

THE EMANCIPATION REFORM OF 1861 IN RUSSIA AND THE NATIONALISM OF THE IMPERIAL BUREAUCRACY¹

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The primary aim of this article is to enrich the historical vision of the legislative process of the peasant emancipation of 1861 with a new perspective related to the issue of nationalist sentiments and modes of thinking of the reformers.

A widely acknowledged approach to the 1861 emancipation of serfs is to regard the Statutes of February 19 as the most important constituent part of the Great Reforms; i.e., as the first “Great Reform” to be followed by a series of others. I do not want to question this concept in principle. Rather, I would like to indicate one of the weaknesses of this generalization. If viewed in so broad and prolonged a perspective, the peasant emancipation is likely to be treated largely in terms of the inevitable elimination of the estate paradigm and the formation of civil society. The application of criteria originating first and foremost in the zemstvo and judicial reforms (local all-estate self-government, independent courts) tends to add anachronistic overtones to the perception of the abolition of serfdom and to oversimplify the interpretation of the reformers’ motives.

As Daniel Field showed a quarter of a century ago in his *The End of Serfdom*,² the contradictions and ambiguities in the

1 I would like to thank the Carnegie Research Fellowship Program of the National Council for Eurasian and East European Research for the financial support of the project in the framework of which this article was written. For a range of helpful suggestions on the paper’s earlier versions, I wish to express my gratitude to Daniel Field, Kimitaka Matsuzato, Alexander Semyonov, Richard Wortman and all the participants in the Historians’ Seminar of Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies and those in the History Workshop of the Harriman Institute in March 2002.

2 Daniel Field, *The End of Serfdom: Nobility and Bureaucracy in Russia, 1855-1861* (Cambridge, MA, 1976).

minds of the participants in the legislative process were as influential a driving force behind the emancipation as were reformist enthusiasm and thoughtful programs. Below, I will be arguing that a somewhat intuitive appeal to ancient tradition, to the past as a point of departure, was particularly characteristic of the promoters of the emancipation. In the schemes for the rationalization of the subsequent reforms, this element played an insignificant role. The emancipation was more often associated with the idea of organic growth, while the other Great Reforms were associated with that of building and construction (take, for example, the famous slogan “To crown the edifice (*Uvenchat’ zdanie*),” which was related directly to the conditions of the zemstvo reform.

Thus, my attempt to reveal the close relationship between the 1861 reform and nationalistic trends within the reformist bureaucracy is prompted, to a large degree, by the search for a more immediate generic context for understanding the complexities of the rationale behind the emancipation. By the words “nationalistic project,” I mean not so much an anticipation of the political nation’s emergence and, more generally, an “objective” contribution to the civic developments, so much as “nationalism” in a more “instrumentalist” sense.³ I am offering a vision of the emancipation legislation as a sphere of activity that provided the imperial bureaucrats with the mental framework and discursive skills required for dealing with forthcoming interethnic tensions and conflicts, especially in the Western borderlands on the eve of the Polish uprising.

For this reason, I am focusing on the reformist circle of the Editing Commissions of 1859-60, the leaders of which – the career military bureaucrat Iakov Rostovtsev: the civil bureau-

3 In this respect, my approach differs from that of Andreas Renner who studies the interrelationship between nationalism and Great Reforms from the perspective of what can be called *obshchestvennost’*: Andreas Renner, *Russischer Nationalismus und Öffentlichkeit im Zarenreich 1855-1875* (Köln, Weimar, Wien, 2000); see also: Andreas Renner, “Problemy i metody issledovaniia natsionalizma i osobenno russkogo natsionalizma XIX veka,” at www.empires.ru – Publications/Articles

crats Nikolai Miliutin, Iakov Solov'ev, Andrei Zablotskii-Desiatovskii, etc.; and the bureaucratically-minded members of the Slavophile group Iurii Samarin and Vladimir Cherkasskii – were the principal authors of the 1861 legislation. The fact that the most prominent of them, Miliutin, Solov'ev, Samarin and Cherkasskii, later became the framers and implementers of Russifying policies in the Kingdom of Poland (which they based on the 1861 legislative experience) deserves a full and clear explanation.

Yet, in the reform of 1861, bureaucratic nationalism is not to be found in the form of clear-cut expedient measures, even in the case of the separate Statutes for the borderlands. It is the rhetoric, symbolic images and even visionary depictions of the liberated peasantry that would shape the later nationalistic practices of the reformers. The abundant, though not always overt, symbolism of the peasant emancipation became a focus of historical studies only recently. Irina Paperno has reconstructed a set of mystical Christian images, including those of the resurrection of the soul and the Last Judgment, which undoubtedly added to the conceptualization of the emancipation by many contemporaries.⁴ In his magisterial *Scenarios of Power*, Richard Wortman has explored the origins and functions of the elevated representations of “Tsar-Liberator” as conveyed through the behavioral strategy, public gestures, and rhetoric of the speeches of Alexander II himself.⁵ However, the impact that the symbolism and mythologization had on the legislative process as such and on the ways of thinking of reformist bureaucrats has not yet received much attention. Hence, I can formulate the subject of my paper as follows: the way in which the rhetoric and symbolic images in the legislative process of the 1861 emancipation anticipated and contributed to the logic and structure of nationalistic sentiments and to the representational strategies of bureaucratic nationalism.

4 Irina Paperno, “The Liberation of the Serfs as a Cultural Symbol,” *The Russian Review* 50 (October 1991), pp. 417-436.

5 Richard S. Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy*, vol. 2 (Princeton, NJ, 2000), part 1, chapter 2-3.

1. THE FRAMERS OF THE EMANCIPATION REFORM: SOME ADDITIONAL DETAILS TO THE PORTRAIT

In the historiographic perspective, a question which, if posed straightforwardly, stirs most vividly the researcher's interest in the interconnection between the peasant emancipation and the rise of nationalism is the issue of the reformers' – and first of all, the Editing Commissions – self-image. The conception of a “liberal” or “enlightened” bureaucracy seems now to prevail in both the Russian and Western historiography of the Great Reforms, particularly the 1861 reform.⁶ However, regardless of its general explanatory potential, it does not provide a satisfactory approach to the 1861 reformers' self-image and their practices of self-legitimization within the rather narrow political space in which they drafted the emancipation laws.

Historians often tend to lose sight of the remarkable elitist ambition demonstrated in the reform architects' self-representation. They deliberately and consistently positioned themselves outside acknowledged sociopolitical and ideological categories of the time – aligning themselves with neither the bureaucracy (as a whole), landed nobility, intellectuals, or courtiers. The leaders of the Editing Commissions looked down on provincial nobles and feared – or pretended to fear – the aristocratic conspiracy in Petersburg. They did not cooperate with liberal journals to get their drafts discussed or even published. Finally, they harshly criticized lower officialdom for corruption and benightedness, and derided senior bureaucrats for incompetence, laziness, and supposed hostility to emancipation.

