



RUSSIAN INTELLIGENTSIA AT THE CROSSROADS: A  
PORTRAYAL AT THE TURN OF THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

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*I do not believe in our intelligentsia – hypocritical, false, hysterical, uneducated, lazy. I do not believe in it even when it suffers and complains, because its oppressors come from its own inner depths.<sup>1</sup>*

*The soul of the Russian intelligentsia, like all of Russian life, is woven of contradictions, and it arouses contradictory feelings. It is impossible not to love it; it is impossible not to be repulsed by it.<sup>2</sup>*

Many scholars attempt to evaluate the condition of the Russian intelligentsia at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century, as well as to answer what are the particular challenges that the intelligent faces in the modern Russia. The academic dispute on the intelligentsia has a long tradition in Russian historiography; yet, scholars still disagree on the meaning of the term *intelligentsia* and its origins. The debate is complicated as it traces the lot of a social group across two centuries, and thus has to acknowledge the ongoing social, political and economic change, not to mention the dramatic transformation of contemporary Russian cultural and intellectual life. The Russian intelligentsia has always shaped its values in response to the official *ordo*, while its worldview has been as much a function of the contemporary political system as it has been an outcome of intellectual development and autonomous creation. Consequently, the intelligentsia has been an entity which depends for its existence on the authoritarian state. Moreover, neither has the intelligentsia, nor the rest of the Russian society, experienced an extended period of democratic government, of free market economy, and of authority's respect toward the human being. The policies of *перестройка*, *гласность*,

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<sup>1</sup> Anton Chekhov in: Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution*. New York, 1990, p. 140.

<sup>2</sup> Sergei Bulgakov, "Heroism and Asceticism: Reflections on the Religious Nature of the Russian Intelligentsia" in: Nikolai A. Berdyaev ed., *Landmarks: A Collection of Essays on the Russian Intelligentsia, 1909*. New York, 1977, p. 62.

and *ускорение*, along with the events of the early 1990s shattered the world of the Russian intelligentsia.

In this essay, I argue that the new principles of pluralism and free choice that emerged in all areas of life undermined the intelligentsia's identity, revealed its multiple flaws, as well as forced intelligentsia to re-define its role. In the early 1990s, the intelligentsia encountered multiple new incentives in all realms: an ongoing democratic project with its opportunities for an open political activism, capitalism which mesmerized with easy gain, and finally, new intellectual and cultural trends of the Western world. What was missing was the all-encompassing state umbrella, which for so long helped the intelligentsia identify themselves, either for or against the *власть*.

In my paper, I will investigate the condition of the Russian intelligentsia at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Let the title of Paul Gauguin's painting, *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?*, be the Ariadne's thread in the labyrinth of the scholarship on the contemporary Russian intelligentsia. Accordingly, I will first assess the question, *Where Do We Come From?*, and analyze how the traditional meaning of the term "intelligentsia" was transformed in the new reality. Then, I will examine the condition of the contemporary Russian intelligentsia by pointing out its major vices, which have been revealed over the period when intelligentsia has been grappling with the new chances and risks. Finally, I will pose the key question: *Where Are We Going?* I will discuss the projects of the role of the intelligentsia in the new political, social and cultural reality. There is no doubt that the principle of pluralism and the multiple opportunities that have emerged left intelligentsia in search for a firm identity and a new role, one that

would correspond to the new manifold reality, and that would also offer reliable points of reference.

### I, *intelligent*...

First, in order to understand the condition of the contemporary Russian intelligent, one has to refer to the legacy of the Russian intelligentsia, from its first generation described by this term in the 1860s, to the Soviet intelligentsia of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Notwithstanding controversies, almost all authorities would agree that the origins of the Russian intelligentsia go back to the “circles” of the 1830s and 1840s.<sup>3</sup> It was a time when young intellectuals introduced into Russia new ideas in the form of German philosophical idealism. However, the term *intelligentsia* did not emerge in the Russian language until the 1860s, when it was proposed by Boborykin and became current. Some scholars see the roots of the 19<sup>th</sup> century intelligentsia in the Petrine reforms, and Russia’s opening on Europe in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century; others trace the intelligentsia’s origins back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century Russian nobility.

What then was the Russian intelligentsia? The word has always had at least two overlapping uses: either all men who think independently or, more narrowly the intellectuals of the opposition, whether revolutionary or not.<sup>4</sup> The Latin word *intelligentsia* means discernment, understanding, and intelligence, and the members of intelligentsia thought of themselves as the embodied “intelligence,” or “consciousness” of the nation. Consequently, they experienced a sense of apartness from the rest of the Russian population. Their social backgrounds were very diverse, as the intelligentsia

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<sup>3</sup> Martin Malia, “What Is the Intelligentsia?” in: Richard Pipes ed., *The Russian Intelligentsia*. New York, 1961; p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

came from all estates: the gentry, the merchantry, the clergy, and even the peasantry. It may seem that this melting pot of the intelligentsia would produce a sense of unity with their Russian compatriots, but in fact the intelligentsia alienated itself from the rest of Russian society.<sup>5</sup>

