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Noblewomen in Late Imperial and Revolutionary Russia**

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The "Russian" Woman? Cultural Exceptionalism among Noblewomen in Late Imperial and Revolutionary Russia

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Introduction

In 1869 Natalia Grot and Evgenia Tur, prominent authors of gentle birth, debated the role of the Russian woman by means of a critical exchange, published in *Our Times* and *Moscow News*, on Elena Nikolaevna Stakhova, protagonist of Ivan Turgenev's *On the Eve* (1860). Grot argued, 'Elena perfectly embodies the element of destructiveness' and questioned the influence on society of such a 'broad' character and her creator. She outlined the characteristics of Russian women she believed Turgenev had ignored—piety, neighbourliness, maternalism and self-renunciation—before denouncing Elena's antithetical nature and styling herself "The Russian Woman." Tur took staunch exception to this signature, proclaiming that 'up to now we have not met a Russian woman.' She applauded Elena's character and systematically denounced Grot's objections to and interpretation of the novel. Grot's final response attacked Tur and her critique: she 'did not think that such a retort could come from the pen of a woman.'¹

This public exchange between two Russian women on the fundamental nature and role of the Russian woman is one inspiration for this research. It embodies the tensions in nineteenth-century Russian intellectual discourse between westernisation and conservatism, constructs of respectable femininity and questions of national identity. Therefore, while the editors of the collection from which this exchange is taken entitled the piece 'The Russian Woman', emphasising, as do its authors, the lack of a single ideal, it is the intention of this study to explore the "Russian" woman in national terms. Specifically, it will explore cultural exceptionalism—the concept expressed by Grot and refuted by Tur that Russian women were defined by specifically Russian traits—and the degree to which this was evident among Russian noblewomen in the period c.1840-c.1920.

Lotman and Marrese inspire this focus on noblewomen. Lotman uses literature as a reflection of contemporary reality, proposing the Petrine reforms encouraged foreign behaviour to such an extent that by the nineteenth century, 'the Russian nobleman was like a foreigner in his own country'. Consciously selected European characteristics masked the noblemen's Russianness, producing a theatrical imitation of "correct" behaviour.² This is not a new conclusion. One contemporary Englishwoman commented:

The adaptation of foreign manners which the civilised Russians of both sexes almost universally assume produces a strange impression. They behave in the

¹ Evgenia Tur versus Natalia Grot, "The Russian Woman", in R. Bisha, J. M. Gheith, C. Holden and W. G. Wagner (Eds.), *Russian Women, 1698-1917: Experience and Expression, An Anthology of Sources* (Bloomington, IN., 2002), pp. 44-49.

² Y. M. Lotman, 'The Poetics of Everyday Behaviour in Eighteenth-Century Russian Culture', in A. D. Nakhimovsky & A. A. Nakhimovsky (Eds.), *The Semiotics of Russian Cultural History* (Ithaca, NY., 1985), pp. 69-72.

most ordinary circumstances of life as though they were acting a part in a drama...³

But confined to his literary source base Lotman denies what this observer recorded, namely that noblewomen were also actively adopted foreign customs.⁴ Marrese uses noble family papers for an analysis of Russian nobles' biculturalism through their use of languages that rejects Lotman's idea of conscious theatricality. She argues that cultures coexisted and acknowledges both the opportunities for noblewomen that European customs presented and the importance of European culture to noble identity.⁵ It is the interaction between Russian and European customs amongst the nobility, the value of non-literary Russian material and the benefit of a foreign perspective that this study is concerned with. Specifically, do Russian noblewomen conform to a transnational European nobility, or is national specificity integral to understanding their individual and group identification?

This is intended as a *gendered* history, not a *gender* history and so it will not compare male and female experiences. Rather, it seeks to synthesise the nascent scholarship on noblewomen with the source material they left behind: autobiographies, memoirs, diaries, letters, travel narratives and other published work. Though these are restricted to English translations, their use will demonstrate the potential value of such material as objects of study in their own right, and as important supplements to existing cultural narratives. First and foremost, they will allow for a detailed exploration of the extent to which Russian noblewomen can be classified as culturally exceptional.

It is crucial to follow current historiographical trends. Studies of the late imperial and revolutionary periods are increasingly adopting an international comparative element as scholars readdress crucial themes.⁶ Consequently, the experiences of late imperial and revolutionary Russian noblewomen will be compared to those of Victorian and early-Edwardian British upper-class women. Such a comparison allows for an exploration and reassessment of Russia's place in the international order in a socio-cultural sense, as individual stories can be used to question the broader issue of national identity at a personal level. This study will compare Russian experiences of and British perspectives on three key cultural episodes in the lives of nineteenth-century Russian noblewomen: marriage, education and adult vocations. It will endeavour to show that far from being denied choice as Lotman suggests, Russian noblewomen were not only active in the sharing of European customs but, like their British counterparts, underwent significant social, cultural and ideological change that both mirrored and responded to national and international developments.

Considering the framework in which noblewomen's writings were produced is therefore important. To discard the differences between Britain and Russia would be to ignore historical and historiographical frameworks that have shaped the course of Russia's development and our understanding of it. Chief among these differences are the social and

³ A. Lyons, *At Home with the Gentry: A Victorian English Lady's Diary of Russian Country Life*, Ed. J. McNair (Nottingham, 1998), p. 23.

⁴ Lotman, *The Poetics of Everyday Behaviour*, p. 75.

⁵ M. L. Marrese, "The Poetics of Everyday Behaviour" Revisited: Lotman, Gender, and the Evolution of Russian Noble Identity', *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 11/4 (2010), pp. 716, 701.

⁶ For example, see J. Burbank, 'An Imperial Rights Regime: Law and Citizenship in the Russian Empire', *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 7/3 (2006), pp. 397-431; E. Lohr, 'The Ideal Citizen and Real Subject in Late Imperial Russia', *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 7/2 (2006), pp. 173-194; E. Lohr, *Russian Citizenship: From Empire to Soviet Union* (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 1-10; D. C. B. Lieven, *The Aristocracy in Europe, 1815-1914* (New York, 1993).

political contexts. While Britain fitted into a Western path of development, in Russia increasing pressures to modernise clashed with traditional values epitomised by the “Westerniser” versus “Slavophile” debate. The predominantly bureaucratic Westernisers envisaged European-style reforms, while Slavophiles viewed these as incompatible with the Russian regimen and character.⁷ This debate manifested throughout elite culture from the eighteenth century, as elements of tradition conflicted with emerging Westernised forces. The tensions between these cultural forms in elite society were exacerbated over the next century by Russia’s industrial, economic and social development, which sometimes followed a Western path.⁸ Noblewomen were not immune from the subsequent questions raised about Russian identity, particularly with the emergence of the “woman question”—intellectual disagreement on the role and rights of women—across Europe and the United States, with which women were actively engaged. However, despite the existence of similar movements and cultural developments, the specificity of national context is of course central to evaluating noblewomen’s culture and national identities.