Their stubborn aversion to being labeled sometimes took a bizarre form, especially after the closing of the Editing Commissions. It is clear from archival papers that the former leaders

6 The typical examples are: William Bruce Lincoln, *The Great Reforms: Autocracy, Bureaucracy, and the Politics of Change in Imperial Russia* (De Kalb, IL, 1990); L.G. Zakharova, *Samoderzhavie i otmena krepostnogo prava. 1856-1861* (Moskva, 1984); B.V. Anan'ich, ed., *Vlast' i reformy. Ot samoderzhavnoi k sovetskoi Rossii* (St. Peterburg, 1996). In the above-mentioned study by Daniel Field the term “enlightened (liberal) bureaucrats” is noticeably missing.

of the Commissions undertook, in early 1861, an audacious intrigue in order to *prevent* Alexander II from decorating them with imperial orders for their legislative services. With Grand Duke Constantin Nikolaevich as an intermediary, they tried to convince the Emperor that the decoration would give them a permanent official status unfavorable to their further participation in the reform. They failed and were awarded orders. Iurii Samarin was the only of them who had the temerity to send his order (of St. Vladimir) back to the Ministry of Justice. The Minister, Count Victor Panin made the official point very clear by stating, in his reply to Samarin, that to return the order meant to “put one’s merits above any reward.”⁷

In other words, the very intention to avoid decoration betrayed their notion of the value of their own services and cause as “instantly historic,” dealing with history rather than current politics, and not subject to any official evaluation, even by the “Tsar-Liberator,” unless the whole nation were able to make the evaluation. Thus, a vague image of “nation” was present in this affair of “avoidance.” Not accidentally, as early as February 1859, Chair of the Editing Commission, Iakov Rostovtsev, stated that the liberation of serfs would enable the Emperor to “create *a people* in Russia such as had hitherto never existed in our fatherland ([*sozidaet*] *v Rossii* “*narod*,” *kotorogo dosele v otechestve nashem ne sushchestvovalo*).”⁸

The emancipators’ nationalistic attitudes are also evident from an analysis of the mechanics of the interconnection between the peasant question and nationality or, more accurately, borderland imperial policy. The notion that the Russian imperi-

7 Otdel rukopisei Rossiiskoi gosudarstvennoi biblioteki, f. 265, k. 68, d. 1, l. 38-38 ob.; Rukopisnyi otdel Instituta russkoi literatury RAN, 9925 XIVc5, l. 2 (letters of Alexander Golovnin to Grand Duke Constantine Nikolaevich); M.I. Sukhomlinov, “Dva epizoda iz epokhi osvobozhdeniia krest’ian,” *Istoricheskii vestnik* 1 (1885), pp. 72-79 (Samarin’s letter to the Minister of Justice, Victor Panin); Rukopisnyi otdel Rossiiskoi natsional’noi biblioteki, F II, # 192/1, l. 285 (Panin’s reply to Samarin).

8 *Osvobozhdenie krest’ian v tsarstvovanie imperatora Aleksandra II. Khronika deiatel’nosti Komissii po krest’ianskomu delu N.P. Semenova*, vol. 1 (St. Peterburg, 1889), p. 49.

al government failed to formulate and pursue a more or less coherent nationality policy is now becoming a kind of truism. However, we should not overlook hidden patterns in the conceptualization of the policy toward the borderlands, especially its conceptualization arising from other priorities of domestic policy. In other words, not infrequently, the borderland policy emerged as an extension of measures undertaken in the framework of major interior policy issues – for instance, restructuring of noble estates, the peasant question, educational reform, improvements to the composition of the Orthodox clergy, and so on. (“Extension” might not be quite accurate, since, in many cases, it is in the borderlands that these measures were tested for the first time – and were only after applied in the Russian interior.) Consequently, the borderland policy may well have been couched in misleadingly (for the historian) non-ethnic terms.

I think that the initiation of the emancipation process by Alexander II in 1857 was precisely such a situation. The public legislative process was initiated in November 1857 by the so-called imperial rescript to Vladimir Nazimov, the Governor General of the Northwest region, which consisted of the Vil’no, Kovno, and Grodno provinces.⁹ One should not forget that the rescript was addressed to the noble corporation, which was almost entirely *Polish* in its ethnic composition. Although ethnic terms were absent from the text of the rescript, it can be viewed as a disguised message from Alexander II to the Polish noblemen. I can hardly imagine that in 1857 the Emperor could have chosen a noble corporation of any Great Russian region or province in which to initiate so bold and unusual an appeal for advice in important domestic affairs. Thus, an extraordinary catalyst for this deed was needed, and it was the willingness of Alexander II to show the Polish nobility mercy and favor (together with the impossibility of being too demonstrative) that set the emancipation mechanism in motion.

The rescript was an action of both the “peasant” and “Polish” policies. Undoubtedly, it represented an attempt at the revitalization of *entente cordiale* between the supreme power and

9 Field, *The End of Serfdom...*, pp. 77-89.

the Polish elite, with the delegation to the latter of certain administrative prerogatives on the Western frontier. In his recent article, John LeDonne has suggested that the imperial rule over the borderlands was maintained by means of the several kinship networks centered around the governors general. According to LeDonne, this decentralized system collapsed after 1825, being replaced with bureaucratized practices of administration under Nicholas I.¹⁰ In my view, Nazimov represented a second and short-lived return to this type of governor general – both an energetic and influential administrator and a member of the Emperor’s entourage, with a strong affection for, and *nearly familial* attachment to, the local noble corporation. During 1856-57, he did his best to elicit the emancipation initiative from the nobles, involving himself in informal communication with the nobility and not hesitating to appeal to the regional patriotism of the Lithuanian Poles, to the *szlachta*’s chivalrous traditions, and even to the memory of Tadeusz Kosciuszko.¹¹

In general, if viewed in terms of imperial governance, the first stage of the emancipation legislation, from 1857 to late 1858 (when almost 50 provincial committees were drafting emancipation projects for each province), can be treated as a de-“unification” of the imperial space and a revision of the power balance in favor of the borderlands offering a hint of “imperial federalism.”

On the contrary, the Miliutin group, which seized control over the legislative process in early 1859, was very skeptical about the prospects of a complete reconciliation with the Polish nobility. The reformers’ reluctance to consult the nobility and to base their drafts, at least partly, on those of the provincial noble committees underscored their distrust of regional, particularly frontier, elites and of the patterns of redistribution of au-

10 John LeDonne, “Frontier Governors General 1772-1825,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 48:3 (2000), pp. 334-340.

11 See, e.g.: [Pavlov A.S.], “Vladimir Ivanovich Nazimov. Ocherk iz noveishei letopisi Severo-Zapadnoi Rossii,” *Russkaia starina* 3 (1885), pp. 573-580; I.A. Nikotin, “Iz zapisok,” *Russkaia starina* 2 (1902), p. 361.

thority between the center and elites. (Not occasionally, they tried to discredit Nazimov by referring to his supposed dependence on the Polish magnates.¹²) As a result, the link between emancipation and the “borderland policy” was preserved and even reinforced, but it was a new, much more nationalistic version of the rule over borderlands that emerged in the wake of the emancipation. Thus, the emancipation served to shake, but not to reform, the particularistic model of borderland rule. How did this happen?

Actually, the close relationship between the emancipation project and bureaucratic nationalism was much older than the Editing Commissions of 1859-60. As can be concluded from a recent article by Nathaniel Knight, it was the Russian Geographical Society in the late 1840s that gave birth to this relationship and interdependence. In the literature on the Great Reforms, there is no lack of studies of the RGS, but almost all of them (take, for instance, William Bruce Lincoln’s *In the Vanguard of Reform*¹³) interpret the Society largely as an experimental “laboratory” of the future institutional reforms, and as a tool for collecting statistical data and bringing together the reformist cadre. I favor a view of the RGS as a “laboratory” of the very spirit of bureaucratic nationalism. In its struggle with the so-called “German faction” within the RGS, the “Russian faction,” among the most active members of which were the brothers Dmitrii and Nikolai Miliutin, promoted a nationalistically (not necessarily ethnonationalistically) motivated vision of geography and ethnography. Their agenda implied a discovery and spectacular manifestation of the huge national foundation of the imperial state and a reshaping of images of the imperial space as the object of governmental rule. Reform and nationalism went hand in hand; an apparently neutral folkloristic expedition may well have sounded like a step toward social reform. In Knight’s words, “ethnographic descriptions of peasant juridical and social norms

12 Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii arkhiv, f. 869, op. 1, d. 517, ll. 5 v –6.