The intelligentsia in the Soviet Union in its initial period tried to persuade the Bolshevik leaders to stop terror, yet the appeals of the Russian writers Maxim Gorky and Vladimir Korolenko to Lenin were unsuccessful. The new regime soon began repression against the “old” bourgeois intelligentsia, and stimulated creation of the “new intelligentsia” that consisted of people of certain social background. Subsequently, the character of the intelligentsia had been transformed, and it now consisted of technically trained personnel, whom Richard Pipes defines as semi-intelligentsia or “white collar”. In the following decades, many thousands of intelligentsia became victims of the Josef Stalin’s regime, even though many of them had previously made distinguished achievements in various areas of scientific and scholarly life, and in art and culture. Besides the persecuted part of the intelligentsia, there was also a part that actively collaborated with the state in the hope of promoting their careers. Krushchev’s cultural policy was contradictory: he united some cultural liberalization with the continuation of some repression. During the era of cultural Thaw, the Communist Party did not release culture from ideological control, but only extended the limits on the creativity of the intelligentsia. The Soviet regime never completely surrendered its ideological positions and continued the persecution of nonconformist intellectuals, i.e. in 1974, the renowned

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<sup>5</sup> More on the definition and etymology of the term *intelligentsia* in: Christopher Read, *Culture and Power in Revolutionary Russia: The Intelligentsia and the Transition from Tsarism to Communism*. New York, 1990, pp. 1-38; Vladimir C. Nahirny, *The Russian Intelligentsia: From Torment to Silence*, p. 3-18.

writer Alexander Solzhenitsyn was forcibly deported from the Soviet Union. In the 1980s, Mikhail Gorbachev's policies caused liberalization of society, and diminishing of censorship what opened the press and mass media for political discussions. After a long break the intelligentsia had revived its influence on public opinion. The Soviet Union collapsed with the intelligentsia playing an important role in the destruction of the empire.<sup>6</sup>

The multiple attempts to define the contemporary Russian intelligentsia relate to the classic understanding of intelligentsia as a unique group of society, which consists of educated people, artists, intellectuals and critically thinking individuals, many of whom remain in opposition to the government. One of the great contemporary Russian intellectuals, Dmitrii Likhachev, says that the intelligent is a “...человек обладающий умственной порядочностью, свободный в своих убеждениях, независимый от экономических, политических условий, неподчиняющийся идеологическим обязательствам”.<sup>7</sup>

Scholars of the subject emphasize that the characteristic features of the intelligent now and in the past is his egotistic stand and yearning to attract the attention of the world around him. Renowned academic Andrei Siniavskii discusses this ultimate self-conceit of the contemporary intelligentsia in his book *The Russian Intelligentsia*, and he purposefully uses letter я (what in Russian means “I”) in the title of his book in order to underline this trend. Siniavskii states, “Наша интеллигенция, к сожалению, слишком часто склонна к экстремизму, истерической эмоциональности, (...) лишь бы люди,

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<sup>6</sup> Andrei Siniavskii, *The Russian Intelligentsia*. New York, 1997.

<http://www.answers.com/topic/intelligentsia>

<sup>7</sup> Dmitrii Likhachev in: Sergei Filatov ed. *Kongress rossiiskoi intelligentsii: Moskva, 10-11 dekabria 1997*; p. 19.

наконец, заметили это маленькое, столь дорогое каждому его собственное Я.”<sup>8</sup>

This egotistic inclination is also addressed by Vitalii Kurennyi, who argues that the Russian intelligent of the 19<sup>th</sup> century defined himself in opposition to state authority, and the Soviet period had only prolonged this trend.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, the contemporary Russian authority, which neither prosecutes nor spoils the members of the intelligentsia, is a shock for an intelligent, who was used to being in the center of attention. For him to be ignored is even more bitter than to be prosecuted.

Yet another feature of the contemporary intelligentsia is revealed in the distinction between intelligent and intellectual, which for the first time has become explicit. So far, there has been little discussion of the differences between the two groups, and the terms “intelligentsia” and “intellectuals” have been used interchangeably when referring to writers, poets, and other creative professions.<sup>10</sup> The contemporary academic discussion revolves around Max Weber’s “ideal types” categories and defines “intelligentsia” as a community of educated members from a variety of social strata, who are concerned with their own social standing. The “intellectuals”, on the other hand, is a small group of people of high creativity, who are often characterized by more individualistic stances.<sup>11</sup> Both groups are parts of a complex cultural mechanism, in which the intelligentsia breaks down and elucidates the ideas raised by the intellectuals.

Everyday language confuses both categories, and even some of the men of letters themselves offer contradictory interpretations of term “intellectuals.” Landau, who is a

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid; p. 48.

<sup>9</sup> Vitalii Kurennyi, “Intellektualy” in: Vitalii Kurennyi ed. *Myshlashaya Rossiia: kartografiia sovremennykh intellektualnykh napravlenii*. Moskov 2006; p. 15.

<sup>10</sup> Alexei Elfimov, *Russian Intellectual Culture in Transition: The Future in the Past*. London 2003; p. 20.

<sup>11</sup> Vitalii Kurennyi, “Intellektualy” in: Vitalii Kurennyi ed. *Mysliashchaia Rossiia: kartografiia sovremennykh intellektualnykh napravlenii*; p. 6.



well-known Russian theater critic, defines intellectuals in a pejorative mode when she claims that the threat for the contemporary intelligentsia is that it can be transformed into “the ethically indifferent intellectuals.”<sup>12</sup> Yet other authors take a completely opposite approach, and argue that the word “intellectual” has recently had more favorable connotations, because it now refers to professionals, “like those in the West, who accomplish something, unlike members of the Russian intelligentsia, who talk on and on about nothing.”<sup>13</sup> Last, but not least, there is a recognition among some scholars, that the era of the intellectuals have not yet come in Russia, “...the intellectuals in the true sense, who advocate certain philosophical principles, discern connections between many disciplines, and make their observations known to society at large, virtually do not exist in contemporary Russia.”<sup>14</sup>

The above discussion of the emergence of the category “intellectual” in the sphere reserved for so long for the intelligentsia exclusively relates to other differentiations of the contemporary Russian intelligentsia. First of all, it has been a recent development to investigate the intelligentsia by taking either an axiological or a sociological approach. Accordingly, in the case of the former approach, one examines intelligentsia as a group of people, who are not only well-educated and cultured, but who also have a strong sense of moral principles. Consequently, the priority of this group, besides professional interests and talents, is the moral responsibility for fellow citizens, society, and humanity. In the sociological approach, one treats intelligentsia as mass social strata, which plays an important role in the functioning of the societal institutions. Therefore, this group is

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<sup>12</sup> Simona Landau. *...Ne daët otveta*. Moskva, 2007; p. 84.

