

# Nationalism as opposition in Russia - a historical comparison

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## Abstract

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, nationalism was generally connected to ideas of democratisation and the contestation of power and status quo. In Russia, there was an ongoing struggle between Official Nationalism, aimed at preserving the empire, and cultural nationalism. This essay is an inquiry into the differences and similarities between how the 19<sup>th</sup> century Slavophiles and contemporary Russian national democrats, exemplified by Aleksej Naval'nyj, view the Russian nation. The focus is on how the Russian nation is defined, how the two nationalist visions relate to competing views of the Russian nation, and how the idea of a Russian nation is used as part of a vision for social and political change. The essay finds that although "the Other" against which the Russian nation is defined differs in the two historical cases, the use of nationalism to frame an opposition against the regime and to advocate for social and political change is persistent across time. However, because of its excluding tendencies, in the cases studied here cultural nationalism is found to be wanting as a basis on which to build a democratic form of government.

### **Keywords**

Russia, Nationalism, Slavophilism, Aleksej Naval'nyj

# Contents

<b>Abstract .....</b>	<b>0</b>
Keywords .....	0
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Overview of Previous Research.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Research Question and Theoretical framework .....</b>	<b>4</b>
Research question and limitations .....	4
The role of the nation in social and political change.....	5
Ideas of a Russian nation .....	7
<b>Theoretical approach and method .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>The early Slavophiles – “spiritual unity” .....</b>	<b>11</b>
The Russian nation according to the Slavophiles.....	12
Opposition to Official Nationalism .....	13
Nationalism as a basis for social and political change .....	14
<b>Aleksej Naval’nyj – “what people are worried about” .....</b>	<b>15</b>
The Russian nation according to Naval’nyj .....	16
Opposition to the official narrative .....	19
Nationalism as a basis for social and political change .....	21
An inconsistent political project .....	24
<b>Discussion – old and new in Russian cultural nationalism.....</b>	<b>26</b>
A revived cultural nationalism .....	27
Nationalism as opposition to power.....	28
Nationalism and social progress .....	29
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>31</b>

[P]усские слишком богато и многосторонне одарены, чтоб скоро приискать себе приличную форму.

The Russians are too rich and multifaceted to be able to find a fitting form for themselves.

Fyodor Dostoyevsky "The Gambler"

## Introduction

Although Dostoevsky's nationalism differs from early Slavophilism, the categorical statement by the main character in his short novel "The Gambler", Aleksej Ivanovich, inadvertently points to one of the dilemmas of nationalism. Are we not all too rich and multifaceted to be divided along singular ethnic or cultural lines? Who are these Russians, Swedes, or Americans? If there is no form according to which one can assess who is a Russian and who is not, then whom is the Russian opposition claiming to represent?

With the decline and end of great European empires throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries came a new idea of political legitimacy based on nations (largely defined culturally and ethnically). This change has brought advances in popular political participation, but also conflicts over the boundaries of nations and how to define the people. In the Russian empire, the Soviet Union and the contemporary Russian Federation, the conflict between popular representation, self-determination for ethnic and cultural groups and inclusion of different groups living within the confines of the state has been especially prominent. It is therefore important to understand how Russian nationalism interacts with the democratic opposition to an increasingly authoritarian regime and how contemporary Russian nationalism compares to its historical antecedents. Comparing and contrasting instances of Russian nationalist rhetoric can provide insights not only into why certain discursive practices have persisted until today, but also into the more general problems that arise when constructing nationalism as a basis for political and social progress.

# Overview of Previous Research

The different strands of Russian nationalism have received significant scholarly interest throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century. For the purposes of this essay, both works on the Slavophiles and on contemporary Russian nationalism have been especially helpful. There is extensive research on the Slavophiles both from an autobiographical and from a theoretical viewpoint. Christoff's thorough exposé in four volumes over the "older" Slavophiles, Aleksej Khomyakov (Christoff, 1961) and Ivan Kireevskij (Christoff, 1972), and the followers, Konstantin Aksakov (Christoff, 1982) and Jurij Samarin (Christoff, 1991), give an in depth description of both the ideas and lives of these four 19<sup>th</sup> century thinkers, and some overview over the intellectual climate at the time. Andrzej Walicki (1989) also provides an interesting discussion of the relationship between the Slavophiles (primarily Khomyakov, Kireevskij, and Aksakov) and the Westernizers originally published in Poland, while Riasanovsky's earlier work (1952) examines the connections between Slavophilism and European Romanticism, as well as the Slavophiles' view of the West and of Russia's role in history. In addition, the Slavophile agenda for social transformation through cultural nationalism has also been examined by Rabow-Edling (2006). She argues that the cultural nationalism of the Slavophiles does not constitute a backward and introverted worldview but an attempt at social change through spiritual and social bonds.

Several attempts have also been made to trace the history of Russian nationalisms broadly up until today, including its relation to Official Nationalism (Torbakov, 2015) and to the nationalism of other former Soviet republics (Kolsto, 2000). For the purpose of this essay, recent research on the Russian national democrats in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Kolsto, 2014) (Kolsto, 2016) (Laruelle, 2017) is relevant, as well as studies that look specifically at the role of nationalism in Aleksej Naval'nyj's political project (Laruelle, 2014a) (Moen-Larsen, 2014). There is some consensus that Russian nationalism has become an increasingly important factor after the fall of the Soviet Union both at the level of the public and in official rhetoric. However, there are also diverging views of how to describe the different visions of a Russian nation envisaged by different actors.

# Research Question and Theoretical framework

## Research question and limitations

In this essay, I will explore how cultural nationalism has been used to build a vision of the Russian nation and Russia's place in the world at two points in time. The early Slavophiles are an informative and influential example of a 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian brand of the Romanticism that to a significant extent inspired cultural and ethnic nationalist movements in Europe. Their ideas of a Russian nation that is based in Orthodoxy and has a special place in the world also continue to have influence today.

Currently, cultural and ethnic nationalism is seeing a revival in Europe. It is often coupled with migrantophobia and xenophobia and is increasingly entering the political mainstream. In Russia, nationalism is also part of the political program of some parts of the opposition to the current political regime, and it ranges from a far right ideology to a more moderate "liberal" nationalism. Some scholars, as well as the actors themselves and their debating opponents in the Russian blogosphere, have termed the new liberal nationalists "national democrats" *natsdem* (Kolsto, 2014) (Laruelle, 2017) (Moen-Larsen, 2014).

While the original Slavophile thinkers are limited in number and represent a nationalism which has been thoroughly explored and classified, current national democrats exist in a number of different guises with different convictions. To limit the inquiry, I will focus the second half of the investigation on the politician and blogger Aleksey Naval'nyj, who at the end of 2016 announced his bid for the presidential elections in 2018. Naval'nyj is a relevant representative of the national democrats since he has had numerous political connections to their political causes (under slogans such "The Russian March", "Stop Feeding the Caucasus" etc.), while being an important figure in the anti-Putin opposition, especially after 2011. Because of his rise to political fame, his nationalist views have also been the subject of scholarly study. There are several other important political figures on the political national democratic scene (for example Vladimir Milov, former deputy energy minister and Konstantin Krylov, leader of the now inactive National Democratic Party). However, Naval'nyj is relevant because of the attention his nationalist views and his opposition to the government have garnered in Russia as well as abroad.

To understand contemporary Russian nationalism, as well as the role of nationalism in state-building and democratisation in a broader perspective, it is important to understand how it

relates to its historical precedents. Therefore, this essay takes a comparative perspective. The main research question is: *What are the differences and similarities between how the early Slavophiles and contemporary Russian national democrats, exemplified by Aleksej Naval'nyj, view the Russian nation?*

More specifically, I will address the following questions and themes:

1. *How is the Russian nation defined by the Slavophiles and by Naval'nyj?*
2. *How do the two nationalist visions relate to the political regime of the time and to competing views of a Russian nation?*
3. *How, if at all, is the idea of a Russian nation used as part of a vision for social and political change?*

Thus, this essay does not intend to give an exhaustive account of nationalism in contemporary or 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia. Rather, it will take two distinct examples from Russian history to illustrate and discuss the role the nationalism has and continues to play in the political debate in Russia as well as in opposition to a regime that is viewed as authoritarian and unjust.

The focus here is on what I have chosen to call cultural nationalism. Often, the terms cultural and ethnic nationalism are used interchangeably or to designate similar ideas (for a more thorough discussion of this distinction, see below). However, the views of the nation discussed here focus on the cultural aspects of the nation as a group, as well as on what differentiates the Russian nation from other nations. The aim of this essay is not to evaluate cultural nationalism generally as a building block for democratisation, but rather to understand the role it plays in visions for social and political change.