Differences in context are not the only problematic consideration. The problems of the term “noble” are significant. Throughout the nineteenth century the Russian nobility became increasingly stratified with the emergence of “personal” nobles alongside the established families. The overarching noble estate, however, remained distinct from the urban residents who formed the closest thing to a Russian middle class.⁹ Britain differs in that social belonging was based on more fluid classes and so the existence of a nobility was less pronounced. At the same time, however, the practice of endogamy among the upper classes in general and the titled aristocracy in particular is indicative of the continued desire to reinforce and reproduce rank identity.¹⁰ The term is therefore difficult to define adequately. Consequently, the women whose writings are examined here have been chosen based on familial belonging to the Russian noble estate and the British upper class broadly defined. Such an approach yields a useful breadth of examples within this narrow upper stratum of society, from impoverished nobles to leading court figures.

This unsystematic selection is not intended to be representative of the Russian or British noble experience. The personal nature of many of the sources makes this a near impossibility.¹¹ Furthermore, these women have generally been rendered invisible. All were obscured because of their sex and Russian women more so for their very Russianness. They were characterised as peripheral to European society with a reputation for backwardness. This conventional image cannot be overcome in a work of this nature. This study is therefore intended to be suggestive, testing the usefulness of noblewomen’s writings in deepening our understanding of elite Russian culture and national identity in a comparative framework.

(1) The Importance of a Gendered Perspective

⁷ D. Saunders, *Russia in the Age of Reaction and Reform, 1801-1881* (Harlow, 1992), pp. 163, 167, 169.

⁸ See M. Rahikainen, ‘The Fading of the Ancien Régime Mentality’, *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 30/1 (2015), pp. 25-47.

⁹ M. Rendle, *Defenders of the Motherland: The Tsarist Elite in Revolutionary Russia* (Oxford, 2010), pp. 4-6.

¹⁰ K. Prandy & W. Bottero, ‘The Use of Marriage Data to Measure the Social Order in Nineteenth-Century Britain’, *Sociological Research Online*, 3/1 (1998), paragraphs 1.3, 6.1, 6.4; K. Schutte, *Women, Rank and Marriage in the British Aristocracy, 1485-2000* (Basingstoke, 2014), pp. 12-13, 16.

¹¹ B. Heldt, *Terrible Perfection: Women and Russian Literature* (Bloomington, 1987), pp. 64-76.

Studies of this sort are few. Only in the 1970s were women integrated into the Russian narrative, though revolutionary women predominated.¹² Hesitantly in the 1990s and more enthusiastically from 2000, scholarship has paid increasing attention to the varied insights Russian noblewomen's writings can provide. However, it remains scant in comparison to that on men. Work on female Russian autobiographers has given prominence to eighteenth-century women and there remains a tendency to use Russian women's fiction to determine how female authors reflected on the "woman question." With regards to scholarship on the British context, the middle classes predominate and their education has been a favourite topic. Consequently some scholarship is of limited relevance to the source base used here or has been extrapolated. Nevertheless, an overview of the nature of the core sources used—Russian women's life writing and English women's travel narratives—is necessary to highlight the new insights that such gendered sources can provide.

Alexandra Kollontai's political pamphlet *Communism and the Family* (1920) defies this categorisation and provides a unique perspective. As a prominent Marxist-feminist Kollontai expounds idealistic communist theories for working-class and female development, resulting in views that contrast sharply with, or far surpass, those expressed by most of the other women considered.¹³ Her perspective is useful to draw upon to demonstrate diversity and change, but is applicable only to specific aspects of this study.

Russian women's autobiographies constitute the core sources, offering important insights, absent from the male perspective, into noble culture in general and noblewomen's socio-cultural experiences in particular. Establishing a definition is necessary. Gusdorf describes autobiography as a western, masculine production, the 'mirror in which the individual reflects his own image,' but that colours this image with a vindication of the life.¹⁴ It is widely acknowledged that autobiography is ultimately a form of fiction, for memory cannot be free from imagination or distortion.¹⁵ However, Gusdorf is reductive in his confinement of autobiography to great western men.¹⁶ With due focus on context, Holmgren suggests Russian women's autobiographies were written in protest, as a 'road map' for other women.¹⁷ Vera Figner certainly uses her memoirs to offer other radical young women instruction for becoming revolutionaries.¹⁸ However, this is not always an obvious or appropriate interpretation. Therefore, the salient aspect in definitions of autobiography is the categorization of works about the self as a literary genre. As such, it is simultaneously public and private and can assume many forms: private diaries and letters should be considered under this categorization, and not as entirely separate subcategories of "life writing."

The ways in which noblewomen navigated literary space to validate their public selves has significant bearing on any reading of these sources. Vera Figner's memoirs were meant for publication to provide her views in contrast to the prevalent strand of socialism after the 1917 October Revolution. She adheres closely to masculine revolutionary tradition: little of the

¹² For example, see B. A., Engel, 'The Emergence of Women Revolutionaries in Russia', *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 2/1 (1977), pp. 92-105.

¹³ A. Kollontai, *Communism and the Family*, (London, Originally Published 1920, 1971), p. 1.

¹⁴ G. Gusdorf, 'Conditions and Limits of Autobiography', in J. Olney (Ed.), *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* (Princeton, NJ., 1980), pp. 33, 36, 39.

¹⁵ S. Benstock, 'Authorizing the Autobiographical', in S. Benstock (Ed.), *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings* (Chapel Hill, NC., 1988), p. 11; Heldt, *Terrible Perfection*, p. 64.

¹⁶ S. S. Friedman, 'Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice', in S. Benstock (Ed.), *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings* (Chapel Hill, NC., 1988), p. 34.

¹⁷ B. Holmgren, 'For the Good of the Cause: Russian Women's Autobiography in the Twentieth Century', in T. W. Clyman & D. Greene (Ed.), *Women Writers in Russian Literature* (Westport, CT., 1994), p. 128.

¹⁸ V. Figner, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, Ed. & Trans by Richard Stites (London, 1991), pp. 5-6.

private self is included where it is not directly relevant to the development of her revolutionary sympathies.¹⁹ For Heldt, such women 'feel no need to disguise their achievements, since they always felt certain of being on the side of progress and history. They easily put their public selves at peace with their private selves,' extolling theory furnished with the details of a life.²⁰ This is useful, as both the theory and private details provide views on conformity to and rejection of an expected standard. Others reach this public-private consonance by different means. Natalia Grot addresses her memoirs to her children and grandchildren, transforming a public platform into one of private instruction in-keeping with her gender role and conservative views. Grot merged the public and private self in a manner that rendered the concepts mutually dependent for validation of her semi-public ideal self: by recounting the experiences of her feminine sphere, her semi-public self made no claims to greatness. But this conformity allowed her to engage in small part with prominent questions of the day, seen with her disapproval of the modern woman.²¹ The inclusion of both aspects makes such sources invaluable. Finally the anonymous recollections published as "Diary of a Young Noblewoman" illustrate the fundamentally private nature of some of the sources. The young woman documented her interactions with the other European girls at her Geneva school, with whom she integrated seamlessly, and felt no qualms about expressing her emotions, flaws and struggles to come to grips with her own national and religious identities.²² The personal is inescapable and the source is important, primarily, for the insights it offers of the individual and her relationship to the world around her.