<sup>13</sup> Heyward Isham ed, *Russia's fate through Russian eyes: voices of the new generation*. Boulder, 2001; p. 331.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

interested in improving its own social standing and fulfilling its professional duties, rather than disseminating certain moral values.<sup>15</sup>

Some scholars go to great lengths to classify the contemporary Russian intelligentsia, and they identify three distinct groups and label them as moralists, white-collar workers, and managers.<sup>16</sup> All the splits are no doubt an effect of the pressure of new socio-political circumstances, in which defining who is and who is not an intelligent is not so easy. One has to agree with the Russian scholar Tatiana Naumova that:

В недавнем прошлом отечественную интеллигенцию в целом характеризовало определенное единство социокультурных и политических ориентаций. В результате радикальных перемен в среде интеллигенции (...) произошел ее раскол между различными силами, борющимися за разные пути развития России.<sup>17</sup>

### Seven deadly sins

The new model of pluralism in politics and culture challenges the intelligentsia to respond to the multiplied voices and opinions that have been formed on the side of the formerly “mono- factors”: nation and authority. This process reveals the intelligentsia’s deeply rooted vices and its new flaws forming a catalog of the intelligentsia’s seven deadly sins. At the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Russian intelligentsia shares some of its 19<sup>th</sup> century predecessors’ faults, such as: alienation from the people, disinterest in the intellectual profession, lack of interest in maintaining moral values, and utopian idealism. Additionally, this catalog is supplemented with a new set of vices, among them corruption with money and power, abandonment (*уход*) of its traditional social tasks, as well as a pronounced sense of helplessness of the former *homo sovieticus*. While the later

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<sup>15</sup> A.A. Yudin ed., *Obrazovannyyi sloi Rossii: vremia peremen*, Nizhnyi Novgorod, 2002; p. 31.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid; p. 55.

<sup>17</sup> Tatiana Naumova, *Nauchnaia intelligentsiia v novoi Rossii*. Moskva, 2008; p.71.

faults are a development of the past two decades, the former flaws characterized the intelligentsia in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and had been discussed by the authors of *Vekhi* (*Landmarks*), a seminal collection of essays by Russian thinkers, published in 1909.

None of the works on the Russian intelligentsia make sense without the context of *Vekhi*, in which Nikolai Berdyaev, Sergei Bulgakov, Mikhail Gershenzon, Aleksandr Izgoev, Bogdan Kistyakovsky, Pyotr Struve and Semen Frank offer their explanation of the Russian intelligentsia's roots, its disintegration and ultimate failure. Among the variety of reasons contributing to the certain outlook of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian intelligentsia, a few are essential to the aforementioned authors: intelligentsia's alienation from the people; its dissociation with science, art and religion; inclination toward martyrdom; and finally, an individual psychological crisis. Although each of the authors investigates the role of a certain factor in the intelligentsia's life such as: philosophy, ascetism, law, self-cognition, education, revolution, ethics, they sometimes present a similar critique of the intelligentsia. That makes *Landmarks* a fascinating analysis of the failure of the Russian intelligentsia at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The question of alienation from the people is a leitmotif in the history of the Russian intelligentsia, and is again actual in the contemporary Russia. The popular model used by scholars assumes a triangle as a symbol of relations between the state authority, the people, and intelligentsia, every one of which is placed on the respective apex of this triangle. The role of the intelligentsia in this model is to represent the "dark", oppressed people to the authority. One asks whether it is viable for the intelligentsia to maintain the same distance to the two other factors in this symbolic triangle, and at the same time successfully represent only one of the agents, the people. The modern Russian

intelligentsia for a long time has carried on the mistaken perception of being close to the people and acting in the name of the people. In the long run, the intelligentsia elitist approach to the people, and its desire to lead the “dark mass” has made the intelligentsia similar to the authority. According to a scholar, Vladimir Mezhyev, “Понятие интеллигента относится к человеку, для которого его уникальная и неповторимая индивидуальность существует в оппозиции к безликой, этически однородной массе лишенной индивидуальных признаков.”<sup>18</sup> How then, given this tradition, can the intelligent release himself from this tragic misunderstanding and relate to the contemporary polymorphous structure of society and its individualistic character?

The contemporary Russian intelligent’s sense of alienation is intensified, because he has difficulties coming to terms with the new social reality, with the ongoing process of Westernization, with consumerism and popular culture, with his compatriots visiting foreign countries, searching for information on radio, TV and internet. The reality puts the intelligent in a dramatic situation, when his monopoly for knowledge and information breaks, and when he ceases to be the exclusive and desirable source of knowledge for the “dark mass.” The intellectual monopoly of the intelligentsia is being replaced with alienation, as every Russian man is capable of thinking for himself and making political and social choices without asking anyone for advice.