An additional important limitation of this inquiry is that it treats the nation as a social construct rather than an objectively verifiable entity. The Russian nation is a construct that is collectively imagined and gains meaning only through human interpretation. Thus, its limits and attributes may change over time. The ideological projects of the Slavophiles and Naval'nyj acquire meaning only in relation to other concepts and constructs, which their audience already understand. Focus is on the Russian case, but the conclusions drawn here can also add to the broader discussion over the nation social construct. In the following paragraphs, I will discuss the broader theories of the nation as a social construct and the role of nationalism in social and political change.

## **The role of the nation in social and political change**

The “nation” is both a popular and analytical concept: First, the word “nation” has successfully penetrated everyday language (“international relations”, “the United Nations”, “the League of

Nations”, “nationwide” etc.), perhaps primarily as a synonym of “state”. Second, the idea of the nation as an ideal political community has also been the subject of considerable academic debate. This debate has focused both on the study of nationalism from a moral-prescriptive standpoint connected with political philosophy, and from an analytical-descriptive perspective connected with sociology. The outline below focuses on these two approaches to the study of nationalism.

First, as a moral concept nationalism has commonly been divided into civic nationalism, freely chosen political communion based on a social contract, and ethnic or cultural nationalism, based on a shared cultural identity (Yack, 1996, p. 194). Civic nationalism is commonly connected with the Enlightenment and the French revolution, whereas ethnic or cultural nationalism is attributed to German Romanticism and is seen in opposition to the project of the Enlightenment (Rabow-Edling, 2006, pp. 59-71). Often, civic nationalism is presented as based on rationalism and a social contract, which members enter into voluntarily, whereas ethnic or cultural nationalism is tied to feeling and belonging based on a sensed common origins and history as well as genealogy (Connor, 1993).<sup>1</sup>

Nationalism as a moral concept, especially civic nationalism, has been closely linked to the idea of popular rule at least since the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. “We, the people” became the slogan of the day, and in contrast to the divine rule of kings and tsars, sovereignty was to emanate from the people, who were also to be granted civil rights on an equal basis. Thus, the idea of a civic nation was an integral part of the Enlightenment project and has had considerable weight in post-Enlightenment political thought (Rabow-Edling, 2006, pp. 60-2).

Second, nationalism as a social construct, has been studied from a historical and sociological perspective. One of the more influential attempts to understand why the nation has attained an important place in politics and societies around the world is that of Benedict Anderson (2016). Based on observations of manifestations of nationalism, he concludes that it is an imagined, inherently limited and sovereign community. The nation’s imaginary quality is manifest in the feeling members have when singing the national hymn. They envisage others singing simultaneously, without being able to see or hear them. You may never meet your fellow nationals, but you will nevertheless perceive them as part of a distinct group. The limits of the nation, in Anderson’s analysis, lies in other nations, where the boundaries between them demarcate that the community is finite, as opposed to for example the imagined medieval community of Christians, which could in theory extend limitlessly across the globe.

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<sup>1</sup> *Although the distinction between (good) civic nationalism and (bad) ethnic or cultural nationalism has been criticised as disregarding the inherent logical failure of both (Yack, 1996), the distinction will be useful for the purpose of analysing nationalism in Russia. In the discussion, I will come back to how the Russian case illustrates the blurred lines between civic and cultural nationalism.*



Furthermore, the nation as such is sovereign, primarily in opposition to the hereditary and divine legitimacy, which had been the prevailing rule in Europe during the middle ages. Finally, the nation is a community insofar as it is based on a comradeship where its members are willing to die for the imagination (Anderson, 2016, pp. 5-7).

As one of the conditions behind the rise of nationalism, Anderson identifies the proliferation and standardisation of vernacular print-language. The advent of vernacular administrative languages in Europe came to challenge the Latin-based sacred Christian community in catholic Europe, and with the reformation, this shift intensified. It was, however, large-scale commercial print technology (in Anderson's words "print-capitalism") and its resulting codification and fixation of language over time which made it possible for speakers of very different forms of "French" or "Chinese" to see each other as existing in parallel and as part of one language-based community (Anderson, 2016, pp. 37-46).

Too much has been written about the role of nationalism in democratisation processes around the world to be able to give a fair representation here. However the role of nationalism in post-Soviet trajectories of democratisation is especially relevant. The Soviet Union was a self-professed multi-national state where allegiance was to be paid to the Soviet state while for much of its history, cultural rights and recognition was still granted to nations (meaning ethnic groups). Many of the successor states were also previous Soviet republics with some type of connection to a "titular" nation, although they were far from homogenous. Today the new states face a varying degree of internal ethnic conflict and contestation over how to define their political community. In contrast, the sense of a particular Russian nationhood within the Soviet Union had been weaker than for other ethnic groups as being Russian was closer connected to being Soviet (Kolsto, 2000). In the first years after the fall of the Soviet Union, Russian nationalism was also very much connected to and nostalgic of the Soviet past and the former empire (Kolsto, 2014, pp. 123-4). Thus, Russian nationalism has to some degree faced different questions than other ethnic groups and states in the region.

## **Ideas of a Russian nation**

Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there has been a tension between Official Nationalism focused on retaining the Russian empire and expressions of popular and elite ethnic nationalisms in the Empire, the Soviet Union, and the Russian Federation. In tsarist Russia, Official Nationalism was part of a doctrine of "Orthodoxy, Autocracy and Nationality" first circulated by the Minister of Education, Count Sergey S. Uvarov and then adopted by Nicholas I. The doctrine was a response to the challenge to hereditary rule meant an intense campaign of "Russification" of the people that inhabited the empire. However, it came only at a late stage (at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century), when popular nationalism had already gained foothold in different parts of the

empire based on other language communities. Official Nationalism in the Russian Empire was thus an attempt at salvaging the previous order by giving it a new tint (Anderson, 2016, pp. 86-8).

Today, the use of nationalism as the basis for ideas about a Russia with expanded borders is present in official government rhetoric, in more marginal political projects such as the Eurasianists, and in the worldview of the Russian Orthodox church. In the foreign policy of the current Russian government, especially in relation to its neighbouring states, the concept of the Russian World is important and articulated primarily as a Russian language community (comparable to the “monde francophone” (Laruelle, 2015)). The government frequently refers to the need to protect Russian speakers abroad, for example in Vladimir Putin’s speech to the Russian parliament on the accession of Crimea to Russia: “[When the Soviet Union fell apart,] millions of people went to bed in one country and awoke in different ones, overnight becoming ethnic minorities in former Union republics, while the Russian nation became one of the biggest, if not the biggest ethnic group in the world to be divided by borders” (Putin, 2014).

Modern Eurasianists, on the other hand also promote a Russia with expanded borders, an ethnically diverse Russian empire, guided by “Asian” values and autocratic government. Although a broad intellectual and ideological field, the Eurasianists are united by a worldview where civilisations with opposing values and destinies compete and where Russia is closer to the East than to the West. The original Russian émigré Eurasianists of the 1920’s connected Russia with the orient and what they perceived to be tradition, conservatism and stability in opposition to European individualism (Laruelle, 2004) (Bodin, 2016) .

The Russian Orthodox Church also defines boundaries of a religious community that to some extent overlap with those of the Eurasianists. The borders of the Moscow Patriarchate coincides largely with those of the Soviet Union, while those of “The Holy Rus” (a term historically used rarely) could be either Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, or the entirety of the Moscow Patriarchate (Bodin, 2016). In this light, the current close relationship between church and state in Russia is perhaps unsurprising.

In summary, the Eurasianists are the most expansive in their vision of a Russian nation. However, the Kremlin’s political project, that to some extent runs in unison with the world view of the Russian Orthodox Church, is based on a multi-ethnic view of the Russian nation that is loosely based on language and that encompasses Russian speakers of different ethnicities within the borders of Russia as well as in the “near abroad”.

Often contesting official and imperial nationalism, Russian cultural nationalism has focused on an ethnic-cultural definition of the borders of the Russian nation. The feeling of lagging behind Europe is often quoted as a reason for the Russian nationalist movements in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Stein, 1976, p. 405). In line with the ideas of Romanticism, the Slavophiles in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century advanced an idea of a Russian nation as culturally distinct from Western

nations and with its own merits and potential to contribute to the advancement of mankind (Rabow-Edling, 2006, pp. 85-100) (Laruelle, 2009). There are instances of more or less outright ethnic and cultural nationalism throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including Alexander Solzhenitsyn's vision of post-Soviet borders defined by ethnicity<sup>2</sup>.