All forms adhere to elements of female autobiographical tradition, for nineteenth-century women's autobiography was fundamentally the product of a clever navigation of the intersection between male and female spheres on a literary platform. As such, there are noteworthy similarities between Russian and British women's works: both were primarily written by the upper classes; both tend to focus on everyday life and the domestic sphere;²³ and in both cases they justify their existence or adopt specific forms in order to appear to remain within the confines of "feminine propriety."²⁴ Therefore, elite Russian women's autobiographies, when read with due care, are a treasure trove for the study of Russian cultural history.

¹⁹ V. Figner, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*. For example, her husband is hardly mentioned. Figner rejected marriage and pursued revolutionary sympathies which her husband did not share (pp. 36, 39, 41). In line with the style of contemporary noble upbringing, she dreamed of becoming a tsaritsa. This ambition, a product of the elitism of her childhood, sits in stark contrast to the stance she adopted later as a radical and revolutionary (pp. 12-14).

²⁰ Heldt, *Terrible Perfection*, p. 68.

²¹ Natalia Grot, 'From a Family Chronicle: Reminiscences for Children and Grandchildren', in T. W. Clyman and J. Vowles (eds.), *Russia Through Women's Eyes: Autobiographies from Tsarist Russia* (New Haven, 1996), pp. 220-222, 225, 229, 231-232, 239-241.

²² 'Diary of a Young Noblewoman, on Her Mother', in R. Bisha, J. M. Gheith, C. Holden and W. G. Wagner (Eds.), *Russian Women, 1698-1917: Experience and Expression, An Anthology of Sources* (Bloomington, IN., 2002), pp. 76-77; 'Diary of a Young Noblewoman: Doubts about Religion', in R. Bisha, J. M. Gheith, C. Holden and W. G. Wagner (Eds.), *Russian Women, 1698-1917: Experience and Expression, An Anthology of Sources* (Bloomington, IN., 2002), pp. 252-253; T. W. Clyman, 'Autobiography', in V. Terras (Ed.), *Handbook of Russian Literature* (New York, 1985), p. 27.

²³ J. Atkinson, *Victorian Biography Reconsidered: A Study of Nineteenth-Century 'Hidden' Lives* (Oxford, 2010), pp. 149, 156; S. Bassnett, 'Travel Writing and Gender', in P. Hulme & T. Youngs (Eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 229; Heldt, *Terrible Perfection*, p. 67.

²⁴ Bassnett, 'Travel Writing and Gender', p. 225; C. H. Mackay, 'Life Writing', in L. H. Peterson (Ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Women's Writing* (Cambridge, 2015), pp. 159-160; Atkinson, *Victorian Biography Reconsidered*, pp. 146-148; Heldt, *Terrible Perfection*, p. 67.

English women's travel narratives possess similar characteristics. For example, the anonymous author of *The Englishwoman in Russia* gave her motive for writing:

The interest at present excited by a nation with whom the English are at war has induced her to listen to several friends who have recommended her to present these written observations to the public.²⁵

The implicit self-deprecation and need to justify the act of recording experiences is indicative of the very cultural resemblance that this study intends to explore. This is even more striking in the similar preoccupation with everyday habits and the general confinement of the authors' experiences to the domestic, elite and female spheres existent at their destinations. Amelia Lyons documented life with her Russian hostesses, using her experiences to comment upon the Russian character, customs and manners. Some of these she related to, some she admired and some she viewed with disenchantment bordering on admonition.²⁶ Similarly, Lady Elizabeth Eastlake used her observations to make judgements on the Russian character, particularly in comparison to English standards of behaviour.²⁷

In this way English travel narratives are reminiscent of Murphy's findings regarding those of Russian women: they affirmed their membership to a European elite by adopting an abstract European elite understanding of their time abroad as part of their own memory; but when experiences evoked recollections of Russia they expressed their national identity clearly, drawing on personal home experiences to construct themselves in relation to the foreign trigger.²⁸ English women did the same. Therefore, while Russian autobiography can demonstrate cultural crossover through reflections that suggest the extent to which Russian noblewomen recognised foreign customs as a part of their everyday lives, English women's commentary on the same experiences can challenge this through their identification of points of comparison and contrast between Russian women and themselves.

It is these points of comparison and contrast that inform the focus of the following chapters. The sources will be used as evidence of cultural amalgamation among Russian noblewomen, affirming Lotman's argument regarding the upper-class adoption of foreign customs, while refuting women's negligible involvement in line with Marrese's critique. It will be suggested that the extent of cultural crossover precludes categorisation of Russian noblewomen's culture as truly "exceptional" despite the extent of national difference, inviting new interpretations of the meaning of cultural exceptionalism in a context that saw nationally informed responses to multiple transnational debates.

(2) Marriage and Family Life

Discourse on the family and women's role in it was a significant point of nineteenth-century intellectual discussion. The overarching British theory rested on separate spheres ideology, which constructed gender roles based on the perceived "natural" interests of the sexes, informed and reinforced by Christian ideals.²⁹ As such, British elite women were seen to

²⁵ *The Englishwoman in Russia: Impressions of the society and manners of the Russians at Home* (New York, 1855), p. ix. The author refers to herself in the third person and the war mentioned is the Crimean War of 1853-56.

²⁶ Lyons, *At Home with the Gentry*, pp. 4, 9-10, 16, 18, 23.

²⁷ Lady Elizabeth Rigby Eastlake, *Letters from the Shores of the Baltic, Vol. II* (London, 1842), pp. 14, 130-131, 187-188, 190-191, 199, 216, 219.

²⁸ E. Murphy, 'Memory and Identity in Russian Noblewomen's Francophone Travel Narratives (1790-1842)', *Avtobiografiya*, 2/1 (2013), pp. 41-43.