13 William Bruce Lincoln, *In the Vanguard of Reform: Russia’s Enlightened Bureaucrats, 1825-1861* (De Kalb, IL, 1982).

were valued for the direct insights they might provide into improved forms of local administration. On the other hand, representations of the Russian narod served as a tool for raising the awareness of the need for reform.”¹⁴ And in one decade, one may add, the widely recognized need for reform served to elevate the representations of the Russian narod, the foundation of the imperial state.

The nationalistic trajectory (both as intellectual evolution and development of professional activities) of members of the RGS and the Editing Commissions, from the late 1840s to, at least, the mid-1860s, when they were “found” to be fierce Polonophobes and hard proponents of Russification policies toward the Polish Kingdom and “Western region (*Zapadnyi krai*),” must be studied most thoroughly.¹⁵ I consider misleading the impression that bureaucratic nationalism, after having emerged in Nicholas I’s reign, vanished or receded for the period of reformist legislation under the “early” Alexander II only to re-emerge in 1863, primarily as a reaction to the Polish rebellion.¹⁶ The

14 Nathaniel Knight, “Science, Empire and Nationality: Ethnography in the Russian Geographical Society, 1845-1855,” in: Jane Burbank and David Ransel, eds., *Imperial Russia: New Histories for the Empire* (Bloomington, IN, 1998), p. 132.

15 In the case of so fierce a Russifier as Mikhail Murav’ev (“Hangman”), the Minister of State Domain in 1857-61 and Governor General of the Northwest Region in 1863-65, we are dealing with a trajectory different from that of the Miliutin people. Actively collaborating with the Miliutins in the Geographical Society, Murav’ev later became an adversary of the Editing Commissions. However, his hostility toward his former allies stemmed not from his supposed commitment to serfdom order, but from the very conditions of interministerial rivalry that did not allow the Minister of State Domains to formulate his own program of agrarian reform. In 1863, the Murav’ev – Miliutin alliance was restored so unexpectedly to outside observers that many Russian nationalists saw their rapprochement as a providential miracle. Murav’ev’s role in the 1861 emancipation process is the subject of my analysis in: “M.N. Murav’ev i osvobozhdenie krest’ian: problema konservativno-biurokraticheskogo reformatorstva,” *Otechestvennaia istoriia* 6 (2002), pp. 67-90.

16 Recently, this view was expressed most clearly in the introduction to the publication of Dmitrii Miliutin’s memoirs which were very rich in Polonophobic sentiments: L.G. Zakharova “Nachalo Velikikh Reform,” in D.A. Miliutin, *Vospominaniia. 1860-1862* (Moskva, 1999), pp. 6-7.

nationalist sentiments were too tenacious to recede so easily, and they were by no means incompatible with the liberal paradigm of the social reforms. Moreover, the Polish uprising can be viewed as a pretext for, rather than stimulus to the subsequent Russifying measures. In a sense, the uprising itself was a response by Poles to the rise of Russian nationalism in its imperial version.

Traces of nationalistic self-identification are noticeable in the centralized and, so to say, “monopolist” model of law making and the ensuing legislation to which the architects of the emancipation stuck. The reformers considered and presented themselves to be the only holders of professional competence and, in Bruce Lincoln’s words, “statistical truth,”¹⁷ the only impartial intermediary between the nobility and peasantry, and the only accurate scale for measuring the conflicting demands and benefits. It is indicative of this self-assessment that they frequently counterposed the emancipation in Russia with the agrarian reforms in Prussia in the first half of the century in terms of the degree of participation in the reform process by the lower officialdom: the Prussian solution seemed to them much less “pure” and “resolute” simply because of the overcomplicated and detailed procedures of its implementation, requiring the participation of an army of functionaries.¹⁸

The jealousy felt by the reformers towards those who offered them help and expertise or, still worse, demanded a share in the legislative process was extraordinary. It bore a similarity to the enthusiasm and fervor the explorer feels for unknown territory. Most strikingly, this pattern of “discovery” influenced their intensive work on the calculation of the maximum sizes of peasant allotments – the point of departure in the implementa-

17 Lincoln, *In the Vanguard of Reform...*, p. 137.

18 See, e.g., the Editing Commissions’ concluding memorandum of October 1860: *Pervoe izdanie Materialov Redaktsionnykh komissii dlia sostavleniia Polozhenii o krest’ianakh, vykhodiashchikh iz krepostnoi zavisimosti*, vol. 18 (St. Peterburg, 1860), p. 6. For a more detailed treatment of the issue, see: [M.D. Dolbilov], “Zemel’naia sobstvennost’ i osvobozhdenie krest’ian,” in D.F. Aiatskov, ed., *Sobstvennost’ na zemliu v Rossii: Istorii i sovremennost’* (Moskva: ROSSPEN, 2002), pp. 93-98.

tion of the reform – for about 50 provinces of the Empire. The calculation was solemnly declared to be the exclusive prerogative of legislative power.¹⁹ Without leaving Petersburg and without collecting additional empirical data, the reformers succeeded in establishing a maximum size for every *uezd*, and in many cases with further differentiation within it.

Two published volumes of these statistical works, along with lengthy comments and rationalizations, had much in common with the geographic and demographic accounts.²⁰ The work of calculating and the practice of drawing new *demographically based* borders reflected an idea of the rediscovery, exploration and recharting of so vast a territory. The latter, they believed, should be transformed from an undergoverned and undercontrolled space of archaic imperial rule into a land inhabited by a visible and countable mass of people, the foundation of the forthcoming nation. During the debates about the Editing Commissions drafts in the Main Committee on Peasant Affairs in the fall of 1860, the former members of the EC (closed by the Emperor in October) presented several large-scale maps of Central Russia showing the zones for each allotment-size. Contemporaries sometimes treated the affection of the reformers' leader, Nikolai Miliutin, for multicolored maps as a bureaucratic eccentricity. However, being now well aware of the association between cartography and nationalism, we are in a position to appreciate the reformers' interest in a variety of colors on maps.²¹

19 *Zhurnaly Sekret'nogo i Glavnogo komitetov po krest'ianskomu delu*, vol. 2 (Petrograd, 1915), p. 140. A good point about the reformers' "jealousy," see: Skaldin [F.P. Elenev], *V zakholust'i i v stolitse* (St. Peterburg, 1870), p. 273.

20 *Pervoe izdanie Materialov...*, vol. 15, 16.

21 Cf. Peter Holquist's notes on how the military statistics of the time (institutionalized by Dmitrii Miliutin) helped the government discern ethnic divisions and "placed the entire population of the Empire... onto a spatial grid, thereby giving graphic representation to the state's task of managing both its spatial and human resources simultaneously": Peter Holquist, "To Count, to Extract, to Exterminate: Population Statistics and Population Politics in Late Imperial and Soviet Russia," in Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin, eds., *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 111-144.

This is particularly so when we think how deeply the conception of emancipation was affected by the nationalistic spirit of the reformers.