Initially, post-Soviet Russian nationalism was largely statist and focused on nostalgia for the Soviet Union and the lost empire (Kolsto, 2014, p. 125). Organisations that claim some form of nationalist agenda have ranged from the extreme right Pamiat' and Russian National Unity, to the later Slavic Union. Especially relevant here is the development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century of a liberal opposition that either did not question the support they received from far right nationalists or articulated their own ethnic nationalist and particularly anti-immigrant agenda. The epithets "National Democrats" and "Liberal Nationalists" was used both to describe these figures and by the actors themselves. Contemporary national democrats include Vladimir Tor and Konstantin Krylov (of the short-lived and unregistered National Democratic Party), former Deputy Energy Minister and leader of the opposition movement Democratic Choice Vladimir Milov, as well as Aleksej Naval'nyj (Pain, 2014) (Laruelle, 2014a) (Kolsto, 2014) (Kolsto, 2016, pp. 30-7). In 2012, Konstantin Krylov explained the unification of nationalism with the democratic opposition:

“Национал-демократы считают, что Россия — это государство, в котором есть национальное большинство — русские. Поэтому Россия и русские не нуждаются в авторитарном правлении, вождях и прочем. В стране должна быть нормальная демократическая Конституция, равноправие, разделение властей и вообще устройство по европейскому образцу.” (Arhangel'skij, 2012)

”National-democrats think that Russia is a state where there is a national majority - Russians. That is why Russia and the Russians do not need an authoritarian government, and do not need leaders and so on. The country should have a normal democratic constitution, equality, division of powers, and in general, a system based on a European model. (my translation)

Krylov here illustrates how the nation, in this case ethnic Russians, gives democracy legitimacy and advances the thought that through constituting the majority, ethnic Russians have a special place in Russia. The quote is relevant as a background to Naval'nyj's view of the Russian nation. Naval'nyj is commonly grouped together with the national democratic camp and his views are to large part similar to other representatives of the group, though in some instances more liberal (Laruelle, 2014a) (Kolsto, 2014).

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<sup>2</sup> *In Solzhenitsyn's view, the borders of the Soviet Union should be redrawn to allow the peripheral republics to break off, while retaining territories in for example Kazakhstan that in his view had traditionally been Russian. He argued for Belarus and Ukraine to become part of Russia, but should they opt to secede, some Russian lands such as Donbass and Crimea should be incorporated into Russia (Rowley, 1997, p. 324).*

# Theoretical approach and method

This essay uses a qualitative approach to compare and contrast two cases of Russian nationalism. At the basis of the inquiry is an assumption that nationalism is both a normative concept and a social construct (see the discussion of the history of nationalism above). Political actors build a normative argument about the importance and the role of the nation, but in doing so, they use and construct existing narratives that define reality. I will analyse how the two cases of Russian nationalism defines the Russian nation, in relation to other nations, in relation to a vision of social progress and in relation to other contemporary definitions of Russian nationalism and the Russian nation.

The material used consists of both primary (books, articles, blog posts, political programs, video and audio material) and secondary resources as a basis for the analysis. There is a large volume of scholarly and popular material on both the Slavophiles and the National Democrats and it will not be possible to exhaust all relevant resources. However, cross-referencing and complementing different forms of resources has given enough material for an analysis of the research question.

To support the analysis of Slavophilism, I have relied on secondary sources, mainly Andrzej Walicki's *The Slavophile Controversy*, Riasanovsky's *Russia and the west in the teachings of the the slavophiles - a study of romantic ideology* (1952), and Susanna Rabow-Edling's *Slavophile Thought and the Politics of Cultural Nationalism*.

Since Naval'nyj's political project is in the making and he has a less consistent system of thought than that of the Slavophiles, I have used both secondary and primary resources from different periods of his political career. They include excerpts from his personal blog, political programs and manifestos, interviews published by different Russian news outlets, and Konstantin Voronkov's uncritical biography from 2011. The period analysed runs from the start of his political activity until May 2017.

Whereas there is some consensus of what constituted the political project of the Slavophiles, the reading of Naval'nyj is contested and part of a wider discursive and political struggle in Russia, where the term nationalist can also be used to defame and discredit opponents. In some instances, it has been suggested (not least by Naval'nyj himself) that the current regime is conducting a defamation campaign, connecting him with far right and even neo-Nazism (Balmforth, 2017). Therefore, it is important to critically treat sources on Naval'nyj, and I have

aimed to cross-reference his own blog posts (<http://navalny.livejournal.com/> and <https://navalny.com/>), two official Youtube accounts (<https://www.youtube.com/user/navalny> and <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCsAw3WynQJMm7tMy093y37A>), Voronkov's book and interviews with him with scholarly studies on his use of and connection with nationalism.

## The early Slavophiles – “spiritual unity”

Slavophilism was first articulated in a climate of nascent Russian nationalism advanced by different actors in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian Empire. According to Riasanovsky, Russian nationalism was inspired by Russia's victories in the Napoleonic wars and expansion of the Russian borders as a result of the Congress of Vienna. The early 19<sup>th</sup> century saw expressions of both conservative and xenophobic Russian nationalism, for example in the patriotic periodical *The Russian Messenger* under Sergei Glinka. At the same time, Riasanovsky cites the influence of freemasonry and the influence of mysticism in Russia as one of the reasons for the influence that Romantic thought and authors came to have (Riasanovsky, 1952, p. 3). It is with this backdrop that Slavophilism originates in the early to mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, during the autocratic reign of Nicholas I and at the same time as the ideology of official nationality was gaining popularity in the Russian government and elsewhere (see below).

Although there are several authors throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century who are commonly included in the Slavophile school of thought, Aleksej Khomyakov and Ivan Kireevskij are regarded as its first and main ideological contributors (Rabow-Edling, 2006, pp. 7-8). In general, the Slavophiles came from old and landed gentry families and they were not scholars in the modern sense of the word. Rather, they engaged in publishing, editing journals and participating in various intellectual circles. In part, the Slavophiles wrote in opposition to the loose ideological camp called “Westernisers”, who are often regarded as more liberal (Rabow-Edling, 2006, pp. 7-8). However, Stein (1976) argues that both the ideas of Westernizers and Slavophiles stemmed from a sense of inferiority and “lagging behind” the west and proposed different means to elevate Russia from its place in the background of European development.

Slavophilism underwent several mutations throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. For example, if the original Slavophiles were opposed to the autocratic regime, some later Slavophiles writing at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century embraced autocratic monarchy. (Kolsto, 2016, pp. 50-1). There was also several subsequent developments of the

Slavophile theses, including a neo-Slavophile revival within the Soviet Union in the second half of the 20th century (Pospelovsky, 1979). In this essay, I will focus on the earlier Slavophiles (primarily Khomyakov and Kireevskij).

## The Russian nation according to the Slavophiles

A core tenant of early Slavophile thinking is that cultural development is particular rather than universal. The character of the Russian nation is viewed as distinct from that of other nations, particularly western culture. Whereas western culture and the Enlightenment project was based on rationalism and individualism, pre-Petrine Russian culture had been marked by spirituality and community (Rabow-Edling, 2006, pp. 40-2). However, the struggle between rationalism and spirituality was not merely between two geographical entities (the West and Russia), but an opposition between different types of social bonds. In Russia, as opposed to Europe, rationalism had not yet gained the upper hand. Here the conflict was still going on between “narod”, a society that was based on tradition, and “obshchestvo”<sup>3</sup>, meaning the intellectual strata influenced by European rationalism (Walicki, 1989, pp. 168-9).

Khomyakov takes the more essentialist view of the character of the Russian nation. In his argument, the most important distinguishing feature of different tribes was spiritual. The Slavs, and especially the Russians, trace their antecedents back to what he calls Iranian religions – the religions of freedom and spirituality. Khomyakov characterises the Slavs by their generosity towards other races, being marked by gentleness, sociability and receptivity (Walicki, 1989, pp. 210-9). According to Khomyakov, the superiority of ancient Russian society did not stem from any special biological features of the Russians, but from the influence of the Orthodox Church:

“The multitude of small communes that made up Russia was covered by a dense network of churches, monasteries, and hermits’ cells from which identical notions of the relations governing public and private life radiated ceaselessly in all directions.” (cited in Walicki, 1989, p. 142).