²⁹ K. Hughes, 'Gender Roles in the 19th Century', <<https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/gender-roles-in-the-19th-century>>, Accessed 28/04/2017; J. Goodman, 'Class and

belong in the domestic sphere, characterised by marriage, motherhood, luxury and feminine enjoyments. They were also dependent on their husbands or male relatives in a patriarchal family structure that pervaded kinship networks beyond the nuclear family.³⁰ As the nineteenth century progressed, the rise of feminism and the “woman question” raised a significant controversy about women’s positions paralleled in the Russian context: were they limited to the home by their innate caring nature, or could they operate beyond this?³¹

Russian parallels also existed within the Russian discourse. Greene identifies piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity as the key elements of the Russian patriarchal ideology. They appear repeatedly through: moral lessons in girls’ magazines; foreign princesses’ influence over elite girls’ boarding schools; translated conduct books; and Russia’s involvement in Enlightenment debates.³² The similarities to the British counterpart are striking. However, the purpose Green expounds for her study—to prove the existence of a nineteenth-century domestic ideology in Russia—seems unwarranted. A discourse was evident at least since Peter the Great’s reforms, when the emphasis on noblewomen’s domesticity tethered them to tradition in the face of other cultural reforms. This created a contradictory public presence.³³

These ideas, foreign and traditional, translated into Russian theory and practice throughout the late imperial and revolutionary periods. Writing in c.1840-1850, Maria Korsini, essayist and graduate of the Smolny Institute, believed a mother to be the ultimate self-sacrificing caregiver, physical and spiritual, while a father was the tireless provider. She adhered to separate spheres ideology, but based this on mutual assistance and love between parents with the goal of achieving domestic harmony.³⁴ This model is highly idealistic, indicative of the romantic idealism that schools such as Smolny instilled, but it does correspond with central aspects of the broader Russian domestic ideology.³⁵ Firstly, family structure mirrored the patriarchal element of its British counterpart and Russian society: Amelia Lyons noted the Russian paterfamilias was “Emperor” in his little domain.³⁶ This observation, immediately following an expression of Lyons’s desire to ascertain the Russian character, suggests unfamiliarity with a patriarchy of such rigidity. Another example comes from Vera Figner, who recalled that her mother never dared speak against her father’s outbursts.³⁷ However, Lady Eastlake observed men sharing kisses with family members on what she considered an unusually frequent basis, concluding that a Russian father’s affection ‘knows no bounds.’³⁸ The polarity in these observations affirms the diversity between families, but the Englishwomen’s tones of unfamiliarity also suggest that Russian elite families were more

Religion: Great Britain and Ireland’, in J. C. Albisetti, J. Goodman, and R. Rogers (Eds.), *Girls’ Secondary Education in the Western World* (New York, 2010), p. 11.

³⁰ D. Roberts, ‘The Paterfamilias of the Victorian Governing Class’, in A. S. Wohl (ed.), *The Victorian Family: Structures and Stresses* (London, 1978), pp. 59, 62, 64; S. Richardson, ‘“Well-neighboured Houses”: The Political Networks of Elite Women, 1780-1860’, in K. Gleadle and S. Richardson (Eds.), *Women in British Politics, 1760-1860* (Basingstoke, 2000), p. 66.

³¹ L. Delap, ‘The Superwoman: Theories of Gender and Genius in Edwardian Britain’, *The Historical Journal*, 47/1 (2004), p. 105.

³² D. Greene, ‘Mid-Nineteenth-Century Domestic Ideology in Russia’, in R. Marsh (Ed.), *Women And Russian Culture: Projections and Self-Perceptions* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 78-79, 85-90.

³³ B. A. Engel, *Women in Russia, 1700-2000* (Cambridge, 2004), p. 22.

³⁴ Maria Korsini, ‘The Ideal Family’, in R. Bisha, J. M. Gheith, C. Holden and W. G. Wagner (Eds.), *Russian Women, 1698-1917: Experience and Expression, An Anthology of Sources* (Bloomington, IN., 2002), pp. 26-28.

³⁵ M. Ledkovsky, C. Rosenthal and M. Zirin, ‘Introduction: Russian Women Writers 1760-1992’, in M. Ledkovsky, C. Rosenthal and M. Zirin (Eds.), *Dictionary of Russian Women Writers* (Westport, CT., 1994), p. xxviii.

³⁶ Lyons, *At Home with the Gentry*, p. 2.

³⁷ Lyons, *At Home with the Gentry*, p. 2; Figner, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, p. 20.

³⁸ Eastlake, *Letters from the Shores of the Baltic, Vol. II*, pp. 189-190.

extreme in their manifestations of prevailing ideology. Secondly, Korsini's model adheres to separate spheres discourse, but practice was rarely as cooperative as she envisaged. Men and boys were usually physically and emotionally detached from women and girls in the home, as family life was geared towards the instruction of children by the parent of the same sex.³⁹ It is for this reason that mother-daughter relationships form such a recurrent theme in the Russian sources.⁴⁰ Finally, Russian kinship bonds were strong but Korsini does not account for their scope. Russians not only mirrored the extended kinship networks of the British elite, but surpassed them. "Family" was based on loyalty. Neighbours, friends and adopted relatives were welcomed, while disgraced blood relatives could be rejected.⁴¹ Indeed, Lyons noted with admiration that most elite families adopted children and claimed it was a 'religious privilege' to do so.⁴²

The importance of religion to domestic ideology is another striking similarity. Russian Orthodoxy emphasised women's domestic role to the end of the imperial period, though after 1860 a liberal branch emerged that, as in the West, engaged with the "woman question" by manipulating women's domesticity to expand their accepted roles.⁴³ However, the domestic ideology explored above survived these developments. Not long before the publication of Alexandra Kollontai's pamphlet, *Communism and the Family* (1920), proposing equality in marriage and collectivity in childcare, Natalia Grot argued women should be instilled with a sense of domestic duty, familial loyalty, piety, privacy and an acceptance of circumstance.⁴⁴ Russian domestic ideology was remarkably similar to that in Britain and was persistent in the face of challenge. Its more acute manifestations, however, hint at the adaptations it underwent to align with the Russian character and context.

It is important, therefore, to explore examples of certain shared experiences of marriage. One is of the arrangement of marriage. Schutte argues that British aristocratic women's marriage patterns were integral to, and are telling of, their identity formation. The inclusion of the family in considering a prospective match and persistent upper-class endogamy shows that family and rank preservation were the main considerations.⁴⁵ Similar observations can be made in Russia. Rahikainen has found that a woman's father's rank was the most important factor to prospective suitors and that the Russian elite also resisted exogamy until the revolutionary period.⁴⁶ Lady Eastlake noted the rarity of intermarriage between Russian

³⁹ J. Tovrov, 'Mother-Child Relationships among the Russian Nobility', in D. Ransel (Ed.), *The Family in Imperial Russia: New Lines of Historical Research* (London, 1978), pp. 17, 32-35.

⁴⁰ See S. Khvoshchinskaia, 'Reminiscences of Institute Life', in T. W. Clyman and J. Vowles (Eds.), *Russia Through Women's Eyes: Autobiographies from Tsarist Russia* (New Haven, CN., 1996), pp. 79, 88; E. Lvova, 'From the Distant Past: Fragments from Childhood Memories', in T. W. Clyman and J. Vowles (Eds.), *Russia Through Women's Eyes: Autobiographies from Tsarist Russia* (New Haven, CN., 1996), pp. 282-285; A. Verbitskaia, 'To My Reader', in T. W. Clyman and J. Vowles (Eds.), *Russia Through Women's Eyes: Autobiographies from Tsarist Russia* (New Haven, CN., 1996), pp. 360, 366; G. Rzhenskaia, 'Memoirs', in R. Bisha, J. M. Gheith, C. Holden and W. G. Wagner (Eds.), *Russian Women, 1698-1917: Experience and Expression, An Anthology of Sources* (Bloomington, IN., 2002), p. 70; M. Ivankova, 'Letter to Her Mother', in R. Bisha, J. M. Gheith, C. Holden and W. G. Wagner (Eds.), *Russian Women, 1698-1917: Experience and Expression, An Anthology of Sources* (Bloomington, IN., 2002), pp. 71-73.