The negative heritage of the intelligentsia is also visible in its contemporary attitude toward its professional duties. This approach is often similar to what Gershenzon discussed, when he claimed in *Vekhi* that in its eagerness to fulfill a political role, the intelligentsia has spent half a century at the square, wailing and bandying angry word

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<sup>18</sup> V.N. Mezhyev in: A. Guseinov ed. *Svobodnoe slovo: intellektual’naia khronika desiatiletii, 1985-1995*; p.304.

about, and staying away from any serious intellectual activity.<sup>19</sup> Currently, in some professions it is not easy for the intelligent to be a devoted employee. In case of academia, the obvious reasons for crisis are scarcity of financial resources, bureaucratization and disorganization. In order to adjust to the new situation the contemporary academic has to go through the rite of passage, "...from the private space of the kitchen to the public space of the scientific institution, [that] leads to an automatic switching from 'reflection in general' to stereotyped professional discourse."<sup>20</sup> Good for him! – one may think, the professional discourse is what people expect the intelligent to be engaged in.

However, even in the sphere of professional discourse, the intelligent is often bound to fail, as the sphere of professional life has been transformed according to the principles of plurality and diversity. An academic is almost overnight forced to overcome his own intellectual disorientation which follows the collapse of communism; simultaneously, he gets confused with the new Western ideas, which are flooding Russia.<sup>21</sup> The unexpected triumph of the alternative culture and hidden intellectual life confuses the intelligent. Yet meanwhile, changing socio-economic conditions place the intelligent under a pressure, so it oftentimes happens that he decides to launch his own business or simply struggle for the family's survival instead of participating in the intellectual and professional exchange. The outcome is that the intellectual dialogue silences, and some of the professional responsibilities are abandoned due to the search for

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<sup>19</sup> Mikhail Gershenzon, "Creative Self-Recognition" in: Nikolai A. Berdyaev ed., *Landmarks: A Collection of Essays on the Russian Intelligentsia, 1909*, p. 79

<sup>20</sup> H. Isham ed, *Russia's fate through Russian eyes: voices of the new generation*; p. 331.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*; p. 336.

better opportunities offered by the new reality, as well as due to the inability to adjust to a new multidimensional intellectual discourse.

The utopian idea about a special vocation of the Russian intelligentsia belongs to its traditional sins, and even today in the new reality of plural, more democratic political and cultural discourse, the intelligentsia's bent to assume the messianic role is apparent. In Russia, the discussion of the intelligentsia, or rather of its ideal type, has always revolved around such lofty ideas as moral imperative, which led to defining the intelligentsia in terms of some divine spiritual qualities. Dmitrii Likhachev states, "Интеллигент-это состояние души."<sup>22</sup> A scholar of intelligentsia, Ergin, in his article, "Реализует ли себя российская интеллигенция?", maintains the myth of its special mission, "В России интеллигенция как носитель духовного начала почти единственный слой способный сохранять в обществе моральное начало."<sup>23</sup> Landau shares his opinion about the unique character and sacred vocation of the intelligentsia, when she states, "А миссия хранить и возвращать доброе плодородные зерна всегда лежала и лежит (...) на русской интеллигенции."<sup>24</sup> The utopian rhetoric is also well expressed by Glukhova, "...Главная миссия интеллигенции состоит в том, чтобы выражать духовные интересы целого, чтобы в каждой данной ситуации найти ту позицию, которая представляет наилучшую возможность."<sup>25</sup> Lucky the one who can live up to this postulate...

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<sup>22</sup> V.E. Triodin, *Sudba rossiiskoi intelligentsii: materialy nauchnoi diskussii*. Sankt-Petersburg, 1999; p.35.

<sup>23</sup> E.A.Ergin in: Sergei Poltorak ed., *Fenomen rossiiskoi intelligentsii: istoriia i psikhologii: materialy mezhdunarodnoi nauchnoi konferentsii, 24-25 maia 2000*, Sankt-Peterburg. p.72.

<sup>24</sup> Simona Landau. ...*Ne daët otveta*.

<sup>25</sup> E. Glukhova in: V.P.Etison ed., *Rossiia nakanune XXI veka: novye vekhi: materialy mezhvuzovskoi nauchnoi konferentsii 2-3 fevralia 1999*. p. 18.

Yet, along with these utopian postulates, there is a widespread recognition that the intelligentsia is in fact disinterested in maintaining moral standards and in disseminating certain values in Russia. In the Russian tradition the intelligent has been identified as the conscience of the nation, the Dostoevsky type who refuses the world where a suffering of a child is permitted. This stand resembles ideas of some Western philosophers, such as Manheim or Nietzsche who emphasize the role of the intelligentsia in the improving moral condition of the nation. Currently, some of the Russian scholars refer either directly or indirectly to these models and claim that there is no future for the people, if the intelligentsia does not start to work on its own moral improvement.

The sad picture of the weak moral condition is confirmed by the surveys of the contemporary Russian intelligentsia, in which its members respond to the questions about their values and concerns. In the years 1993-1998, the number of the intelligentsia willing to strengthen the moral principles in social life has sharply decreased.<sup>26</sup> The decrease of engagement is also to be observed in such areas as: strengthening of the rules of law and order (31% in 1993, 24% in 1998), securing the rights of man (29%, 18% respectively), or striving for the development of the nation (49%, 13% respectively).<sup>27</sup> According to the survey, the so-called *соль земли* has partially lost its interest in fulfilling its traditional role of the moral leader, and social reforms do not play an important role in their worldview any more. The majority of intelligentsia prefers to define its social tasks primary in terms of spiritual, intellectual and professional work, rather than civic or political practice.