2. PEASANTS IN THE EYES OF THE REFORMERS: BONDED TO THE LAND FOREVER?

One of the most fundamental symbolic and, in a sense, subconscious premises of the emancipation reform was to be found in the vision of peasantry as an eminently immobile mass deeply rooted in the soil – “*krepost' zemle.*” The reformers of 1861 did not by any means pioneer this notion. As early as 1822-23, the Decembrist Pavel Pestel', when setting forth his bold agrarian project, called for a “riveting” of citizens to the “body of the state” by binding them to the land.²² The Marquis de Custine, in his famous *Russia in 1839*, eloquently depicted the Russian peasants as “plant-like human beings.”²³

There were very few people on the eve of 1861 who welcomed the prospect of peasant migrations and, more generally, of unrestrained mobility, even if supported and sponsored by the state. The discursive nature of this fear of mobility and the disintegration of the peasantry is strikingly revealed in a statement by Nikiforov, a Tambov noble landowner and contributor to *The Journal of Landowners (Zhurnal zemlevladel'tsev)*, who wrote: “It is necessary to bind the peasant to the land so inextricably that he can never be even imagined without it.”²⁴ Thus, the task, as perceived by many contemporaries, was to dispel thoughts of an unreliable and dangerous peasantry who could move about at will. We can rightfully define this mental trend in terms of a collective phobia – perhaps an urbanistic one – within educated society. In one of the celebrated “tales” by Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin, *A Savage Nobleman (Dikii pomesh-*

22 *Vosstanie dekabristov*, vol. 7 (Moskva, 1958), p. 187.

23 I am quoting from the Russian translation: A. de. Kiustin, *Rossia v 1839 godu*, vol. 1 (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo Sabashnikovykh, 1996), p. 152.

24 N.M. Druzhinin, “‘Zhurnal zemlevladel'tsev' 1858-1860 gg.,” in N.M. Druzhinin, *Izbrannye trudy* (Moskva: Nauka, 1987), p. 52.

chik), this fear is conveyed in an outlandish (in the fullest sense of the word) vision of the peasant vagabond crowd as a swarm of bees which one needs to catch and install back into its proper place.

Undoubtedly, sober, rational considerations played a role in this obsession with keeping peasants on allotments. First of all, I mean the Russians' awareness of the calamities concomitant with economic progress in the West at the time, attributed so frequently to "proletarianism" – "the European ulcer of proletarianism." The wish to escape the emergence of its Russian counterpart (together with the firm belief that it had not yet emerged in any hidden form), as well as understandable fiscal reasons are usually viewed as key factors which predetermined the imposition of rigid restrictions on the individual rights of emancipated peasants during the half-century redemption operation (till 1906). In David Macey's words, "the [Editing] Commission's concern with fostering the growth of individual initiative and better work habits was subordinated to its larger concern with protecting the state's fiscal interests."²⁵

Is this explanation enough? I think not. The growth of this fear of proletarianism into a kind of panic is surprising and unexpected in the leaders of the Editing Commissions. Bureaucrats of the Ministry of Interior such as Nikolai Miliutin or Iakov Solov'ev as well as the bureaucratically-minded Slavophile Vladimir Cherkasskii were ardent and competent "free traders," adherents of the Manchesterian doctrine; they criticized the communal form of land use from different but complementary viewpoints, praised individual landownership and considered social differentiation within the peasantry to be a natural economic phenomenon, an unavoidable aspect of agrarian progress. In private conversations and correspondence, they spoke of letting a segment of the peasantry abandon the land to promote the availability of hired labor; they even calculated an optimal ratio be-

25 David Macey, *Government and Peasant in Russia, 1861-1906. The Prehistory of the Stolypin Reforms* (De Kalb, IL, 1987), p. 10.

tween those who would be emancipated with land and the “landless” ones.²⁶

However, very few of these ideas were incorporated into the legislation. Moreover, in their analytical memoranda submitted to the emperor for the advancement of their ideological goals, the reformers – as if quite oblivious to their own calculations – triumphantly denied any threat of “proletarianism” to Russia and asserted that the emancipation would deliver Russia from the “seeds of the proletariat forever.” My close examination of these documents in their draft stages prevents me from interpreting them as a product of the reformers’ hypocrisy or forced concession. Their emotional exclamations, interpolated hastily in the margins,²⁷ about the evil of the proletariat indicate that a very powerful image had taken possession of their minds. Even if fiscal and other mundane concerns had been the first to influence the reformers’ decision to preserve and sustain the peasant commune, these reasons were very soon given an ideological framework, became closely connected to this or that mythologem, and eventually lost their pragmatic priority.

The very dynamic of the emancipation law making showed that the architects of the legislation were shifting from a discriminating perception of the peasantry as a heterogeneous social class, open to differentiation processes, to a view of it as a homogeneous and indivisible mass, a “swarm,” an organic and nearly anthropomorphic whole.²⁸ Here were the roots of that lasting mental paradigm of agrarian policy of the second half of the 19th century (“non-interventionism”) which, according to David Macey, induced bureaucrats to “hold an almost *sacred reverence* for existing reality as an organic product of the historical process” and to attempt to “enshrine it in the inviolable aura

26 See, e.g.: Iakov Solov’ev, “O pozemel’nom vladenii v Rossii,” *Otechestvennye zapiski* 9 (1858), section 1, p. 224; E.A. Dudzinskaia, *Slavianofily v obshchestvennoi bor’be* (Moskva, 1983), pp. 88-89.

27 See, e.g. Otdel rukopisei Rossiiskoi gosudarstvennoi biblioteki, f. 327/I, k. 20, d. 13, l. 14 ob.-15 (a draft of the Editing Commissions’ memorandum of September 1859 submitted to Empress Maria Aleksandrovna).

28 This is the subject of my analysis in: “Zemel’naia sobstvennost’ i osvobozhdenie krest’ian,” pp. 128-150.

of custom or culture” (emphasis is mine).²⁹ In my opinion, this belief in the organic, spontaneous quality of any major change in peasant economy and culture, as well as a reluctance to interfere in the “existing reality,” of the village, cannot be fully explained without extending the analytical context beyond the realm of agrarian policies. Is it accidental that such mundane things as the size of peasant allotment or compulsory crop rotation really obtained, in the eyes of reformers, an aspect of sacrality? I think that an acute need for an inspiring nationalistic myth eventually prevailed over the reformist agrarian ideal. That the representation of peasantry proved somewhat more important than social reality itself can be seen in the way in which the reformers strove to dramatize the notion of the peasants’ bond to the land in terms of the “legacy of history.”

The entire legislative process of the reform was dominated by heated debates about the size of peasant allotments to be recovered, by redemption, from the noble demesne. However, at a deeper level, it was a battle of interpretations of the liberated peasants’ *being bound to the land* – “*krepost’ zemle.*” A large part of the nobility saw in *prikreplenie* a tool for inculcating moral and work discipline into peasants and demanded that the allotments be reduced. Reformers, who advocated larger allotments, also admitted the necessity of providing the gentry with the hired labor of neighboring peasants for their fields. Still, they appealed to history more often and more vigorously than to economic reasons.

The reformers took as a point of departure and made use of the nascent historiographic theory of the late 16th century “enservment by the state” – “*gosudarstvennoe zakreposhchenie.*” According to this theory, just before the Time of Troubles, anxiety about the collection of taxes as well as about the subsistence of numerous *sluzhilye liudi*, holders of villages with peasants and a core of cavalry, had driven the government to prohibit the free movement of peasants and introduce a complete bondage. The reformers were quick to assimilate this narrative and

29 Macey, *Government and Peasant in Russia...*, p. 30.

extend it to their own deeds.³⁰ Serfdom was presented by them as a kind of hibernation (this idea will be further discussed below) into which peasants had sunk to avoid the risk of being forced from the land. As Iurii Samarin stated, the loss of freedom was a “test (*ispytanie*)” at the cost of which the peasants’ being settled down, *osedlost*, was saved for the “better times (*spasena byla dlia luchshikh vremen*).”