⁴¹ Tovrov, 'Mother-Child Relationships', p. 15; Engel, *Women in Russia, 1700-2000*, p. 37; Grot, 'From a Family Chronicle', p. 228.

⁴² Lyons, *At Home with the Gentry*, p.9.

⁴³ W. G. Wagner, "'Orthodox Domesticity": Creating a Social Role for Women', in M. D. Steinberg and H. J. Coleman (Eds.), *Sacred Stories: Religion and Spirituality in Modern Russia* (Bloomington, IN., 2007), pp. 124, 125, 127, 130, 135, 139.

⁴⁴ Kollontai, *Communism and the Family*, p. 14-17; Grot, 'From a Family Chronicle', pp. 219, 238-239.

⁴⁵ Schutte, *Women, Rank and Marriage in the British Aristocracy*, pp. 11-13, 16, 19, 160-163.

⁴⁶ Rahikainen, 'The Fading of the Ancien Régime Mentality', pp. 28-29, 35, 38.

nobles and English aristocrats.⁴⁷ Anna Vyubova recounted how anxiety about her marriage was overridden by the approval of her parents and the Empress, whom Vyubova regarded as a motherly figure.⁴⁸ In a very different case, Emiliia Pimenova used marriage to gain the independence to study in St Petersburg. After she ended her engagement with a man of her father's choosing who repudiated her ambitions, her father (temporarily) disowned her. Her subsequent marriage to a man she found more suitable (a mechanical engineer) was permitted only for her happiness. To compensate for the poor match her father used the occasion of the wedding for political gain.⁴⁹ Clearly Russian elite women's marriage was a family affair, privileging family and status preservation.

Another experience is that of noblewomen's roles in marriage. The fathers of Anastasiia Verbitskaia, a Russian noblewoman, and Eglantyne Jebb, the upper-class English philanthropist, both expressed disapproval of their wives' endeavours that removed them from their children.⁵⁰ Furthermore, Varvara Tatishchevna's diary is telling of the flow of a Russian noblewoman's life. She experienced twelve pregnancies in twenty years of marriage, oversaw her children's education and recorded a monotonous pattern of trips to St Petersburg, her husband's long absences and visits from her relatives.⁵¹ This all adheres to a shared domestic ideology. But Tatishchevna recorded the salaries she issued: 1,200 roubles per year for a foreign nanny, later rising to 2,000.⁵² This record suggests that Tatishchevna had some control over, or at least input regarding, finances. Tenuous as this jump may seem it is justified, as Russian women were permitted by law to inherit and hold property. Furthermore, it was not uncommon for noblewomen to run estates for absentee husbands as the role was viewed as complementary to housewifery, perhaps due to this tradition of female property holders.⁵³ Therefore, while British and Russian noblewomen appear to have similar roles in marriage in relation to contemporary ideology and male expectations, in practice they could have significantly different experiences.

Finally, disenchantment with or rejection of marriage is a common theme with similar nuances. With the rise of the "woman question" globally, Britain saw the emergence of the "New Woman," a literary motif adopted as a feminist model to challenge social limits.⁵⁴ This was primarily a middle-class movement. The Russian counterpart had much more of an elite presence, perhaps due to the more charged social and political context of autocracy and radicalism in which the Russian nobility were intimately involved.⁵⁵ Nikolay Chernyshevsky's *What Is To Be Done?* (1862) proposed an answer to the "woman question" by providing a model for imitation. Vera Pavlovna, the protagonist, enters a fictitious marriage to escape

⁴⁷ Lady Elizabeth Rigby Eastlake, *Letters from the Shores of the Baltic, Vol. I* (London, 1842), p. 73.

⁴⁸ *Alexander Palace: Anna Vyubova, Memories of the Russian Court*, Ed. Bob Atchinson (2011), 'My Duties, Marriage and the Standart'; J. T. Fuhrmann, *Rasputin: A Life* (New York, 1990), p. 37.

⁴⁹ E. Pimenova, 'Bygone Days', in T. W. Clyman and J. Vowles (Eds.), *Russia Through Women's Eyes: Autobiographies from Tsarist Russia* (New Haven, CN., 1996), pp. 312-315, 317, 319-321.

⁵⁰ Verbitskaia, 'To My Reader', p. 72. Anastasiia recalls her mother who transformed from an 'eternally pregnant' housebound wife into a society woman, to the displeasure of her father. L. Mahood, *Feminism and Voluntary Action: Eglantyne Jebb and Save the Children, 1876-1928* (New York, 2009), p. 28. Eglantyne's father disapproved of her mother's philanthropic work in Ireland because it took her away from her children.

⁵¹ V. Tatishcheva, 'From 1797, A Journal', in R. Bisha, J. M. Gheith, C. Holden and W. G. Wagner (Eds.), *Russian Women, 1698-1917: Experience and Expression, An Anthology of Sources* (Bloomington, IN., 2002), pp. 65-69.

⁵² Tatishcheva, 'From 1797, A Journal', pp. 66-67.

⁵³ Engel, *Women in Russia, 1700-2000*, p. 36.

⁵⁴ G. Buzwell, 'Daughters of Decadence: the New Woman in the Victorian fin de siècle', <<https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/daughters-of-decadence-the-new-woman-in-the-victorian-fin-de-siecle>>, Accessed 28/04/2017.

⁵⁵ D. R. Brower, *Training the Nihilists: Education and Radicalism in Tsarist Russia* (London, 1975), p. 41.

parental oppression and devote herself to the revolutionary principles of egalitarianism and collectivity, practiced in her pragmatic marriage and her seamstresses' cooperative. While she does become a mother in her second marriage (a love match), she continues to pursue socially useful work as a physician.⁵⁶ Vera Figner followed this model in part. Her marriage in 1870 to a man who allowed her to study medicine in Zurich removed her from the guardianship of her father, who refused this request. The marriage did not last as her increasingly radical political views clashed with his relative conservatism.⁵⁷ Emilia Pimenova similarly entered a fictitious marriage. In Pimenova's case the marriage developed beyond pragmatism and she had two children, but she lamented the obstacle this presented to her aspirations:

I should not have turned this fictitious marriage into a real one... I had become a wife to my husband through passive acceptance and continued along that same path.⁵⁸

Both women used marriage in the hopes of escaping their expected paths and pursuing revolutionary ideals.⁵⁹ They were not anomalous. Sofia Kovalevskaja wrote:

Ask whatever noble family you would at that time [c.1860s], you always heard one and the same thing--the parents had quarreled with the children... An epidemic seemed to seize upon the children--especially the girls--an epidemic of fleeing from the parental roof.⁶⁰

Rejection of marriage therefore appears prominent among Russian noblewomen. This is most likely due to their greater exposure to, and involvement with, social and political conflicts, combined with a very specific literary model in tune with the more rapidly and radically polarizing Russian context.