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<sup>26</sup> A.A. Yudin ed., *Obrazovannyyi sloi Rossii: vremia peremen*, p. 30.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, p. 30.

A high number of the intelligentsia has become much more restrained in playing the role of the spiritual leader, and has withdrawn into private sphere. The social disengagement of intelligentsia is evident, even though there is still a lot of wishful thinking about its moral quality, “...Можно было бы говорить о роли интеллигенции в качестве носителя, хранителя и субъекта развития гуманитарной культуры.”<sup>28</sup> This statement is sharply contrasted with Professor Alexei Nikishnekov’s picture of the intelligentsia, “An intellectual of yesterday in Russia was a type perfectly shaved and occasionally drunk; whereas an intellectual of today is a type occasionally shaved and perfectly drunk.”<sup>29</sup>

Among the cardinal sins of the intelligentsia one can also find corruption with power and money, a phenomenon called by Siniavsky “dollarization of consciousness”, and one that is broadly discussed in studies on the contemporary Russian intelligentsia. The problem of the intelligentsia craving for power is not new in the literature, and many interesting interpretations are offered by scholars, among them Richard Pipes’ analysis in his book *The Russian Revolution* (1990). According to Pipes, the 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian intelligentsia may be defined as intellectuals craving for political power, who for a long time had remained in permanent opposition to the autocracy, only to push the rest of the population to revolution in 1917. It is not difficult to recognize similar trends in the critique of the contemporary intelligentsia, “Ныне многих интеллигентов объяла страсть, прямо-таки потребность соединиться с властью, самими стать властью.”<sup>30</sup> This inclination became explicit in the early 1990’s, when academics, writers, engineers,

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<sup>28</sup> V.E. Triodin, *Sudba rossiiskoi intelligentsii: materialy nauchnoi diskussii*; p. 91.

<sup>29</sup> Alexei Elfimov, *Russian Intellectual Culture in Transition : The Future in the Past*; p. 108.

<sup>30</sup> V.N. Mexhyev in: A. Guseinov ed. *Svobodnoe slovo: intellektualnaia khronika desiatiletiia, 1985-1995*; p.306.



and artists frantically searched for governmental positions. In the new political situation, with an imperfect Russian democracy, some members of the intelligentsia became disinterested in the role of opposing to the authority and representing the people, and some of its members concentrated efforts on pursuing the sheer power. In this tendency the intelligentsia resembled Robespierre, who launched his political career protesting against the death penalty.

In the same time, the intelligentsia was not required by the average citizen, who made his political choices autonomously; that was yet another incentive for the intelligent to move toward the other apex of the triangle, the authority. Needless to say, when granted an office, the intelligent in power happened to be a complete failure. His detachment from the real life was detrimental to his work, “На государственных постах любой грамотный чиновник в тысячу раз полезнее красноречивого и идеологически ангажированного интеллигента.”<sup>31</sup> Some scholars recognized the intelligent at power as an antinomy, something that goes against the tradition of the intelligentsia. Last but not least, others pointed out the risk involved in the intelligentsia at power, and providing historical evidence, they warned of “ideocracy”, the dictatorship of ideas.

The intelligentsia, having failed in its attempts to find own place and collaborate with either the people or the authority, has partially withdrawn from the social and political life, and distanced itself from both sides. This act of withdrawal could have various forms. Some members of the intelligentsia took advantage of the free market economy and launched a new business, some, having been seduced by the foreign professional offers, emigrated; yet others chose an internal exile. Whether one was an

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p. 319.

actor of the brain drain process, or he thrived as a businessman, a *nouveau riche*, it was evident that the challenges and diverse opportunities of the new system had an overwhelming influence on the intelligentsia.

The principle of political, economic and cultural diversity effected the intelligent in a variety of forms, one of which describes Dmitrii Bykov, a Moscow writer:

Стихи я пишу, когда пишется. Чаще всего сочиняю их в транспорте или во время прогулки с собакой. Прозу пишу по выходным. А на жизнь зарабатываю статьями которые постепенно эту жизнь заменили, вытеснив из неё выпивку, агюльтеры, дружеские посиделки и общественную активность.<sup>32</sup>

Probably, to a higher degree than it was in the case of the other citizens, the intelligent was disoriented in this new situation, and, while for the first time in life given so many opportunities, he often decided to withdraw from his traditional position into other spheres. The intelligentsia was both blessed and cursed with the old Chinese saying, “Shall you live in interesting times.”

Finally, this long list of sins ends with the intelligentsia’s inability to fit into the new post-Soviet reality and its inclination to dwell into the past, when the state constituted one and only point of reference. The contemporary intelligentsia subscribes to all-Russian phenomenon of *homo sovieticus*, with its helplessness, extreme confusion and inability to find its own place in a reality that ceased to be the state-driven monolith. Strikingly, despite its position in the “triangular model”, the intelligentsia does not refer to the third apex -”the people,” as it did in the past two centuries. Consequently, one may think that the principle of the people has been an excuse for the intelligentsia to negotiate its own position with the authority. Zapesetskii states, “Неудивительно что любой разговор о роли интеллигенции в общественном развитии непременно переходит в

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<sup>32</sup> Dmitrii Bykov, *Vmesto zhizni*. Moscow, 2006, cover.

разговор об отношениях интеллигенции с властью.”<sup>33</sup> It is the curse of the intelligentsia that it has constructed its identity against the *vlast'*, and as a result, now it suffers from the change in the character of the state authority and the nature of its own connection to it.