In the same way, the abolition of serfdom meant a return to the inherent “historical foundation,” and a restart from that foundation in a new, “proper” direction.³¹ The emancipation was even compared, in a concluding memorandum of the Editing Commissions, to a fulfillment by the autocracy of the testament of history.³² Peasant landed property, emerging in its communal form after redemption, was associated not so much with European legal norms to be established in the future as with a native primeval tradition that could be discerned solely by legislators highly attuned to the people’s consciousness and memory.

This interpretation was something more than a sum of Slavophile truisms, because it was projected onto the very fabric of the legislation and practices of its implementation, with far-reaching implications. Reaffirming the peasants’ bond to the land in 1861 and precluding any shortsighted refusal to take and use allotments were of great symbolic significance. A reunion of every liberated peasant with his ancestors’ land (except for the *dvorovye servants*) underscored the peasantry’s supposed existence as an organic entity. One of the early drafts of

30 A fine example of this assimilation can be seen in the detailed discussion of the historical study by Ivan Beliaev, “Krest’iane na Rusi,” in the anonymous collection undoubtedly inspired by the leaders of the Editing Commissions: *Materialy dlia istorii uprazhneniia krepostnogo sostoianiiia pomeshchich’ikh krest’ian v tsarstvovanie imperatora Aleksandra II*, vol. 3 (Berlin, 1862), pp. 5-81.

31 On the great importance of the organicist and historicist rhetoric to the Great Reforms as a whole, see: Olga Maiorova, “Tsarevich-samozvants v sotsial’noi mifologii poreformennoi epokhi,” in *Rossiiia/Russia: Kul’turnye praktiki v ideologicheskoi perspektive*, issue 3 (1999), pp. 210-217.

32 *Pervoe izdanie Materialov...*, vol. 18, pp. 3-5.

the Emancipation Manifesto composed by Nikolai Miliutin contained the very telling statement: “[Peasants are] to obtain, for themselves and all of their posterity, rights which ensure forever their well-being (*priobretaia dlia sebia i dlia vsego svoego potomstva prava, koimi obespechivaetsia naveki ikh byt*’).”³³ Taking “rights” to first and foremost mean “ancestral lands” (the verb “obtain” signified the gradual redemptive operation, not the individual freedom which was being “granted”), Miliutin rhetorically projected the notion of the peasant-land bond into a distant future.

Giving an allotment to every peasant household expressed a unity between past, present and future generations of peasants – an image which, in its turn, testified to a unity of the peasantry. It is extremely characteristic of the reformers’ legislation that they took unprecedented care to preserve many of the old, traditional socioeconomic village structures precisely in order to recast them in the light of new organicist rhetoric. As the Slavophile Iurii Samarin said, “our Statutes should seize upon everything as it existed long before, because we base them on the existing state of things.”³⁴

I would like now to emphasize the paradox of February 19, 1861 in that the reform, which was very frequently said to have turned everything “upside down,” in truth introduced few changes into the interior agrarian order of the estate – *pomest’e* – as such. Early visible divisions between the demesne and peasant allotments, communal use and repartitions of land among the peasantry, forms of symbiosis between the noble landowner’s and commune’s economies, and so on, were by no means destroyed, especially in Great Russia. The legislators boasted, not always without exaggeration, that they had not intruded into any “living,” that is, the natural and inherent conditions of the agrarian order – for instance, size of allotments or their composition. Beyond legal terms, the village after 1861 retained many of its

33 Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii arkhiv, f. 869, op. 1, d. 524, l. 23-23 ob.

34 *Osvobozhdenie krest’ian v tsarstvovanie imperatora Aleksandra II. Khronika...*, vol. 2 (St. Peterburg, 1890), pp. 408-409.

pre-emancipation constituent elements. *But it is precisely this apparent immutability that allowed the reformers to allude to the most genuine rebirth.*³⁵ In their view, they proved able to penetrate the visible state of things and to discern, beneath a superficial configuration, a certain “frozen” layer of reality, a primordial pre-existence of peasant landownership waiting to be revitalized.

To make the point clearer, I would like to quote Afanasii Fet, not only a lyric poet, but also an owner of a post-emancipation farm in the Kursk province, who experienced the consequences of the reform most closely and immediately. In 1871, in the concluding contribution to his series of agrarian accounts “From the Village (*Iz derevni*),” (published in different journals), Fet expressed the following evocative thought: “The reform of 1861 has changed everything, outwardly having touched nothing. ... It has given peasants the juridical right to the land which in fact they have been owning for centuries. Outwardly, the reform took place only in words. It is only abstract ideas, words, that have changed. However, these words were the words of freedom..., and they poured onto the ancient land like a new torrent of life.”³⁶

One hundred and thirty years later, Fet should have used the term “discourse” to describe this phenomenon – he captured precisely the creative force of the discourse of power. The 1861 reform emerged not so much as an introduction of new institutions and practices, but rather as a solemn act of renaming, of attaching new meanings to ancient things, including the peasant *osedlost*. The real driving force behind the reform and, at the same time, the basic source of puzzlement and confusion to so many contemporaries was to be found in the discrepancy between the preserved old structures and provocative new labels, such as “peasant property.”

35 For one of the most striking example of the reformist belief in the rebirth of peasantry, see: Iu.F. Samarin, *Sochineniia*, vol. 4 (Moskva, 1911), p. 417 (Samarin’s article in the newspaper *Den*’ of February 1862).

36 Afanasii Fet, *Zhizn’ Stepanovki, ili Liricheskoe khoziaistvo* (Moskva, 2001), pp. 278-279.

Taking into consideration this symbolic strategy, we can better understand why the reformers were so hostile towards any project requiring this or that (be it in favor of peasants, nobles or both sides) change within the economic order of the village parallel to the emancipation. Any serious renovation of the estate socioeconomic configuration, with its emphasis on construction, would have dispelled the organicist effect of awakening, of the peasantry's return to the state in which they had existed much earlier, before their enserfment. The reformers wanted not to be constructors, but discoverers or deliverers. This effect combined the notions of "naturalness," wholeness, authenticity, and rebirth – a conspicuously nationalist pattern of thinking.

3. AN "ABORIGINAL ESSENCE" OF THE PEASANTRY

Manifestations of the rediscovery of the people led the reformers to counterpose, though in a disguised manner and in ambiguous cultural terms, the peasantry to the nobility. A great number of noblemen before and after 1861 blamed and cursed the reformers for neglecting, as it seemed to them, the vital interests and needs of the landowners and, moreover, for an alleged willingness to ruin the nobles' estates. Generally, historians are right when they do not take these antibureaucratic protests at face value. From the standpoint of the legal and financial conditions of the land redemption, the reform architects did much to meet the demands of landowners; and, of course, it was not a malicious dream of the ruination of the nobility that inspired their actions. However, the noble adversaries of the Editing Commissions had a point in indicating a pro-peasant bias in the works of the lawmakers. Intuitively, they sensed a kind of symbolic humiliation of the nobility, a spirit instilled into the rhetoric and cultural settings of the legislation.

Take, for instance, one of the favorite verbal expressions of the emancipators, "Holy cause," "*sviatoe delo*." It was a cliché designating the peasant emancipation that appeared in the official discourse as early as 1857. The word "holy" implies a definite rejection of the earlier pro-gentry priorities of government, and not only simply because that something related to peasantry

was acclaimed “holy,” with supposed Biblical connotations. Before 1861 the use of “holy” was controversial – under Nicholas I, the epithet “holy” in the sphere of domestic policies was very often applied to descriptions of noble landed property – “holy,” “sacrosanct,” “inalienable.” It was also a strong and recognizable association to be found in the speeches of Nicholas I himself.³⁷ Now a remarkable, though somewhat understated (for obvious reasons), shift took place.