In both nations, however, elite women could remain unmarried for reasons that had little to do with a socially or politically charged rejection of circumstance. Eglantyne Jebb grew up admiring a spinster aunt, was introduced to liberal views at Oxford, suffered a broken heart and had an ageing mother to care for, any of which may have influenced her decision never to marry. Similarly, Lady Eastlake remained unmarried until the age of forty, while Anna Vyubova became a nun after her divorce. Since neither reflected on this personal predicament, it may simply be that neither felt inclined to marry and were not required to as opportunities for women increased. This epitomizes the difficulty of comparing personal experiences and the necessarily suggestive nature of this study.

Discourses on marriage and family life, the developments that impacted this and the considerations that took precedence in arranging an elite marriage match are strikingly similar in Russia and Britain. With this similarity the Russian noblewomen can confidently be identified as part of a consciously European nobility. However, the differences apparent in the manifestations of this ideology at an individual level are indicative of the importance of the national context and its cultural heritage. From Lyons's and Lady Eastlake's observations and the reflections of Tatishchevna, Figner, and Pimenova a distinct "Russianness" can be

⁵⁶ *Internet Archive*: Nikolay Gavrilovich Chernyshevsky, *What Is To Be Done?*, Trans. N. H. Dole & S. S. Skidelsky (New York, 1886).

⁵⁷ Figner, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, pp. 36, 39.

⁵⁸ Pimenova, 'Bygone Days', pp. 332-333.

⁵⁹ Vera Figner was even a top graduate of an elite girl's boarding school and was well positioned to enter Kazan high society, but she alleged that she became disillusioned with that life upon her return to her home after her graduation: Figner, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, pp. 31-32, 35-36.

⁶⁰ Engel, 'The Emergence of Women Revolutionaries in Russia', p. 93.

discerned from their obvious awareness of and sensitivity to the specificity of this national context.

(3) Education

Exploring elite women's secondary and higher education is the natural next step in this study, for it is a cultural episode of nineteenth-century female elite life at the juncture between the domestic ideology just examined, which education often perpetuated, and the course of noblewomen's later lives, which education could inform. Changes within elite women's education are significant, as they both reflected and informed the formation of socio-cultural norms.

Girls' boarding schools had proliferated in Russia and Britain to the 1860s, but this must be understood in relative terms. Whilst Russia's first boarding school, the Smolny Institute for Noble Maidens, was established in 1764, by the end of the eighteenth century the country still had considerably fewer than Britain.⁶¹ Although more followed after 1800, when girls' education became a more significant government concern, they remained rare. Private home education was far more common but training for domesticity was the universal focus. Indeed, this was a Europe-wide theme.⁶² "Feminine" subjects including languages, music, drawing, sewing and Christian moral values formed the body of girls' curriculums with a view to training better wives and mothers.⁶³ There is one obvious difference, however, between British and Russian elite girls' education: while the development of the former was largely driven by like-minded individuals, particularly strong female teachers, the latter was state directed.⁶⁴ Emphasis on loyalty to Orthodoxy and the autocracy was pervasive in the Russian system, and censorship of the curriculum was extensive: current literature, debates and recent history were largely absent.⁶⁵ Furthermore, in order to prevent outside influences, the Russian girls lived in isolation at the Institutes for up to nine years of study. At the beginning of the period therefore, Russian and British elite girls received a similar instruction in domesticity reflective of their shared domestic ideologies. The structure of this education in Russia, however, lagged behind the more democratic and liberal British system.

After 1860 the "woman question" accelerated developments in elite girls' education, particularly the expansion of curriculums and the provision of university courses. In Britain increasing criticism of the frivolity of girls' education resulted in a shift in focus towards strengthening mental powers in traditional domestic training, so that educated wives may be of 'material service.'⁶⁶ For example, John Ruskin taught pupils the theory and philosophy of

⁶¹ C. De Bellaigue, *Educating Women: Schooling and Identity in England and France, 1800-1867* (Oxford, 2007), p. 11. While De Bellaigue examines middle-class education, she notes the elite nature of such establishments as only 4% of school age girls attended private school in Oxfordshire in 1821, and only 3% in Manchester (p. 14); E. T. Ewing, 'From an Exclusive Privilege to a Right and an Obligation: Modern Russia', in J. C. Albisetti, J. Goodman, and R. Rogers (eds.), *Girls' Secondary Education in the Western World* (New York, 2010), p. 168.

⁶² De Bellaigue, *Educating Women*, p. 23; Rahikainen, 'The Fading of the Ancien Régime Mentality', p. 32; J. C. Albisetti, J. Goodman and R. Rogers, 'Girls' Secondary Education in the Western World: A Historical Introduction', in J. C. Albisetti, J. Goodman, and R. Rogers (Eds.), *Girls' Secondary Education in the Western World* (New York, 2010), p. 3.

⁶³ Albisetti, Goodman and Rogers, 'Girls' Secondary Education in the Western World', p. 3; Ewing, 'From an Exclusive Privilege to a Right and an Obligation: Modern Russia', p. 168; see Figner, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, pp. 23-25.

⁶⁴ De Bellaigue, *Educating Women*, p. 16; Ewing, 'From an Exclusive Privilege to a Right and an Obligation: Modern Russia', pp. 168, 171.

⁶⁵ Ewing, 'From an Exclusive Privilege to a Right and an Obligation: Modern Russia', p. 168; Figner, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, p. 23.

⁶⁶ De Bellaigue, *Educating Women*, p. 172.

painting, but such change was largely adopted on an individual pupil or school basis.⁶⁷ Similarly, women were able to study a limited range of university subjects, but could not earn a full degree. In Russia, however, the government adopted a new education policy from 1868, opening three-year *gymnasia* and six-year *progymnasia* institutions. While foreign languages, handiwork, dancing and religious history were still central, *progymnasia* also taught arithmetic, Russian language, world geography, history, physics, and some natural sciences.⁶⁸ Furthermore, after the government prohibited the practice of noblewomen studying abroad in the 1860s, midwifery and nursing courses were opened at home. In both nations developments were based on the nation-building desire to make better wives and mothers, but this resulted in some liberal victories.