### Что делать?

The above list of the intelligentsia's sins poses a question about its future in the modern Russia, as well as its ability to construct and negotiate a status in the new reality characterized by principles of plurality and free choice. The position of intelligentsia is one not to be envied, as it describes Naumova, “...интеллигенция сама оказалась жертвой преобразований, к которым она стремилась, обосновывая их необходимость, и за которые боролась.”<sup>34</sup> The intelligentsia, being both shocked and disillusioned with the reforms that have transformed the social, political and cultural reality of Russia, is now forced to reevaluate its own role. The problem is that the intelligentsia, along with its mission, means all things to all people. Therefore, any attempt to satisfy the postulates of certain groups is always met with critique from some other social actors.

Given its position in the aforementioned model of a triangle, the intelligentsia has three alternatives: either it will successfully fulfill its social agenda by building connections between the poli-structures of the authority and the people, it will withdraw from the triangle to pursue its own personal and professional goals, or, finally, it will not

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<sup>33</sup> A.C. Zapesetskii in: Sergei Filatov ed. *Kongress rossiiskoi intelligentsii: Moskva, 10-11 dekabria 1997*; p. 114.

<sup>34</sup> T. Naumova, *Nauchnaia intelligentsiia v novoi Rossii*; p. 140.

decide on either of the above and will suffer a complete failure. As one may expect, there is much discussion on the future of the intelligentsia in academic and popular circles in Russia. Much of this can be easily analyzed in the three models of the future of intelligentsia: symbolic death, action limited by realistic agenda, submerging into utopian projects.

The most dramatic scenario, the complete failure, which is sometimes called the symbolic death, follows logic of one of the famous Russian writers Daniil Granin, who in a prolific article in 1997 announced that the Russian intelligentsia perishes.<sup>35</sup> Later, he confirmed this opinion in set of articles, “Интеллигенция тает на глазах. [...] Талантливая научная молодежь уезжает за границу. Кто не уезжает, подаётся в коммерцию. Меняют профессии, уходят из сферы интеллектуального труда, чтобы выжить.”<sup>36</sup> Another author, Masha Gessen, in her book, *Dead Again: The Russian Intelligentsia after Communism*, investigates the faiths of several Russian intelligents, to conclude that the intelligentsia, due to the lack of unifying values, had already expired.<sup>37</sup> The moral and ideological vacuum is a crucial factor, which contributes to a gradual devastation of the intelligentsia’s potential. One of the scholars, Vladimir Mirzoev states, “The main problem of Russian intelligentsia today is that it has no obvious cultural-anthropological ideal it finds essential to affirm.”<sup>38</sup> Consequently, not only does the intelligentsia perish because of the worsening social position and living standard, but it is also weakened by the poignant awareness of the state disinterestment in its faith, as well as by lack of the unifying principle.

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<sup>35</sup> Daniil Granin. “Rossiskaia intelligentsia ukhodit”, in: Russika-Izvestia, November 5, 1997.

<sup>36</sup> D. Granin in: V.E. Triodin, *Sudba rossiiskoi intelligentsii: materialy nauchnoi diskussii*; p. 55.

<sup>37</sup> Masha Gessen, *Dead Again: The Russian Intelligentsia after Communism*. New York, 1997.

<sup>38</sup> Vladimir Mirzoev in: H. Isham ed, *Russia's fate through Russian eyes: voices of the new generation*. p. 334.

One of the most conspicuous signs of the withering of the intelligentsia may be the unwillingness of some of its apparent members to define themselves by this term. Russian late historian, Lev Gumilev, burst with anger when he was called an intelligent, “Я - образованный человек и уже поэтому не интеллигент. Я – солдат, я – Родину защищал. А интеллигенты – это те, кто языком болтают.”<sup>39</sup> He confirmed his negative opinion about the intelligentsia, when he stated that it was easier to deceive intelligentsia than it was to deceive the people, because the former was senseless.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, Professor Alexei Nikishenkov, a popular figure in the humanities at Moscow State University, says that he does not want to be associated with the intelligentsia anymore.<sup>41</sup>

Moreover, even the young generation of the Russian intelligentsia renounces this title similarly to the elderly professors. Aleksandr Saltykov, a former graduate student at Moscow State University, now working for a private Russian –American firm, states, “I would rather be associated with the New Russian today, than with the intellectuals; the former say little but at least get some work done, while the latter say much and do nothing. [...] so you has better stay the hell away from this weird group.”<sup>42</sup> His colleague, Olga Vainshtein, a young professor at the Russian State University for the Humanities, distances herself from the tradition of the intelligentsia and refuses to play the role of metaphorical Prometheus. She says, “Our humanities people should finally abandon this idea, long cultivated in this society, of striving after the position of the genuine organic intelligentsia, some omnicompetent teachers of the nation, and just learn to pursue a

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<sup>39</sup> L.N.Gumilev in: V.P.Etison ed., *Rossiiia nakanune XXI veka: novye vekhi: materialy mezhvuzovskoi nauchnoi konferentsii 2-3 fevralia 1999*; p. 68.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid; p. 69.

<sup>41</sup> A. Elfimov, *Russian Intellectual Culture in Transition : The Future in the Past*; p. 108.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

normal critically oriented academic discourse.”<sup>43</sup> As a result, when people whom one would define as the intelligentsia start to contest the abnormal status of this group and do not want to be associated with it, the intelligentsia really comes much closer to death.