Still more important and relevant to the issue of nationalism, the cultural contrast between the peasantry and nobility (natural/artificial, ancient/recent, inner/superficial, etc.) can be traced in the representations of peasant landed property as a revitalized tradition. It has been noted above that the imagined picture set forth by the reformers lent the peasant emancipation a sense of awakening from a two-hundred-and-fifty-year hibernation. The trope of “awakening from sleep” in the repertoire of early romantic nationalism in Europe, as Benedict Anderson shows quite convincingly, “opened up an immense antiquity [of the nation] behind the epochal sleep.” Slumber itself was dramatized as a guarantee of the “return to an aboriginal essence.”³⁸ The metaphor emerged as a triumphant proof of the authenticity of those who were supposed to have been “sleeping” for so long, a glorification of their ancient language, roots and origins. In other words, it was a claim on the land that could be determined both as national territory, the nation’s cradle, and soil to cultivate and possess.

In these terms, the definition of the Russian emancipation as “belated” (a very wide-spread figure of speech of the time) obtained additional symbolic connotations. The logic of this symbolism was simple but powerful: the later the awakening was, the more ancient and authentic the roots were. Exploiting the theme of late awakening was perceived as questioning the position of the nobility in the social hierarchy. The nobility’s

37 See, e.g.: *Russkaia starina* 9 (1883), pp. 594-596 (Nicholas I’s speech to the St. Petersburg nobility, March 21, 1848).

38 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, NY: Verso, 1996), pp. 195-196.

misgivings were articulated lucidly by one of the most shrewd critics of the Editing Commissions, the St. Petersburg Marshal of the nobility, Count Petr Shuvalov: “The right of landed property as it has been defined by the law turns out now to be opposed by the other, superior principle – the primeval *osedlost*’ of the peasant population.” Shuvalov stressed that, in the drafts of the Editing Commission, a solution to the land problem looked like a “restoration of the supreme right sanctified by history.”³⁹ *In the very term “osedlost”, the notions of “aboriginal essence” and of land cultivation merged together.* Actually, the reformers’ appeal to the “historical foundation” of the 16th century agrarian order hinted at an effacement of the more recent period during which the juridical legitimization of the property rights of the nobility (e.g., Catherine II’s Charter to Nobility) had taken place. Surely, it was not a juridical construction, but rather a cultural model.

The intrinsically nationalistic idea of a contrast between peasantry as a “mass” or a “wholeness” and the nobility as “disintegration” was also to grow and be perceived by contemporaries in ways the reformers had envisaged would improve the prospects for post-emancipation landed property. Rationalizing a range of restrictions on the disposal of landed property by peasants within communes, the reformers’ discourse on this type of property was couched in the rhetoric of firmness, solidity, permanence, and continuity. They introduced another tone when speaking about the disposal and usage of landed property by the nobility. As compensation for the land being transferred to the peasants, the landowners would receive a certain sum of money in liquid 5% interest bonds. To propagate this new form of assets in Russia, the reformers enthusiastically described the incomes and profits which the bonds were expected to bring as “*beskhlopotnye*,” another telling word, meaning “received without taking any trouble.” In a sense, the noble landowners were

39 Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii arkhiv, f. 1180, opis’ del Arkhiva Gos. Soveta, t. 15, d. 100, ll. 190-195 (Shuvalov’s notes on the Editing Commissions’ concluding memorandum, Fall 1860, circulated in many manuscript copies).

expected to be tempted into exchanging a part of their landed property (as being too troublesome) for securities guaranteed by the government.⁴⁰ More generally, within a broader metaphorical context, this emphasis on conversion and liquidity lent the representations of the noblemen's landed property aspects of unpredictability and fluidity as opposed to the peasantry's integrity and immobility.

However, up to this point in my analysis, a very important question has remained unclear: what relationship did all of this nationalistic myth-making have with the preservation in 1861 of many elements of the estate – *soslovie* – isolation of the emancipated peasantry, with “segregation,” as Francis Wcislo put it?⁴¹ Civic nationalism, one may say, ought to have broken down such barriers. (And, by the way, the Slavophile doctrine which reverberated here and there in the 1861 legislation called for a “fusion of the estates” – “*sliianie soslovii*.”) In my view, the matter is precisely that we are dealing with nationalism, not as a movement within civil society, but as a discursive engineering, a strategy of the bureaucratic elite's self-assertion.

A number of historians, sometimes out of an instinctive pre-occupation with “whitewashing” the architects of emancipation, treat the post-1861 survival of the estate (*soslovie*) phenomenon in the peasant legislation as a temporary structure designed to shield the former serfs from pressure and manipulation by supposedly vindictive landowners. After having performed this function, all of these restrictions should have given way to an all-estate order. This explanatory scheme is often applied to the study of the rigidly estate-based peasant administration and court (*volostnoi sud*). The fact that these institutions persisted throughout the entire transition period up to the early 20th century is thought to have been the product of a conservative perversion of the reformers' long-term objectives.

40 I have analyzed this issue in detail in the article: “Proekty vykupnoi operatsii 1857-1861 gg.: K otsenke tvorchestva reformatorskoi komandy,” *Otechestvennaia istoriia* 2 (2000), pp. 15-36.

41 Francis William Wcislo, *Reforming Rural Russia: State, Local Society, and National Politics, 1855-1914* (Princeton, NJ, 1990), p. 45.

However, I think that the reformers contributed much to the continued existence of the *soslovie* paradigm. To be exact, there was a compelling cultural prescription for the dramatic administrative and judicial autarky of the peasantry in the legislation. Many of the reasons why the reformers were aiming for an exclusively peasant composition of the lower administrative institutions – *volost'* and *sel'skoe obshchestvo* – deliberately, or unwittingly, provoked a growing sense of threat to the peasant's authenticity.⁴² Rejecting proposals of a host of noblemen about the nobility's direct participation in the *volost'* administration, Chair of the Editing Commissions, Iakov Rostovtsev, did not hesitate to dramatize the distance between the nobility and peasants: “To incorporate a nobleman into the composition of *volost'* headed by a peasant official elected by peasants would mean to implant an alien element into it.”⁴³ The symptomatic epithet “alien,” reinforced by the term “element,” which imperial officials liked to apply to unreliable and troublesome categories of population, marked a high degree of anxiety.

A dynamic glimpse into the reformers' obsession with the supposed “purity” of the peasantry as a social body is to be found in the drafts of the memoirs of Petr Semenov-Tian-Shanskii. A

42 I should refer here to a meaningful parallel which Yanni Kotsonis recently drew between narratives of the peasantry's “separateness” as practiced in late imperial Russia and European colonialist ways of thinking and the representation of the dominated ethnic groups. In both cases the rhetoric of irrationality, helplessness and otherness played a leading role. Kotsonis shows how the discussion of peasant backwardness in the early 20th century fostered a self-assertion of professionals in the agrarian sphere such as agrotechnicians: “The question... was not whether the peasantry was backward, but who... was best equipped to grapple with peasant backwardness.” [Yanni Kotsonis, *Making Peasant Backward* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), p. 7 and *passim*.] The reformers of 1861 did not often verbalize the theme of backwardness as such (which related to their reluctance to intervene in communal life), but the ways in which they portrayed the peasantry and rationalized the estate institutions revealed a similar interest in cultivating an image of external menace to the body of the population as a whole.