The socio-political tensions these developments caused in nations confronted with emerging feminist movements demanding further concessions are not difficult to discern. This is especially so in the autocratic, patriarchal Russian context with its reactionary climate from 1881 and the predominance of students among revolutionary groups.⁶⁹ Natalia Grot wrote:

If girls run through the streets to school they will feel the need for activity outside the home. The modern woman needs a public arena, on a level with a man. Women's education should not instil knowledge but arouse good will to bring them closer to Christian perfection.⁷⁰

Emilia Pimenova epitomised this "modern woman." She recorded a conversation with other female medical students in which one woman said, 'I am sure very few of us feel a true vocation for the medical profession.' Emilia reflected, 'this was not a flattering statement, but I had to agree with her...I had not even given it a thought!'.⁷¹ For Pimenova higher education offered an escape from the domesticity that Grot revered. It is clear education became a subject at the forefront of political discourse for many and threw different visions about society into sharp relief. This raises an important consideration for questions of national identity, for a new polarity appeared in Russian noblewomen's group identification. On the one hand were those who engaged with established radicalism or nascent feminism to reject traditional Russian gender roles. On the other were those who held fast to these. Both kinds of noblewomen continued to broadly resemble their British counterparts, as their ideas and the development of these share key features. However, as new pathways emerged after 1860 there was no longer a broadly homogenous class of Russian noblewoman in which one culture could establish dominance. With the expansion of education, ideological specificity in the national context, rather than the national specificity of Russian noblewomen themselves, became the central feature of identity construction.

⁶⁷ De Bellaigue, *Educating Women*, pp. 175, 177.

⁶⁸ 'Petition to Establish a School, Anna Virt', in R. Bisha, J. M. Gheith, C. Holden and W. G. Wagner (Eds.), *Russian Women, 1698-1917: Experience and Expression, An Anthology of Sources* (Bloomington, IN., 2002), pp. 176-179; 'Statute of the School Established by the Women's Patriotic Society, Approved 7 April 1827', in R. Bisha, J. M. Gheith, C. Holden and W. G. Wagner (Eds.), *Russian Women, 1698-1917: Experience and Expression, An Anthology of Sources* (Bloomington, IN., 2002), p. 181; 'Statute on Women's Gymnasiums and Progymnasiums of the Ministry of Education, approved 24 May 1870', in R. Bisha, J. M. Gheith, C. Holden and W. G. Wagner (Eds.), *Russian Women, 1698-1917: Experience and Expression, An Anthology of Sources* (Bloomington, IN., 2002), pp. 181-184.

⁶⁹ The assassination of the reform-minded Alexander II in 1881 cemented the reactionary mindset of his successor, Alexander III and then Nicholas II. See D. R. Brower, *Training the Nihilists: Education and Radicalism in Tsarist Russia* (London, 1975) for a thorough study on radicalism among the student population.

⁷⁰ Grot, 'From a Family Chronicle', pp. 239, 240.

⁷¹ Pimenova, 'Bygone Days', p. 325.

This does not inhibit drawing comparisons across the period or between nations. Russian and British views on the effectiveness of Russian educational methods can demonstrate the continued degree of similarity between women of the two elites. Russian comment is largely confined to institutes and criticism is rife, the most common denunciation being that girls left naïve of the world. Sofia Khvoshchinskaia remembered that there was no library at the Ekaterininsky Institute in Moscow, from which she graduated in the 1840s.⁷² She also denounced the conservative, domineering character of the Institute and the matrons:

Decorum, silence, an appearance of propriety, and obedience at all costs—these were the qualities one could expect from girls subdued by power alone... I don't think that the institute founders meant to develop only those qualities in us. In part perhaps, but not in such monstrous proportions.⁷³

Similarly, Vera Figner wrote of the Rodionovskii Institute in Kazan, from which she graduated in 1869:

As for scientific knowledge, or still more, intellectual training, those years at the school not only gave me almost nothing, but even retarded my spiritual development, not to mention the harm caused by the unnatural isolation from life and people.⁷⁴

Furthermore reading was not encouraged. Figner's mother directed her through this process, giving her novels during vacations that stimulated her intellectually and provided more valuable knowledge than she believed the Institute, with its emphasis on French dictation, penmanship and manners, ever did.⁷⁵ Such criticisms attest to the static nature of institute-led education in the face of educational reform throughout the period and across Russia. Furthermore, that two so different noblewomen—Khvoshchinskaia a woman of moderate sympathies and Figner a revolutionary—shared such strong criticism is indicative of the faithfulness of these assessments. The Englishwoman, however, believed that the Catherine Institute was an 'excellent establishment,' providing a 'brilliant education' in languages, geography, religion, Russian history and physics, as well as traditional accomplishments.⁷⁶ This suggests the Englishwoman found the Russian system to provide a familiar education to a high standard. Nevertheless, she too criticised the Russian methods, believing there was far too much restraint and attention to 'exterior and showy accomplishments.'⁷⁷ Consequently, 'in Russia there are few, it must be confessed, whom we should call well-informed people, among either the ladies or gentlemen.'⁷⁸ Despite the familiarity of the subject matter, the Russian means and end result of education for girls appears to be significantly different from what the Englishwoman was accustomed to. There is a sense that this education and the Russian women who were made distinct by it fell far short of the English standard. However, her identification of the same flaws as Figner and Khvoshchinskaia noted suggests a cross-cultural disaffection with a system that transcends these women's native national contexts. There appears to have been some degree of engagement with broad transnational ideological developments that produced universal standards of knowledge that were not met in a Russian system emphasising "frivolous" pursuits. This suggests a similarity between Russian and British noblewomen in the values that they esteemed and their ideas of how these should be achieved through education.

⁷² Khvoshchinskaia, 'Reminiscences of Institute Life', p. 91.

⁷³ Khvoshchinskaia, 'Reminiscences of Institute Life', p. 99.

⁷⁴ Figner, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, p. 23.

⁷⁵ Figner, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, pp. 23-28.

⁷⁶ *The Englishwoman in Russia*, pp. 241-242.

⁷⁷ *The Englishwoman in Russia*, pp. 242, 244, 245.

⁷⁸ *The Englishwoman in Russia*, p. 245.

Foreign languages undoubtedly constituted one such cultivated value. Their presence in Russian elite girls' education is central to an assessment of their cultural exceptionalism and national identity. Marrese's findings are seminal: interchange between native and foreign tongues was found to be a common feature of noble correspondence, indicating that Russian noblewomen's bilingualism existed comfortably as part of their bicultural behaviour. Adoption of foreign languages was a conscious choice in the construction of cultural identity but did not replace the use of Russian or eclipse feelings of patriotism.⁷⁹ Sofia Khvoshchinskaia attests to this beautifully. She recalled that at the Ekaterininsky Institute there was a stringent French-only rule, but demonstrated how this did not preclude expressions of national identity by recounting a conversation she claimed to have overheard and explaining its significance. Two girls were talking about an idol:

One of them had said: "*Elle est belle comme, je ne sais, a queen.*"

The other replied: "*Je l'aime comme, je ne sais, an angel.*"

The point is that the Russian words [queen, angel] described her qualities more fully, but to be able to use the Russian words they had to qualify them with the words "je ne sais," otherwise they would be punished for violating the French-only rule.⁸⁰

The belief that Russian provided the best means of expression indicates that a sense of Russian identity persisted amid the adoption of foreign customs. This emphasis on foreign languages was not confined to institute education: Varvara Tatishcheva recorded it in her diary when she employed a French nanny, a French governess and when her son began music lessons under German tuition.⁸¹ That these events were recorded in her diary, which otherwise documents significant family events, is telling of the prestige attached to them. Indeed, both Amelia Lyons and the anonymous Englishwoman attested that it was not uncommon to find a French, a German and an English employee in noble households for the purpose of privately educating the children.⁸² However, such multiculturalism is not limited to the Russian noblewomen. The British commentators remain fixed in an observer mind-set, commenting on Russians' mastery of languages while demonstrating their own participation in similar practices: the use of French to provide more detail in their observations and as the language of conversation with their hosts shows that this it is not a specifically Russian trait, something Marrese does not elaborate upon.⁸³ This use of French, both in conversations with foreigners of similar status and in addresses to their countrymen, was in fact an integral part of elite identity construction across Europe, affirming membership to a transnational nobility while not obscuring national identity.