The view of what characterised the Russian nation also led the early Slavophiles to specific conclusions about its destiny in relation to other nations. Rather than being a backward cousin to Europe, it would have the potential to make a significant and even crucial contribution to history and to the advancement of mankind (Rabow-Edling, 2006, p. 57). Since this potential

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<sup>3</sup> The meaning of “obshchestvo” is in this context closest to the English society or French société, which is reminiscent of Rousseau’s apprehension about la société civile or civil society. The touch point between Rousseau and the Slavophiles is an apprehension about how much cultivation, industry and outer refinery can add to human progress.

was to a significant degree based on the influence of Orthodoxy and the spirituality it brought, religion has an important role to play in the Slavophile project. The idea of *sobornost'* advanced by Khomyakov is central to Slavophilism. It is best described as an inner unity illuminated by a divine spirit. Rather than proscribing democracy, parliamentarism, or the rights of the individual it focuses on the collective and its organic development. In addition, there is a scepticism of religious institutions. According to Khomyakov, *sobornost'* meant inner spiritual unity rather than institutions and doctrine (Walicki, 1989, pp. 192-7).

## Opposition to Official Nationalism

The Slavophiles acted in opposition to the form that they saw tsarism take after the reforms of Peter the Great and to the rule of Nicholas I, and especially Official Nationality. Official Nationality was first promoted by Sergei Uvarov in 1833, when he became the minister of Public Instruction. In a letter to his subordinates he ordered that “Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality” (*narodnost'*) should be the guiding principles of public education. The triple formula was adopted by Nicholas I gained widespread influence in Russia. However, the ideology was dominated by autocracy, while orthodoxy was interpreted as the control of the church by the state and Nationality represented a defence of the established order, including serfdom (Riasanovsky, 1952, p. 9).

The Slavophiles despised Official Nationalism, partly because it led to censorship (Riasanovsky, 1952, p. 9), and their ideology differed from it on a number of points:

- Official Nationalism was largely sceptical to emancipation, while the Slavophiles generally advocated for emancipation and the peasants' right to some land (esp. the later Samarin and Aksakov);
- Official Nationalism was entirely devoted to serving the tsar as opposed to the Slavophiles' emphasis on the service of the tsar to the people. The Slavophiles saw the purpose of autocracy as creating an environment in which the people could thrive and it should thus be confined to the state;
- According to the Slavophiles, the people had an important role to play in history, while Official Nationalism limited the role of the people almost to zero;
- Although both ideologies were defined in opposition to the West, Official Nationalism was altogether hostile, while the Slavophiles looked favourably on some literature, science, and art from the West. (Christoff, 1991, ss. 375-90)

Nicholas, on his part viewed the Slavophiles as a threat as their conception of nationalism was based on culture and traditions rather than loyalty to the tsar and the country (Rabow-Edling, 2006, p. 128) (Riasanovsky, 1952, p. 9).

# Nationalism as a basis for social and political change

The Slavophile ideology was born from a sense of backwardness in relation to the West and the Slavophiles sought to define both the Russian nation and how conditions in Russia could be improved. Based on their view of the nature of the Russian nation, their conclusion was generally that Russia needed an organic development of the community and a state that served the people.

As noted above, the Slavophiles viewed the state with scepticism. In their view, social unity should not be enforced, but be the function of common faith and traditions. The prototype of this organic community was their image of the village commune (Walicki, 1989, p. 449)<sup>4</sup>. To the Slavophiles, the autonomy of the individual was the source of social disintegration. Freedom could only be a function of communal life where each individual internalises and assimilates traditional values and patterns of behaviour (Walicki, 1989, pp. 446-7).

Just as the nation should be separated from the state, the role of the state was to enable the nation to thrive and to be guided by public opinion as an expression of the essence of the nation. Written laws were seen as artificial, whereas customary law was organic and stemming from the spiritual realm rather than from reason. The state would be authorised to make laws, but not to decide the origin of those laws. In this sense, autocratic government was not a real problem, as it allowed the people to concentrate on the spiritual development of the nation rather than on the artificial structures of the state. The state should furthermore be guided by public opinion, which was to be articulated by the intellectuals on behalf of the public (Rabow-Edling, 2006, pp. 118-27). At the same time, however, Khomjakov saw the expansion of the Russian empire as proof of the greatness of the Russian spirit, as opposed to Kireevskij and Aksakov, who regarded the growth of the state as a threat to their ideas (Walicki, 1989, p. 224).

In summary, the Slavophiles advocated for a cultural nationalism that was based on German Romanticism, and for a community based on organic bonds rather than a rational social contract. Their world view is centred on religion and limits the Russian nation to those who embrace a culture based on Orthodox Christianity. As such, the nation is defined in opposition to Catholic and Protestant Europe. According to Riasanovsky, the Slavophile ideology was based on a dichotomy between “we” (the Russians) and “them” (the West) (Riasanovsky, 1952,

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<sup>4</sup> In 1905, the British scholar Sir Donald Mackenzie Wallace wrote about Russian village communities as “[...] capital specimens of representative Constitutional government of the extreme democratic type!” (Mackenzie Wallace, 1905). However, Mackenzie Wallace’s enthusiastic remarks must primarily be taken to reflect the view of the Russian village community held by some parts of Russian society, as well as a possible nostalgia for a European village that no longer was.



p. 90). Their nationalism is thus in line with Anderson's notion that the nation ends where other nations start and is by necessity defined in opposition to something else. In addition, just as other nationalist projects around the world, their vision of a government limited by the interest of the nation put them in conflict with the government of the Russian Empire and its view of the Russia nation. In addition, their political thinking was inspired by an aim to define a future and a place for the Russian nation in relation to other nations.

## Aleksej Naval'nyj – “what people are worried about”

Aleksej Naval'nyj has a background as a political activist within the Yabloko party (from 2000 to 2007). Although he is perhaps more known in the west as a blogger and online activist, his political activity has also encompassed more traditional means. As a member of Yabloko, Navalny organised Moscow's electoral campaign and was a member of the party's federal political council. During this time, he was also one of the organisers of lively political debates in bars in Moscow through the “Democratic Alternative” (Da!) movement, which he founded together with Maria Gaidar (Voronkov, 2011, p. 50) (Laruelle, 2014a).

While still an active member of Yabloko, Naval'nyj began introducing nationalism into his rhetoric in 2007 (Laruelle, 2014a, p. 278), although he claims to always have held the views he started to articulate at that time (Voronkov, 2011, p. 66). He co-founded the (short-lived) Russian National Liberation Movement (abbreviated Narod, the Russian word for people) together with a number of other political activists, including Zaxar Prilepin<sup>5</sup> (NAROD, 2007). Laruelle (2014a, p. 278) attributes the turn to nationalism partly to the debate following interethnic riots in the Karelian town Kondopoga in 2006.

Naval'nyj also participated in the organising committee for the Russian March in Moscow, an annual nationalist demonstration held in cities across Russia, and spoke at the rally in Moscow. According to himself, he participated in the organising committee as an observer after Yabloko's Moscow chapter decided that the march should be allowed as an expression of freedom of assembly (Voronkov, 2011, p. 71). Naval'nyj justifies participating in the Russian march and his later development of a nationalist agenda through the need to address the

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<sup>5</sup> Prilepin would later organise support for the self-proclaimed republics of Donetsk and Luhansk

“problem” of migration and interethnic conflict, an issue that according to him had been largely monopolised by the violent extreme right (Sokolova & Sobchak, 2011).

”Мне было очевидно, что то, о чем говорят на «Русском Марше», если мы абстрагируем от людей, которые кричат «Зиг хайл!», отражает реальную повестку, волнующую очень многих.” (Voronkov, 2011, p. 65).

“It was evident to me that what they talk about at the “Russian March”, if we distinguish it from the people that are shouting “Sieg Heil!”, is something that reflects a real agenda that a lot of people are worried about” (my translation)

In connection with his new political priorities, Naval’nyj was expelled from Yabloko in 2007. His political activism was then channelled largely through his blog on the site LiveJournal, which became “the most followed blog on the Russian internet” (Laruelle, 2014a, p. 278). Naval’nyj worked for a brief period as an advisor to the governor of Kirov oblast’ Nikita Belykh, but mainly gained recognition as minority shareholder activist pressuring large former state owned companies on corruption charges as well as for monitoring government procurement and road maintenance. During the large demonstrations in several Russian cities in 2011-2012, Naval’nyj took an active stance and was also detained (Gerasimenko, 2010) (Voronkov, 2011, pp. 115-30) (Laruelle, 2014a, p. 278).