*Gloria victis...*

Yet, at the same time, there are some, who, having read Weber and Nietzsche, warn, that the destruction of the intelligentsia can lead to the lethal consequences for the entire nation. In order to avoid this path they offer realistic agendas for the intelligentsia. Scholars recognize that intelligentsia will remain in the *tupik*, as long as it does not redefine its role in the triangular model, “Пока данная ситуация не изменяется, судьба будет повторяться: либо быть жертвой, страдающей за весь народ, либо развращаться властью и пополнять ряды плутократии.”<sup>44</sup> The situation is complicated, yet there is a chance to find a satisfying solution. Daga claims, “...Сегодня интеллигенция обречена на мучительную агонию и неизбежную гибель в течение ближайших 2 -3 десятилетий; однако такой исход не фатален.”<sup>45</sup> Among multiple ideas on the role and place of the intelligentsia, one can find some viable and well-argued postulates, such as: to resign from the role of a moral guru on behalf of a more practical activity, choose the tasks that correlate to the present needs, enhance constructive differentiation among the group, develop an awareness of a national intelligentsia and, finally, drop the politics of total condemnation of the government on behalf of constructive criticism. There is something to be done...

Mezhyev calls for a reform in the intelligentsia’s attitude toward the people,

“Надо, стало быть отношение интеллигенции к народу заменить отношением

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid; p. 107.

<sup>44</sup> V.E. Triodin, *Sudba Rossiiskoi intelligentsii: materialy nauchnoi diskussii*; p. 53.

<sup>45</sup> Sergei Daga in: V.E. Triodin, *Sudba Rossiiskoi intelligentsii: materialy nauchnoi diskussii*; p. 66.

индивида к индивиду, то есть подлинно человеческим отношением.”<sup>46</sup> That is, in other words, the intelligentsia is asked to step back from the altar, and rethink its sacred position. Currently, there is a need for both: the intelligentsia pursuing moral chastity, but also making practical socio-political choices, “То есть выбор связан с тем, чтобы в конечном итоге более активно и всесторонне влиять на общественное развитие, на становление нашего демократического общества.”<sup>47</sup> Only in this way can the intelligentsia avoid the mistake of its 19<sup>th</sup> century predecessors, described in *Vekhi*.

This opinion is followed with a postulate to acknowledge the reality, and form the intelligentsia’s agenda in reference to it, rather than base it on some utopian principles. The tradition of the долг to the people, introduced to Russian political thought by Petr Tkachev, is yet another example of an unproductive rhetoric. Rather than continue it, the intelligentsia should pursue some realistic tasks, among them: revival of society, political and cultural development, supporting the civil society, enhancing dialogue between the authority and nation. Once again, these are only words, but a smart intelligent is capable of pursuing these goals, if only willing to. The nestor of the Russian intelligentsia, Dmitrii Likhachev, at the Congress of the Russian Intelligentsia in 1997, appealed for the intelligentsia’s engagement into a positivist project, for help to the libraries, museums, and other local and national institutions, which were going through a tough time.<sup>48</sup> The aforementioned Congress introduced “The Declaration of the Cultural Rights”, which is

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<sup>46</sup> V.N. Mezhyev in: A. Guseinov ed. *Svobodnoe slovo: intellektual’naia khronika desiatiletia, 1985-1995*; p.305.

<sup>47</sup> Bogacin in: V.S.Memetov, *Intelligent i intelligentovedenie na rubezhe XXI veka : itogi proidennogo puti i perspektivy : tezisy dokladov X-i mezhdunarodnoi nauchno-teoreticheskoi konferentsii, 22-24 sentyabria 1999*; p. 131.

<sup>48</sup> Dmitrii Likhachev in: Sergei Filatov ed. *Kongress rossiiskoi intelligentsii : Moskva, 10-11 dekabria 1997*; p. 23.

one step toward better definition of the potential intelligentsia's contribution to the cultural life of the contemporary Russia.<sup>49</sup>

In contrary to the voices mourning over the diffusion of the intelligentsia, many scholars believe that there is much to be gained in this process. They approve of the differentiation of dysfunctional intelligentsia, because it contributes to the emergence of the productive professional group of intellectuals. This process of differentiation is accompanied with the urge to reestablish the self-awareness of the Russian intelligentsia. Scholars, referring to the intelligentsia's indebtedness to the Western tradition, call for formation of a national intelligentsia, one that would be independent of the foreign trends, or at least critical in their application. It is high time for the intelligentsia to abandon once and forever the rhetoric along the lines "Умом Россию не понять..", and make an effort to understand one's own country in order to come up with a plan for improvement. The intelligentsia has to bind itself closer to the native land, if it does not want to be completely alienated and left outside the national life.

Finally, the difficulty of the intelligentsia's political stance is an effect of its uneasy position as a negotiator between two sides, the authority and the people, whose interests have been in conflict for centuries. Currently, at the cradle of the Russian democracy, intelligentsia can be neither the authority's pet nor its servant, yet it cannot also prolong its own policy of total criticism of the authority. Davelov says:

...Интеллигенции пора отказаться от положения гордого оппонента, критически взирающего на любые действия власти, перестать лелеять фешизированный образ народа, [...] а перейти к реальной, практической работе: непосредственному

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<sup>49</sup> "Декларация прав культуры" ("The Declaration of the Cultural Rights") in: S. Filatov ed. *Kongress rossiiskoi intelligentsii: Moskva, 10-11 dekabria 1997*; p. 266-275.



сотрудничеству с властью в плане разработки новой идеологии и посредством такой – позитивному воздействию на общественное сознание.<sup>50</sup>

Whether one approves or not of the policies of the Russian government, its total condemnation is a position taken by an intellectual sluggard, who prefers the century-long formulas over new intellectual contribution.