43 *Osvobozhdenie krest'an v tsarstvovanie imperatora Aleksandra II. Khronika...*, vol. 2 (St. Peterburg, 1890), p. 987 (the so-called “testament” of Rostovtsev, February 1860).

member of the Editing Commissions, he much later, in the 1910s, claimed to be speaking to the public for all his deceased colleagues as a plenipotentiary of the glorious generation of reformers. Initially, recalling the debates within the Editing Commissions over issue of the commune and exclusively peasant administrative institutions, he attributed to another celebrated reformer, Prince Vladimir Cherkasskii, the statement that “only such an order [*soslovie*-based peasant administration] will be able to resist the nobility’s efforts to keep all of the peasant population in patrimonial administrative or at least economical dependence.” But later, in an attempt to reinforce the impression of the reformers’ sagacity and far-sightedness, the memoirist reformulated the passage, so that a danger of subjection solely to the nobility was replaced with that of subjection to “other [i.e., all non-peasant] estates.”⁴⁴ Cherkasskii may not have spoken these words as cited by Semenov, but they are indicative of how the idea of a beneficial isolation of the peasantry could have continued to generate a sense of menace from without, a fear of losing the sacred foundation of the longed-for national body.

A striking example of the treatment of the separation of peasants from the nobility within the lower administrative institutions can be cited from a criticism of the draft of the Editing Commissions by the well-known Tver’ nobleman, a partisan of the all-estate local self-government, Aleksei Unkovskii. An acute observer, Unkovskii discerned ethnic implications in the vision of a carefully insulated peasantry. He held that, if the drafts were put into practice, the landowners would vegetate like “a kind of outcast, like Jews scattered among the peoples alien to them (*v vide kakikh-to otverzhentsev, v vide evreev, rasseiannykh mezhdû chuzhdymi im narodami*).”⁴⁵ Unkovskii discerned

44 S.-Peterburgskii filial arkhiva Rossiiskoi Akademii nauk, f. 906, op. 1, d. 6, l. 32 ob.-34. Cf. P.P. Semenov-Tian-Shanskii, *Memuary*, vol. 4 (Petrograd, 1916), p. 165 and *Osvobozhdenie krest’ian v tsarstvovanie imperatora Aleksandra II. Khronika...*, vol. 3, bk. 2 (St. Peterburg, 1892), p. 290.

45 *Prilozheniia k trudam Redaktsionnykh komissii. Otzyvy chlenov, vyzvannykh iz gubernskikh komitetov*, vol. 2 (St. Peterburg, 1860), p. 689.

the cultural opposition between “mass” and “outcast” which loomed beneath the text of the agrarian legislation and mirrored the specific nationalistic logic of its bureaucratic architects.

4. AN ECHO OF THE SERF EMANCIPATION IN THE “POLISH QUESTION”

Let me emphasize once more that, before 1861, these cultural idioms were very rarely expressed explicitly, unlike, for example, the Slavophile doctrine. Rather, they were implicit and somewhat understated modes of nationalistic thinking, a tool of the self-identification of the bureaucratic elite in regard to the nationalistic trends of the time. The rhetoric and imagery of rebirth, wholeness, and authenticity in the 1861 legislation was like a test of nationalistic logic made by the bureaucrats within the agrarian sphere, beyond – *for the time being* beyond – the realm of interethnic collisions. Tropes opposing the peasantry to nobility were still latent (and what disasters could they have precipitated before 1861, should they have been manifest?), but it is precisely their vagueness and allusive pervasiveness in the discourse, their very close ties to the structures of the implementation of the reform that required the metaphor to be realized.

It is the Russifying policy in the Western borderlands in the aftermath of the Polish rebellion of 1863 (until about 1869) that

This point seems to be related to an observation by Michelle Viise that the authors of the draft texts of the 1861 Liberation Manifesto, Nikolai Miliutin and Iurii Samarin, took no care to camouflage “the basic division in Russian society of those existing within the law and those without...” In general, Viise is right in pointing out a gap between the reformist rhetoric of Miliutin and Samarin, on the one hand, and the official language of the Metropolitan Filaret (who composed the final version of the Manifesto), on the other; see: Michelle R. Viise, “Filaret Drozdov and the Language of Official Proclamations in Nineteenth-Century Russia,” *Slavic and East European Journal* 44:4 (2000), pp. 553-582, 576 ff. However, it should not overshadow the fact that the Editing Commissions’ original rhetoric, being barred from the text of the Liberation Manifesto, February 19, 1861, circulated among the educated society through a number of official and semiofficial channels.

embodied the organicist and primordialist rhetoric of the peasant emancipation most literally and visibly. It was as if the energy of this symbolism poured into the region of the former Rzeczpospolita, with the concentration of semiotic preoccupations with de-Polonization and Russification being unprecedented and all but maniacal. Usually, the Russification campaign of the 1860's is characterized by historians as a definitely repressive course of action and as an anticipation of the "conservative turn" of Alexander II in 1866. Only very recently, thanks to a growth of interest in the nature of Russian empire building and nationalism, has a new scholarly trend begun to appear. As Theodore Weeks states, "reform and Russification were not unrelated, and the growing strength of 'Russian society' during this period paralleled and in many ways underscored St. Petersburg's attempts to strengthen control over the non-Russian borderlands..."⁴⁶ To me, "were not unrelated" sounds evasive. The question remains as to how they were related. Without any detailed discussion on the Russification policy, or the "Russian cause" as such, I will focus only on those aspects of its cultural mechanisms which the bureaucratic Russifiers borrowed directly from the symbolism of the 1861 emancipation, thus reaffirming the nationalistic vision embedded in the latter.⁴⁷

First, there was the essential difference between the official programmatic interpretations of the two Polish rebellions in 1830-31 and in 1863-64. Under Nicholas I, Russia's fight against the Poles was treated in terms of suppression, punishment and retaliation, bringing enemies to subjugation and subservience.

46 Theodore R. Weeks, "Religion and Russification: Russian Language in the Catholic Churches of the 'Northwest Provinces' after 1863," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 2 (Winter 2001), p. 87.

47 The following discussion is based primarily on my articles: "Kul'turnaia idioma vozrozhdeniia Rossii kak faktor imperskoi politiki v Severo-Zapadnom krae v 1863-1865 gg.," *Ab Imperio. Teoriia i istoriia natsional'nostei i natsionalizma v postsovetskom prostranstve* 1-2 (2001), pp. 227-268; and "Konstruirovanie obrazov miatezha: Politika M.N. Murav'eva v Litovsko-Beloruskom krae v 1863-1865 gg. kak ob'ekt istoriko-antropologicheskogo analiza," in A.I. Filiushkin, ed., *Actio Nova 2000* (Moskva: Globus, 2000), pp. 338-408.

Poles figured in this narrative largely as the object of conquest and reconquest; the social connotations of the concept “Pole” were not emphasized. After 1863, the picture changed dramatically. The contest with Poles was very often envisaged, paradoxically at first glance, as a longed-for *liberation of Russians* from detrimental Polish influences and presence, or, in the most extreme version, a throwing off the Polish yoke. The pejorative term “Pole” obtained noticeable social connotations, being applied to the upper strata of the Polish nation (meanwhile Polish peasants were treated as victims of the *szlachta* and in acute need of liberation⁴⁸). Such a discursive transformation was completely unthinkable without the 1861 reform. Indeed, the peasant emancipation loosened the Imperial power’s tongue, and the tongue was an extremely powerful weapon for promoting the idea of Russianness in the highly contested area of the Western provinces.