The next step in Naval’nyj’s political career was his candidature to become mayor of Moscow in 2013 for the Republican Party of Russia – People’s Freedom Party (RPR-PARNAS) (Naval’nyj, 2013), a campaign which was marked by his arrest and subsequent release on charges of embezzlement during his time as advisor in Kirov. Naval’nyj was later convicted, but the Russian Supreme Court overturned his conviction after the European Court of Human Rights had ruled that the first trial had not given him a fair hearing (BBC, 2017). At the end of 2016, Naval’nyj announced that he would run in the 2018 presidential elections. In early 2017, a retrial in the Kirov case found him guilty, but according to Naval’nyj’s campaign website, the verdict would not bar him from running for office as long as an appeal was being considered and as long as he was not serving a prison sentence.

## **The Russian nation according to Naval’nyj**

Largely, Naval’nyj defines the Russian nation along cultural rather than ethnic or civic lines. According to him, Russian culture is the only thing that unites Russia (Voronkov, 2011, pp. 68-9). It is not entirely clear what Russian culture entails for Naval’nyj. As opposed to the Slavophiles, Naval’nyj does not clearly connect the Orthodox Church to the fate of the Russian nation. He advocates for a secular state where decisions are primarily taken by secular institutions but the dominance of the Orthodox church also warrants a special relationship to which other religious institutions are not privy. However, the right of people of other faiths to

practice their religion should not be limited (Akunin, 2012). Naval'nyj additionally sees orthodoxy as an important part of Russian culture:

Бессмысленно отрицать особую роль Русской православной церкви просто в силу того, то у нас 80% людей причисляют себя к православным (Galperovich & Sokolov, 2016).

It is pointless to deny the special role that the Russian Orthodox Church plays, just because 80% here consider themselves orthodox. (my translation)

Thus, orthodoxy has a special place in Russia by force of tradition and the number of followers, but unlike the Slavophiles, Naval'nyj does not explicitly state that it is only through the Orthodox faith that the nation takes form and grows.

If it is to some extent unclear what Russian culture entails, Naval'nyj is more explicit about what it is not. Just like the Slavophiles defined Russia in opposition to the West, Naval'nyj's cultural nationalism defines the Russians in opposition to certain other groups, including people who are Russian citizens. At the time when nationalism was more prominent in Naval'nyj's rhetoric (up until 2013) "Caucasians", and specifically "Chechens", were presented in opposition to "Russian":

“Почему сейчас разговоры, что Кавказ может отделиться, на столько реальны? Потому что там русских нет.” (Voronkov, 2011, p. 21).

“Why are people now discussing the possibility of Chechnya breaking off? Because there are no Russians there.” (my translation)<sup>6</sup>

From the quote above, it appears that Russian culture is something that defines the Russian state. Despite Chechnya being a Russian republic, there are no Russians there (see below for a discussion of the difference between the terms “ruskij” and “rossijskij”).<sup>7</sup>

Although the Chechens are not Russians, it is possible to “become” Russian since belonging to the nation is primarily based on cultural habits and norms. People whose ethnic origins are something else than Russian can, by adopting Russian culture become part of the group “Russians” (Voronkov, 2011, pp. 68-9) (Golubovskij, Kazinik, & Loshak, 2011).

[...] сегодня миллионы людей, воспитанных в русской культуре, не будучи русскими по происхождению, отказываются от химеры "россиянства", осознавая себя русскими людьми. (NAROD, 2007)

[...] today millions of people who were raised within the Russian culture but are not originally Russian call themselves Russians.

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<sup>6</sup> At the time when Naval'nyj participated in the Russian march, he also supported the slogan "Stop feeding the Caucasus", arguing that budgetary allocations the Russian republics in Caucasia only served to support corrupt elites (Azar, 2011).

<sup>7</sup> Despite the maintaining that there is a lack of Russian culture in the republics of the North Caucasus, Naval'nyj does not support them breaking off (URA.ru, 2012)

Not only is it *possible* to become Russian. Adopting a Russian culture is *necessary* to become a full member of society. Naval'ny's hard line on immigration policy makes clear that people migrating to Russia can only be included if they assimilate and take on Russian traditions and values (Sokolova & Sobchak, 2011). His earlier focus on deportation<sup>8</sup> has overtime been replaced by assimilation, but the dichotomous relationship between "Russian" on the one hand and certain other nations on the other is still present.

If the Russian nation is to a large extent defined in opposition to the Caucasus and Central Asia (as well as to Islam), it is at the same time closely related to Belarusians and Ukrainians. In response to Russia's relations with Ukraine, Naval'nyji supports the right of Ukrainians to national self-determination (Naval'nyji's Blog 2015-10-28), but also identifies a unifying cultural bond:

Я не хочу сказать [...] [что] жители Средней Азии нам враги, но всё-таки с Украиной и Беларуссией мы как братья в разных квартирах, а не просто соседи. (Naval'nyj's LiveJournal 2014-03-12)

I do not want to say [...] [that] the inhabitants of Central Asia are our enemies, but the Ukrainians and Belarusians are like our brothers living in different flats, not just neighbours.  
(my translation)

Here, the Russian nation is defined not in opposition to something else, but in comparison to something that it resembles. Naval'nyj does not appear to indicate that the Ukrainians and Belarusians are also part of the Russian nation, or that the two countries should be incorporated into Russia, but rather points to a cultural connection between eastern Slavic nations.

The emphasis on cultural nationalism identified above puts Naval'nyj further from a civic understanding of the Russian nation. There are two Russian language words for the English "Russian". "Rossijskij" is used to refer to the Russian state and its citizens, whereas "russkij" is commonly understood as ethnic Russians. Thus, there appears to be a rivalling and more civic understanding of the Russian nation, where culture plays a less pronounced role. Laruelle (2016) has argued that the connection between "russkij" and ethnic nationalism is less straightforward than commonly assumed, as the term is also used to underline Ukraine's ties to Russia and to designate a distinct voice and role for Russia in the world. The rejection of the "rossijskij" concept is on the other hand connected to a rejection of the perceived failure of Yeltsin's liberal agenda rather than a multi-ethnic Russian state.

In line with Laruelle's argument, when Naval'nyj embraces the term "russkij" it is also in opposition to the official imperial rhetoric. However, even though criticism of the government is a strong theme in Naval'ny's discourse (see below), the important place that he grants to

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<sup>8</sup> In a video from 2007, Naval'nyj advocates deporting "whatever is disturbing us", while showing images of people of Central Asian or Asian ethnicity.

“Russian culture” is also an indication of a rejection of a purely civic definition of the nation. Furthermore, culture rather than citizenship or state boundaries appear to be important in relation to Russians living abroad. When starting to articulate a more active nationalist position in 2007, Naval’nyj advocated for the rights of Russians living in other states to Russian citizenship and the possibility of returning to Russia (NAROD, 2007).

## **Opposition to the official narrative**

A theme that runs through Naval’nyj’s whole political career is his opposition to the current regime, and this existence in opposition and tandem is also characteristic for the whole nationalist movement. The more recent development of Kremlin’s Official Nationalism, branded as patriotism, limited the discursive field available to the nationalist opposition, and they had to find new themes, such an anti-immigrant discourse (Laruelle, 2014a, p. 287). The opposition to what Naval’nyj has termed the “crooks and thieves” in power also runs through his nationalist discourse, which is primarily formulated as a critique of the regime. Specifically, he is opposed to what he calls imperial nationalism, something which he connects with the official narrative (Russkaja Fabula, 2017).

Russia’s annexation of Crimea is one example where Naval’nyj acts in opposition to what he calls imperialism, while still advocating for the rights of ethnic Russians abroad. According to him, Crimea happened to become Ukrainian only by chance and there are many people on the peninsula who want to either join Russia or gain greater autonomy (Naval’nyj’s LiveJournal 2014-03-12), and they should be given the opportunity of expressing their opinion in a new, fairer referendum (Venedictov A. , 2016). However, in line with his critique of the official Russian policy towards Ukraine, Naval’nyj also views what he perceives as official state imperialism in relation to Ukraine as a threat to the Russian people:

Главный интерес русских не в захвате земли, а в нормальном управлении той землёй, которая уже есть. Взгляните на карту, её довольно много. Россия должна стать европейским государством, где есть один закон для всех, где национальные богатства служат народу и распределяются справедливо (Naval’nyj’s LiveJournal 2014-03-12).