In this reformist rush, it is easy to cross the line of realistic agenda and, continuing the well-established Russian intellectual tradition, resolved to wishful thinking and in the projects of the intelligentsia's future lapse into the sphere of utopia. Among many irrational projections of the role of the intelligentsia in the present and future of Russia, three trends are recognizable: unrelenting rhetoric about the “chosen”, “Messianic” role of the intelligentsia, dreams about unity between the intelligentsia and authority, and various plans characterized by inner paradoxes and contradictions.

In some circles, the idea that the intelligentsia deserves special treatment still holds strong, notwithstanding the political and social transformation the country has come through. Glukhova states, “В демократическом обществе нормативный консенсус может установиться лишь в результате широкой общественной дискуссии, где особая роль принадлежит интеллигенции.”<sup>51</sup> On the one hand, thanks to the existence of these ideals, members of the intelligentsia can pursue goals that have been previously enumerated. On the other hand, though, these principles act against the well-being of the intelligentsia, as they once again separate it from the society, and place the intelligentsia on a mystique altar hovering over the heads of average citizens.

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<sup>50</sup> Davelov in: V.S.Memetov, *Intelligent i intelligentovedenie na rubezhe XXI veka : itogi proidennogo puti i perspektivy : tezisy dokladov X-i mezhdunarodnoi nauchno-teoreticheskoi konferentsii, 22-24 sentiabria 1999*; p. 170.

<sup>51</sup> Glukhova in: V.P.Etisov ed., *Rossiia nakanune XXI veka: novye vekhi: materialy mezhvuzovskoi nauchnoi konferentsii 2-3 fevralia 1999*; p. 15.

Certain Russian scholars postulate unification of the intelligentsia and the state authority, taking away from the intelligentsia the choice to either participate in politics as an actor, or to continue a constructive critique of the governmental policy. Zapesotskii observes that it is the intelligentsia's mission to unite politics with morals, which, especially in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, seems to be but an irrational project that can be put on the shelf next to the 19<sup>th</sup> century "going-to-the-people" movement. Similar postulates are to be understood in terms of propaganda, when they are expressed by people like Abdulatipov, a former vice-premier of the Russian government, who argues against what he calls an artificial split between government and the intelligentsia. Instead, he offers a unification, saying, "Настоящие величие России и российских граждан зависит от единства власти и интеллигенции."<sup>52</sup> One shall be cautious of this kind of union, as it would make the intelligentsia vulnerable to the government's policies.

Last but not least, the plans considering the future of the Russian intelligentsia are often marked by internal incongruence and do not offer viable solutions. This even applies to the mandarins of the Russian thought and their conceptions, as in the case of Likhachev, who spoke on the topic during the aforementioned Congress. In his speech, Likhachev argues against mono-ideology for the intelligentsia, as he sees "diversity" as its major value. Additionally, he claims that individualism is *condition sine qua non* for the existence of the intelligent, and any attempt to curtail this individualism by means of party organization would be detrimental to the intelligentsia. However, Likhachev concludes with a paradox when he introduces the aforementioned "positivist project" and offers the declaration to be signed by the members of the Congress, calling upon the

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<sup>52</sup> P. Abdulatipov in: Sergei Filatov ed. *Kongress rossiiskoi intelligentsii : Moskva, 10-11 dekabria 1997*; p. 19.

intelligentsia to coordinate their efforts along certain “party” lines. The above is one of many examples of the inconsistency of potential reformers and leaders of the intelligentsia. It is probably a forgivable however, given the complexity of the intelligentsia’s condition of diversity.

Ralf Dahrendorf claims that societies without intellectuals are devoid of future. Today’s Russia needs intellectuals; whether or not it needs the intelligentsia is a question of the near future. At this point, even the scholars working on the subject of the Russian intelligentsia are confused and uncertain of its future. Furthermore, the studies of the intelligentsia itself have been stained with the clash between the mono-system of the past and the new poli-structures. In his discussion of the research on the intelligentsia, Sibiriyakov states:

Одним из возможных вариантов преодоления ‘кризиса’ интеллигентоведения может стать реализация знаменитого принципа ‘дополнительности’ Н. Бора, суть которого можно было бы свести к следующей формуле: ни одна концепция не может описать объект столь исчерпывающим образом, что бы исключить возможность существования других концепции.<sup>53</sup>

It would be pointless to argue that the Soviet period was a black and white reality, with Manichean distinction between good and evil. However, we can make the claim that there was surely much less room for the individual decision. Under the Soviet rule, it might have been easier for the intelligent to stick to his identity, define himself against the authority, and find a goal in his life, which had been often limited to the sphere of “a room and a half.” Bogatsyrin says, “Интеллигент был более активен и целеустремлен когда в стране был идеологический диктат, а когда его не стало, то он как-то вроде

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<sup>53</sup> Sibiriyakov in: V.S.Memetov, *Intelligent i intelligentovedenie na rubezhe XXI veka : itogi proidennogo puti i perspektivy : tezisy dokladov X-i mezhdunarodnoi nauchno-teoreticheskoi konferentsii, 22-24 sentiabria 1999*; p. 44.

растерялся и потерял идейный ориентир.”<sup>54</sup> The intelligentsia, having been both impelled and lured by the new principles, has not yet completely answered the questions, *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?* Neither did the scholars.

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<sup>54</sup> Bogatsyrin in: V.S.Memetov, *Intelligent i intelligentovedenie na rubezhe XXI veka : itogi proidennogo puti i perspektivy : tezisy dokladov X-i mezhdunarodnoi nauchno-teoreticheskoi konferentsii, 22-24 sentiabria 1999*; p. 129.

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