The ways in which the imperial officials conceptualized and dramatized the hostility of the Polish (both by origin and self-identity; i.e., including Polish speakers, for instance, in Western Belorussia) noblemen and Catholic clergy were also anticipated, at least partly, by the emancipation discourse. As I have tried to show, the architects of emancipation placed the social polarity “top – bottom” within a broader cultural context connected to the legislation, invoking the image of a thin outside stratum over a massive core or body. The symbolic strategy of Russification served to reinforce this opposition. The notions of superiority, splendor, and sophistication – indispensable traits of the lofty self-portrait of the Polish noble – were deliberately hyperbolized to a degree that they became subject to negative interpretations. An expressive conversion of meanings took place: higher social position was transformed into “superficiality” (“*nanosnoi sloi*,” as the Polish nobility was labeled in the official discourse), splendor – into “artificiality” and “falsehood,”

48 On the strategies of the Russifiers of the 1860s toward the Polish peasantry, see: Henryk Głębocki, *Fatalna sprawa. Kwestia polska w rosyjskiej myśli politycznej (1856-1866)* (Kraków: ARCANA, 2000), rozdział 4.

sophistication and intelligence – into an inveterate commitment to political heresies and subversive doctrines.

In the eyes of the Russifiers, this symbolic approach proved to be especially convincing in the Western provinces, thanks to the symmetry between ethnic composition and social hierarchy (peasant mass – non-Poles, upper stratum – Poles or Polish speakers). The semiotic exploitation by power of the concept of “top” as “superficiality” is clearly seen from the study of that fierce campaign against even minor visible and audible signs, relics and reminiscences of Great Poland’s legacy waged by officials in 1863-66. The overt fixation on the detrimental “Polish appearances” underscored, on the level of collective representations of the ruling elite, the supposedly artificial and alien nature of “Polonism.” This strategy was engineered by the elite, and there was no Polonophobic hysteria to be found among lower classes of population. At the same time, a group of Petersburg bureaucrats unfailingly warned the Emperor about the extremely dangerous empire-wide consequences, which the symbolic negation of the social top were fraught with.

It is certain that the rhetoric of the people as the mass and body of the nation played an enormous role in the Russification policies. The government’s measures against what was called the Polish “predominance” in the “native Russian land” were designed to evoke a sense of vision regained and to shape a mental picture of rediscovering the massive and indivisible body of the Russian people beneath a deceitful and bewitching veil of “Polonism.” Since many officials, before 1863, had not been at all certain about the “Russianness” of the East Slavic population in the Western provinces and might have considered, for example, Belorussians to be Poles, the newly sanctioned metaphors of awakening and rebirth seemed to have been really fleshed out within the boundaries of Western region. Local administration proved amazingly quick to learn the conventional language originating in the 1861 emancipation acts. Only a year before the Polish uprising, the local peasantry was still depicted in a memorandum of Governor General Vladimir Nazimov as an amorphous, apathetic and unreliable crowd devoid of any clear-cut self-identity. With the passing of a single year, the

same Governor General claimed the East Slavic peasantry to be a “pure and intact” repository of Russianness, a genuine source of vital energy.⁴⁹ Subsequent imperial decrees concerning major revisions to the emancipation legislation in favor of local peasants again connected the issue of landownership with the idea of authenticity and “aboriginal essence.”

The policies of de-Polonization rendered the concept of Russianness both more inclusive and more ambiguous than before. As opposed to the superficial, rootless, and nearly phantasmal “Polonism,” Russianness ought to transcend ethnic and confessional diversities within the local peasantry. However, declaring Belorussian and sometimes even Lithuanian peasants to be “genuinely Russian,” Russian by nature and spirit, precluded a rationalization of modern assimilation policies based on vertical and horizontal mobility, structures of secular education and press, and so on, rather than on an outward traditionalism.

Here again an image of outside menace to the body of the people played a role. Despite all the rhetoric of Russianness, officials could not help noticing, from time to time, considerable linguistic, confessional, and cultural differences between the local East Slavic peasants and their Great Russian counterparts. However, instead of a deep empirical analysis of this differentiation, Russifying officials usually resorted to the generalizing tropes of spoiling and distortion.⁵⁰ An extraordinary vulnerability to the “Polish poison” was thought to be one of the qualities of Russianness. So, the discourse of Russianness as shaped in the aftermath of emancipation oscillated between the celebration of a monolithic and authentic national mass and the

49 Otdel rukopisei Rossiiskoi gosudarstvennoi biblioteki, f. 169, k. 42, d. 2, l. 41-41 ob. (Nazimov’s memorandum of February 1862); Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii arkhiv, f. 1282, op. 2, d. 339, l. 33 (Nazimov’s report to the Ministry of Interior, March 1863).

50 On this polarity of perception, see also L.E. Gorizontov’s article on the notion of the tripartite Russian nation: “Bol’shaia russkaia natsiia v imperiskoi i regional’noi strategii samodержaviiia,” in: B.V. Anan’ich, S.I. Barzilov, eds., *Prostranstvo vlasti. Istoricheskii opyt Rossii i vyzovy sovremennosti* (Moskva, 2001), pp. 129-150.

nearly ritualistic lamentation about the permanent threat of losing such a treasure. In both cases, what was at issue was not the gradual involvement of peasants in civic life, but a dramatization of the narrative of how the elite would rediscover the (imagined) nation's foundation.

CONCLUSION

The nationalistic project embedded in the organicist rhetoric and structures of imagery that emerged in the debate over emancipation was promoted first and foremost by a segment of the bureaucratic elite. Not always articulate but expressive images of the homogeneous mass of the people awakened from an "epochal sleep" to regain primeval land invoked a sense of self-identification with an ancient and authentic tradition. At the same time, the nationalistic symbolism helped these enthusiastic bureaucrats to challenge an obsolete (as they believed) pattern of redistribution of power between the imperial center and the Polish elite in the Western borderland. The trope of rediscovery of the body of the people as the foundation of the nation employed by the 1861 reformers very soon proved capable of opposing the East Slavic peasants to the Polish nobles and undermining the political influence of the latter. This experience led to a reinforcement of nationalistic trends in the bureaucratic approaches to other borderlands as well.

However, as a typically manipulative and self-asserting strategy of the bureaucracy, the nationalistic project of the 1861 reform reproduced, in some new forms, a drastic alienation of the images of the people from the people itself, provoking further manipulation. Lofty symbols to which the reformers (and then Russifiers) appealed tended to lose their initial meaning and became more and more subject to contesting interpretations. Given the close interconnection between the national and social aspects of the key notion of "awakening," the bureaucratic rhetoric of emancipation can be viewed in terms of its contribution to far more radical doctrines.

Moreover, one may tentatively suggest that the 1861 reformers' nationalistic sentiments and mode of thinking have contin-

ued to exert a certain influence on current Russian historiography (a topic which certainly should be the subject of a separate discussion). Different and diverse treatments of the political history of the peasant emancipation have a common underlying pattern of narrative – a kind of heroic narrative about a fateful struggle between two principles. Interpretations of the reform in terms of confrontation between the peasants’ and landowners’ “interests” borrowed their emphatic and often moralizing tone from the implications of another opposition, that of nationalist – antinationalist. Tacitly identifying noblemen as an anti-patriotic community, scholars tend to exaggerate the anti-reformist stance of the Russian nobility as a whole and preclude themselves from reconsidering such historiographic problems as the nobility’s constitutionalist movement, economic prospects for major landownership after the emancipation, the aristocracy’s role in local government, and so on.