The main interest of Russians [russkije] is not to seize land but to govern the already existing land in a normal way. Look at a map, there is quite a bit of land. Russia should become a European state where there is one law for everyone and where the national wealth serves the people and is divided fairly. (my translation)

An additional example of how Naval’nyj’s opposition to the Kremlin defines his nationalist rhetoric is his relation to the West. While he defines the Russian nation in opposition to Central Asia and the Caucasus and as a brother of the Belarusians and Ukrainians, something which does not significantly distinguishes him from the Slavophiles, his view of “Europe” and the

“west” is more positive and embracing than the Slavophiles’. European democracy, and even European nationalism is something that Russia should strive for. In addition, Naval’nyj has a very positive view of his time as a student at Yale University, and in general of the American education system. He often uses “European” to mean something positive that Russia should strive towards. According to Naval’nyj, it is to Europe rather than to the wider “West” that the Russians are closely connected and there is a common denominator in that Europe and Russia are both defined in opposition to the Islamic world:

«Потри русского и найдешь европейца!» По духу, по мысли. Наши люди хотят в России немецких дорог, британского независимого правосудия, европейского соцобеспечения.

И это нормально. В конце концов, у нас даже общий враг — исламский терроризм, победить который можно только объединив силы России и НАТО. (Russkaja Fabula, 2017)

“Rub it off a Russian and you will find a European”<sup>9</sup>! in spirit and in thought. Our people want German roads, British independent justice, and European social security in Russia. That is normal. At the end of the day, we have a common enemy – Islamic terrorism, which can only be defeated through the joint forces of Russia and NATO. (my translation)

Naval’nyj appears to hold that Russia is primarily a part of European culture, something that distinguishes him both from contemporary Eurasianists, who reserve an important place for a perceived Asian influence over Russian culture, and from the official government rhetoric. According to Zevelev, “Since 2012, Europe as a cultural concept and the European Union as an institution have been increasingly portrayed by the Russian official propaganda machine as an immoral actor that corrupts Eurasia by promoting same-sex marriages, liberal migration policy, and tolerance, all viewed in an extremely negative way” (Zevelev, 2016, s. 12).

In Naval’nyj’s political project, the opposition to the “crooks and thieves” in government is the most important political argument and one around which his rhetoric revolves. Therefore, he has also needed to articulate a nationalist position that was different from that of the Kremlin and from the civic narrative during the Yeltsin years, while still appealing to popular opinion. For a nationalist auditorium, he has repeatedly questioned whether the government is protecting the rights and interests of Russians (Russkaja Fabula, 2017).

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<sup>9</sup> A play on the expression “Scratch a Russian and you will find a Tartar”, commonly attributed to the French traveller Marquis de Custine.

## Nationalism as a basis for social and political change

Like the Slavophiles, Naval'nyj's program includes an aim to advance the interest of the Russian nation towards social and political progress. His express motivation for promoting a nationalist agenda in connection with the founding of NAROD was both the failure of the liberal opposition to address the concerns of the voters and garner support, as well as a feeling of failure and of lagging behind the rest of the developed world. The manifesto of NAROD states that:

Россия стоит перед лицом национальной катастрофы. В мирное время, в условиях благо приятной экономической ситуации, в самой богатой природными ресурсами и территорией стране население стремительно деградирует и вымирает. [...] Главная задача российского государства - остановить процесс деградации Русской цивилизации и создание условий для сохранения и развития русского народа, его культуры, языка, исторической территории (NAROD, 2007).

Russia is facing a national catastrophe. In peacetime, with a positive economic situation, and in the world's most resource rich country, its inhabitants are quickly degrading and dying out. [...] The main task of the Russian state is to stop the process of degradation of the Russian civilisation and create conditions for maintaining and developing the Russian people, its culture, language, and historical territory. (my translation)

NAROD constructs the Russians not only as a nation, but as a civilisation with distinct interests and which has value in itself (the language is strangely reminiscent of that of the Eurasianists). It is a view of the Russian people which is close to the Slavophiles' vision of a Russia with a special mission and place in world history. Furthermore, depending of the definition of the Russian people, the tasks of the Russian state may be limited to promoting the interests of only some people living in the Russian federation, based on their culture. The baseline of the argument is that preserving the Russian civilisation is a value in itself and that the current regime is not adequately addressing that problem.

As noted above, at the time when NAROD was founded, Naval'nyj's nationalism was more prominent than in recent political campaigns, but also veered more towards ethnic nationalism. The claim that the inhabitants of Russia are degrading and dying out indicates that being part of the nation is defined less by the culture one adopts than by any perceived ethnic or biological traits. The discourse implies that people of a certain genetic make-up are diminishing, and that this will lead to the Russian *nation* dying out.

In a blog post from 2014 it also becomes clear that Naval'nyj has continued to view the preservation of the Russian nation (defined culturally), as a goal in itself. While criticizing the suspension of commuter trains in the Vologodskaya region (situated in the north-west of

Russia), he draws the conclusions that making life harder for the region's inhabitants can be equated to a genocide of Russians by the authorities (the title of the blogpost is "Хроники геноцида русских. Об одном действительно ужасном и символическом событии" / "Chronicle of a Russian genocide. About a really terrible and symbolic event"):

Вологодская область - самая большая по проценту русских, и явно всё делается для того, чтобы они не жили и не размножались в Вологодской области. Хотя, конечно, и по вепсам этот геноцид бьет не меньше. (Naval'nyj's blog 2014-12-24)

The Vologodskaya region has the biggest percentage of Russians, and obviously, everything is done to prevent them from living and multiplying in the Vologodskaya region. Although, of course the Vepsians<sup>10</sup> are no less affected. (my translation)

The same blog post also shows some measure of nostalgia for the past by including a colour picture of a Russian village girl taken in the region in the year 1909, indicating that it is the preservation of a historical definition of Russian culture that is Naval'nyj's objective. By equating the decline of the Russian countryside and periphery to a genocide of Russians, Naval'nyj indicates that in 2014 his political project was still directed towards the preservation and advancement of a culturally defined Russian nation.

In another expression of the importance Naval'nyj attributes to the people as an independent entity, he has advocated for a more direct democracy (Naval'nyj's LiveJournal 2012-06-06). For example, his stance on Crimea's relation to Russia and Ukraine is that a new, fair referendum will have to be conducted to determine the will of Crimeans. He has also stated that his reason for aiming to run in the presidential elections as an independent (despite the fact that he currently head the Party of Progress) is that he wants "people" to support him:

Мне важно выдвигаться от людей. Я претендую на то, чтобы [...] стать голосом тех миллионов людей, которые не имеют политического представительства. Поэтому я хотел бы выдвигаться именно от людей. (Venedictov A. , 2016)

It's important for me to run on behalf of people. [...]I aim to become a voice for those millions of people who do not have anyone representing them politically. That is why it is the people that I want to run on behalf of.

For Naval'nyj, the people is the legitimising power and appears to have a value that is more than an accumulation of individuals and which can have a common voice.<sup>11</sup> However, the meaning of "people" in the text quoted above is ambiguous. Naval'nyj uses the word "ljudi", a

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<sup>10</sup> Finnic minority.

<sup>11</sup> In addition to the inherent value attributed to the people, Naval'nyj also assigns special meaning to Russia as a place. In the first two years after starting his blog, he aimed to reassign a positive meaning to the slogan "Glory to Russia" and distance it from Nazism and the extreme right (Moen-Larsen, 2014, p. 557).



wider concept designating “people” in general, rather than “narod”, which in some contexts is closer in meaning to “the people”, a confined group. “Narod” is also at the root of words such as “narodnyj” (with the approximate meaning “folk” used as an adjective) and of “narodnost” in Uvarov’s doctrine “Orthodox, Autocracy, and Nationality [narodnost’]”. Thus, Naval’nyj here seems to refer to people in general rather than “the people”, or any particular group.

Popular rule in general and the interest of the Russian nation in particular is an important building block of Naval’nyj’s political project for political and social progress in Russia. At the same time, there is an unresolved conflict between the liberal traits in Naval’ny’s rhetoric and his more conservative cultural nationalism. He appears to advocate for religious freedom, and NAROD’s manifesto clarifies that ethnic minorities have the opportunity to effectively assimilate, while at the same time maintaining their specific traditions and characteristics (NAROD, 2007). At the same time, when campaigning to become the mayor of Moscow, Naval’nyj pointed to the culture of Russian citizens from the Caucasus as a problem that he would have addressed if he had won:

Если для нас бытовая жизнь – это лезгинка на Манежной площади, то я как мэр регулирую таким образом, что я говорю, что «ребята, лезгинка на Манежной площади – это административное правонарушение» (Venedictov A. , 2013).

If our everyday life includes lezginka<sup>12</sup> on Manezhnaya square, then as mayor I would regulate it by saying “guys, dancing lezginka on Manezhnaya square is a civil offense”. (my translation)

Naval’ny’s tolerance towards cultural expressions that are not Russian is limited and there is an underlying message that certain cultures have more merit than others. Islam is for example something that appears to be a threat to Russia:

Так что если в Европе и существует «orgia толерантности» по отношению к исламистам, то в России это просто Содом и Гоморра лжи, лицемерия, коррупции и прямого поощрения агрессивного исламизма. (Naval’nyj’s Blog 2015-11-16)

So, if there is an “orgia of tolerance” in relation to Islamists in Europe, then in Russia there is a Sodom and Gomorra of lies, hypocrisy, corruption and direct encouragement of aggressive Islamism. (my translation)

When Naval’nyj speaks and writes about his work against corruption and other critique against the regime he often employs both the words “народ” (the people), “люды” (people), and “граждане” (citizens) to designate who he is serving and who will benefit from the changes he proposes. Based on his definition of the nation based on cultural ties discussed above, and on the special place he designate for the Russian nation, Naval’nyj’s rethoric is ambiguous on whether all citizens of the Russian Federation are included in these terms.

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<sup>12</sup> A folk dance traditional to the Caucasian region.

## An inconsistent political project

It is important to note that Naval'nyj's objectives are political rather than directed towards building a consistent theoretical argument and his self-professed liberalism runs alongside support to and interaction with nationalist groups and personas. He categorises himself as a liberal, but "his liberal convictions are essentially formulated around the topic of the right to free elections and the government's accountability towards society, less about free speech, tolerance, or equality" (Laruelle, 2014a, p. 290). Additionally, nationalism is only one part of his agenda. Moen-Larsen's analysis shows that between 2006 and 2012, the number of nationalism-related entries on Naval'nyj's personal blog never exceeded 15.1% (Moen-Larsen, 2014, p. 554).

It is evident that Naval'nyj does not see his task as developing a consistent system of thought:

«[Я сейчас не занимаюсь] абстрактной идеологией, а беру конкретную проблему и в процессе ее решения придаю ей политическое звучание.» (Voronkov, 2011, p. 48)

"[I am not currently working] on abstract ideology, I take a concrete problem and while solving it I give it a political flavour." (my translation)

In addition, his statements and position on nationalism vary over time, in accordance with changes in prioritised questions on his agenda. Explaining to Voronkov in 2011 what nationalism meant to him, he stated that:

Русский национализм – это идеология, близкая к европейскому мейнстриму куда больше, чем принято думать. [...] У меня, может быть, есть какие-то изоляционистские позиции, но такие позиции есть у половины партий Великобритании или Швейцарии. В этом не ничего пугающего (Voronkov, 2011, p. 70).

Russian nationalism is an ideology that is much closer to the European mainstream than people usually think. Maybe I have some isolationist views, but half of the parties in Great Britain and Switzerland have those views. There is nothing frightening about that. (my translation)

However, in 2017, in discussions with video blogger Yuriy Dud', he holds that the nationalist label is primarily something that others impose on him:

Многие меня называют [националистом]. [...] Все эти идеологические клише просто неприменимы. У меня есть один пункт программы, который можно считать националистическим: введение визового режима со странами Средней Азии и Закавказья. И я не вижу здесь ничего националистического (Dud', 2017).

Many people call me [a nationalist]. [...] All those ideological clichés are just not applicable. There is one point in my programme that you could call nationalistic: introducing visa requirements for Central Asia and Caucasus. I don't see anything nationalistic here. (my translation)

Yet, although Naval'nyj has put less emphasis on nationalism in his campaign to become president of the Russian Federation than in the 2013 mayoral elections and as co-founder of NAROD, he has not publicly explained how his views have changed in relation to earlier statements. For example Naval'nyj's official Youtube channel still hosts a video from the 2013 mayoral campaign (posted on 2013-08-27), where he discusses nationalism and migration with representatives of ethnic minorities in Moscow and he continues to aim to appeal to Russian nationalists (Russkaja Fabula, 2017).

Finally, Naval'nyj evidently seeks to appeal to the Russian public through addressing issues that are currently on the political agenda. An illustrative example is how his interest in migration has followed public opinion. When running for mayor of Moscow in 2013, one of the points on Naval'nyj's programme addressed "illegal immigration". The program mainly discusses labour migration in the context of abuse of the migrant work force, including by local authorities and public utility companies, and employment of immigrants without work permits. It also promises to advocate with the central government for stricter migration policies and specifically introducing visa requirements for countries in Central Asia and South Caucasus (Naval'nyj, 2013)<sup>13</sup>. Visa requirements for these countries are also part of Naval'nyj's program for the 2018 presidential election (Naval'nyj, 2016-2017) but is has not thus far been emphasised in his campaign.

Naval'nyj's emphasis on illegal immigration in 2013 coincides with a public opinion that was increasingly for a more restrictive immigration policy, even concerning migration within the Russian federation. According to polling by the Levada centre (2017), 76% of the respondents in 2013 were for introducing policies that would limit migration (up from 45 % in 2002), and 84% were positive or rather positive to the idea of introducing strict visa requirements for Central Asia and Transcaucasia. Both these indicators had gone down slightly by 2016, which may explain the lesser emphasis Naval'nyj puts on migration in the 2018 presidential race as compared to the 2013 Mayoral race.

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<sup>13</sup> *Since Chechnya and other republics in the Caucasian region are part of the Russian federation, people who move to Moscow from the area would most likely be Russian citizens and could not be legally grouped together with "illegal immigrants".*

# Discussion – old and new in Russian cultural nationalism

In the current political context, where there is a want both inside and outside the Russian Federation for a credible and liberal political force that has the potential to challenge the current regime, Naval'nyj's political potential has been widely debated. This essay does not aim to discuss whether Naval'nyj's political project can potentially be that liberal force and to what extent his nationalist views are compatible with the agenda that actors inside and outside of Russia would want to see. Instead, the discussion below will focus on similarities and differences between the nationalism of the Slavophiles and that of Naval'nyj. Are there similarities and differences in how they define the Russian nation and its role, in their relation to the state power of the time, and in how they use the nation as a building block for a project of social and political change? Finally, I will make some tentative conclusions about the inherent limits of nationalism as a tool for political and social progress in Russia and generally.

The main trait that unites Naval'nyj' with the Slavophiles is the construction of the Russian nation as an independent and important building block in a wider political project. In both worldviews, the nation is presented as an intangible but real entity with defined borders defined by culture. The nation is more than the sum of its members: it can be threatened and even die, and it is able produce collective knowledge. To both Naval'nyj and the Slavophiles, representation through political parties are of lesser importance. Instead, they advocate for the significance of public opinion, to be expressed either through the interpretation of intellectuals (Slavophiles) or through direct democracy (Naval'nyj).

In addition to fundamental similarities in their view of the inherent nature of the nation, there are also common aspects in the role that the nation should play according to Naval'nyj and the Slavophiles. In both the 19<sup>th</sup> and in the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, the nationalist project is articulated in opposition to political power and in support of social progress. At the same time, there are important differences connected to the discursive and ideational landscape in which Naval'nyj and the Slavophiles operate. A change in the view of “the Other” and of Russia's cultural and historic ties leads to a change in rhetorical construction and different visions of social progress.

## A revived cultural nationalism

The inquiry into how the Slavophiles and Alexej Naval'nyj defines the Russian nation shows that liberal nationalism in Russia today constitutes mainly of a revived cultural nationalism, as opposed to the more civic project of the Yeltsin 1990s. Although there are some elements of ethnic nationalism in Naval'nyj's discourse, especially at the time when NAROD was founded, his view of the nation is primarily based on culture. In both Naval'nyj's and the Slavophiles' world views, the definition of the Russian nation is based on cultural attributes that sets it apart from other nations. To the Slavophiles, it was mainly Russian Orthodoxy and the way of life in a partly imagined pre-industrial Russia that gave the Russian nation a special place in history and qualities that made it especially apt to take a leading role in the development of mankind. Naval'nyj, on the other hand, has a more loose definition of Russian culture. Although it includes Orthodoxy, Russian language, and a weak nostalgia for village life, it is not the categorical definition of what being Russian means that can be found with then Slavophiles. While Naval'nyj alludes to a vague definition of Russian culture, the Slavophiles were very definitive in their view of a separate (and better) spiritual unity among Orthodox believers in Russia which could produce knowledge and wisdom organically.

Naturally, these differences are partly due to the differences in reference points and intellectual climate in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as compared to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The European Romanticism that the Slavophiles wrote in tandem with accepted and embraced mysticism and broad generalisations, and Orthodoxy penetrated more of the worldview and daily life of Russians. Although nominal adherence to Orthodoxy has been on the rise since the fall of the Soviet Union, the discursive climate that Naval'nyj navigates today differs from that in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Contemporary Russians do not largely perceive the President as ordained by God, serfdom has long been abolished, and the majority of Russia's inhabitants live in cities and large towns. Thus, to appeal to voters as a politician, Naval'nyj needs to adopt a limited discourse of nostalgia for Orthodoxy and Russian history, while at the same time embracing modernity and the West.

An important difference in how Naval'nyj and the Slavophiles define the Russian nation is that which it is defined in opposition to. To the Slavophiles, the West (including Catholic and perhaps protestant Europe) was the main concept that the Russian nation was pitted against. Naval'nyj on the other hand defines Russian in opposition to the South Caucasus, Central Asia and Islam. In Russian language literature, the Chechen has always been the other (see for example the different adaptations of the story "Prisoner of the Caucasus" from Pushkin's poem, through adaptations by Lermontov and Tolstoy to modern Russian films from 1966 and 1996). However, the strong discursive force that the "Muslim" and "immigrant" has as "the Other" in both Russian and other European countries means that this building block of an understanding

of what it means to be Russian has taken centre stage in the rhetoric of Naval'nyj as well as of others in the European and Russian debate over the meaning of nationalism. As he himself notes, to Naval'nyj's contemporaries the west is often equated with something positive and modern that Russia is striving towards. However, as there are at the same time negative connotations attached to the concept of the "the West", Naval'nyj is also forced to attempt to influence and alter the general understanding of Russia's relation to Europe and the West, just like the Slavophiles in their debates with the Westernizers.

For both Naval'nyj and the Slavophiles, since the cultural bond is primary, nations can transcend borders. Naval'nyj appears to see a stronger cultural bond with "ruskije" in the near abroad, and even Ukrainians and Belarusians than with Russian citizens in North Caucasus. While he sees no need to introduce visa requirements for Belarusians, Russian citizens who have moved to Moscow from the republics in North Caucasus are connected to the question of illegal immigration.

## **Nationalism as opposition to power**

As many studies have concluded, there is a continued opposition in Russia between Official or Imperial Nationalism, aimed at preserving (and sometimes expanding) the Russian empire (or the contemporary Russian Federation). Whereas the motivation of both the tsarist regime of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the current Russian government was to some extent a preservation of the political status quo, retention of political power, and legitimising the state borders, cultural nationalists focus on preservation and advancement of the Russian nation. Both Naval'nyj and the Slavophiles acted in opposition to the political power of the day. The Slavophiles considered Peter the Great to have taken tsarism down the wrong path towards a form of government where the role of the church had been diminished in favour of rationalism and their works were censored by the authorities. Similarly, the underlying current in Naval'nyj's political project constitutes of a critique of power. The regime has encouraged corruption and mismanagement, and it has not done enough to protect the interests of the Russian nation and address questions that concern the Russian people. In line with this critique, he also opposes what he perceives as official imperialism. Despite the strong cultural connection with Belarus and Ukraine, Naval'nyj is never the less opposed to Russian intervention in the Ukrainian conflict and to the expansion of the territory of the Russian Federation.

At the same time, the official narrative has also at times occupied the nationalist discursive field, for example after the events in Ukraine in 2014, when Russian nationalists became divided over whether to support the intervention and the official government policy. Whereas former NAROD co-founder Zaxar Prilepin participated in the military actions in the East of Ukraine, Naval'nyj voiced critique of the government's policy towards Ukraine. Since

opposition to the current regime is a fundamental defining feature of Naval'nyj's political programme, he has also had to define his nationalism in terms that are significantly different from those of the Kremlin, and find ways to critique the government's lack of protection of the Russian nation.

Opposition to the regime and to the contemporary political order is a defining feature of both the nationalism of the Slavophiles and of Naval'nyj, just as it has been a defining feature of nationalism in general when it has been used to critique colonialism or authoritarianism throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The origins of popular and elite nationalism as an alternative to the hereditary and divine legitimacy that persisted in Europe into the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries has meant that it is generally constructed as a critique of power.

## **Nationalism and social progress**

Both in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in contemporary Russia, the motivation for advocating for protecting the interests of the Russian nation is in part a feeling of backwardness and inferiority in relation to other nations or states. The Slavophiles compared Russia to what they observed in Western Europe and questioned why Russia was lagging behind, despite the positive characteristics they saw in their home country. However, their conclusion was not that Russia should imitate the West, but look inward for answers to the question of development. Naval'nyj, on the other hand, also views the Russian society as lagging behind the West in several areas (openness, education, a fair political and judicial system), but to a larger extent sees the West as a positive model to be employed to serve the Russian national interest. To Naval'nyj, nationalism is a means to save Russia from degradation. The preservation of the Russian nation (culturally defined) is an end in itself and public policy should in part be aimed towards this goal. However, unlike the Slavophiles, he does not reject modernity or capitalism but views these as building blocks to Russian progress.

Although they differ in their views of modernity and the West, the work of the Slavophiles and of Naval'nyj are similar in that it is aimed towards a change in the social and political conditions in Russia, a change which they perceive will lead to progress. In both political projects, legitimacy stems from the people. In Naval'nyj's world view, this will be achieved through democratic elections as well as more direct forms of democracy, perhaps without the need for political parties, which he has little trust in. To the Slavophiles, although not advocating for parliamentary democracy, public opinion is never the less crucial and they see it as emanating organically from the people and being filtered through the interpretation of intellectuals.

Nationalism as a component of democratisation is not unique to Russia. It has been a component of the anti-colonial struggles as well as the break-up of the Soviet Union. As noted

above, Russian nationalism had a less clear opponent and its history of partnership with imperialism was problematic for the development of a post-Soviet Russian nationalist narrative. Never the less, the attempt by Naval'nyj and other self-professed national democrats to use Russian nationalism as a building block of their critique of the government is clearly in line with the role that the nation as a concept has played in the development of modern democracy in emphasising the will and interest of the nation as a source of legitimacy.

However, there are limitations to the democratising potential of nationalism. Laruelle (2014a) argues that the development of a civic identity in Russia requires defining who belongs and who does not, as well as a consensus on a cultural framework. As an imagined community, the Russian cultural nation as envisaged by both Naval'nyj and the Slavophiles is sovereign, but also limited. The borders that limits it are not based on the borders of the state but rather of culture and can both be extended beyond the limits of the Russian Empire or the Russian Federation, and be drawn more narrowly, excluding certain groups and citizens.

Democracy requires a definition of the demos, a discursive place that has been occupied by nationalism for much of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. However, the romantic view of the nation provides for an excluding and limited view of the people. In Russia, where the Slavophile antecedent of contemporary cultural nationalism continue to define it through the emphasis on orthodoxy and a nostalgic view of Russian culture, cultural nationalism has clear limitations. These problems are paralleled by other European states' contemporary struggle in trying to define people and culture while being determined by the current world order based on "nation states". Dostoyevsky's observation quoted at the beginning of this essay about the difficulty in defining what it means to be "Russian" can also be applied to nations more generally. As a political and discursive construct, "nation" is a fleeting and contentious concept, and perhaps too exclusive and problematic to be used as a building block for democracy.

In a recent opinion piece, Fareed Zakaria (2016) notes that since the publication of "The Future of Freedom" in 2003, illiberal democracy has continued to flourish in countries around the world that hold free elections but neglect fundamental rights and liberties. The cultural nationalism that underlies Naval'nyj's political programme shows that "democracy can be intolerant" (Laruelle, 2014a) and that a post-Putin regime may also bear signs of illiberal democracy, just like many other current regimes and opposition parties throughout Europe. It is also possible that democracy not only *can* be intolerant, but that when cultural nationalism is used to define the demos and when the nation is defined through reference to "the Other", there is a necessary element of exclusion and intolerance inherent in the idea.



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