As with domestic ideology, and partly due to its close connection with education, Russian and British theories of girls' education and the developments that these underwent are remarkably alike, though their manifestation reflects national specificities. Unlike experiences of domestic ideology, which were highly personal and demonstrate that differences could be considerable, Russian and British experiences of the manifestations of educational theory, which was far more impersonal, are much more similar. In fact, Russian and British elite

⁷⁹ Marrese, 'The Poetics of Everyday Behaviour' Revisited', pp. 701-702, 705, 716, 718-731.

⁸⁰ Khvoshchinskaia, 'Reminiscences of Institute Life', p. 82.

⁸¹ Tatishcheva, 'From 1797, A Journal', pp. 66-67.

⁸² Lyons, *At Home with the Gentry*, p. 9; *The Englishwoman in Russia*, p. 244.

⁸³ Lyons, *At Home with the Gentry*, pp. 9, 71; Eastlake, *Letters from the Shores of the Baltic, Vol. II*, pp. 220-244; *The Englishwoman in Russia*, p. 244. In the latter two narratives the use of French phrases occurs throughout on a variety of subjects, but the frequency of this noticeably increases when the Russian noble class forms the specific subject of the observations. For example, see Eastlake, *Letters from the Shores of the Baltic, Vol. II*, pp. 220-244 on St Petersburg society, the imperial family, balls and other elite customs.

women of similarly inclined thought came to bear more resemblance than Russian noblewomen on either side of the “woman question” debate. The identification by Russian and British women of the same issues in the Russian institutes and the choice to incorporate foreign languages as a part of everyday noble behaviour are salient examples emphasising the ways in which Russian education broadly reflected transnational elite practices, and fostered a multicultural noble identity. However, national sentiment appears pervasive, and it is clear that both Russian and British women felt the former to be distinctive from the latter. The significant lack of cultural exceptionalism in Russian educational practices and values does not equate to cultural uniformity with the British.

(4) Vocations

Adopting a vocation was the life experience in which noblewomen could exercise the most control thanks to expanding opportunities. This choice often represented the apex of an individual’s experience of social, educational and religious discourses. How an individual interpreted these in relation to their own person, through their multiculturalism and amid a changeable national and international social, political and intellectual climate, determined whether they adhered to or subverted expectations. It must be remembered, however, that while opportunities for noblewomen expanded, they were still fairly finite.

These women’s roles as writers of autobiographies and travel narratives have been examined. However, many wrote other genres, warranting further examination of writing as a vocation. The content, forms of and reasons for writing have been the subjects of academic study, but are not crucial considerations here.⁸⁴ The conditions of Russian and British literary and noble culture that permitted and encouraged women to write are more important, as nineteenth-century salon culture—the juncture between these two sets of factors—combined with the arguments of the “woman question,” resulting in a proliferation of female writers in both nations. The elite salon, originating in pre-revolutionary France, allowed prominent intellectuals and nobles to share knowledge and refine tastes. It became a fixture of elite life across Europe as Enlightenment ideals spread, but its late appearance in Russia (c.1820-c1840) means that historians rightly emphasise its similarity only to the first French salons, focused on literature and the acquirement of *urbanité* among women.⁸⁵ By the same period in Britain, salon culture and noblewomen’s involvement were much more political.⁸⁶ Nevertheless, in both cases noblewomen acted as guests and hostesses, demonstrating that cultural sharing was a behavioural norm. After the 1860s Russian noblewomen gained increasing freedom as writers. Maria Korsini, Evgenia Tur, Natalia Grot, Sofia Khvoshchinskaia, Princess Elizaveta Lvova, Anastasiia Verbitskaia and Alexandra Kollontai were all authors of fiction, essays, journal articles, or political pieces between 1840 and 1920. Furthermore, Tur held her own salons and established a journal, while Verbitskaia had her own publishing house. Similarly, Lady Elizabeth Eastlake wrote regularly for the *Quarterly Review*, a literary and political publication. Russian noblewomen across the class were active in sharing European customs to the same extent as, albeit later than, British women.

Noblewomen’s roles as wives and mothers have been investigated as well, but conformity to female and domestic ideology is also evident in philanthropic work, as it was believed

⁸⁴ See A. Rosenholm & I. Savkina, ‘“How Women Should Write”: Russian Women’s Writing in the Nineteenth Century’, in W. Rosslyn and A. Tosi (Eds.), *Women in Nineteenth-Century Russia: Lives and Culture* (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 161- 207; Ledkovsky, Rosenthal and Zirin, ‘Introduction’, pp. xxvii-xli.

⁸⁵ Engel, *Women in Russia, 1700-2000*, p. 37; Ledkovsky, Rosenthal and Zirin, ‘Introduction’, p. xxix; Rosenholm and Savkina, ‘“How Women Should Write”’, p. 165.

⁸⁶ Richardson, ‘“Well-neighboured Houses”’, pp. 62-65.

domesticity allowed women to exercise a civilising influence on society.⁸⁷ Lindenmeyr has found that Russia followed European developments in philanthropy closely but retained distinctive Russian features, notably an indiscriminate attitude to the poor. The rich had a moral duty to assist these unfortunate victims of circumstance for the benefit of the general good in a pervasive culture of personal giving, heavily influenced by Orthodox teachings. In this way Russian philanthropy was integral to national identity.⁸⁸ This affirms themes evident in some of the Russian memoirs. Vera Figner spent a period as a physician in Voronezh with her sister. As well as their medical duties, they opened a school and gave readings in peasant households. Figner wrote:

This life of ours... possessed such a bewitching charm, that even now it is pleasant for me to recall it; every moment we felt that we were needed. It was this consciousness of one's usefulness that was the magnetic force which drew our Russian youth into the village.⁸⁹

Despite her refutation of women's domesticity and of religion, Figner was still drawn to philanthropic social work by her 'Russian youth'. That she was able to do this work is largely due to her gender and station: due to her and her sister's manners and appearances neither the villagers nor the authorities imagined them to be nihilists.⁹⁰ Not only is Figner's nationalistic philanthropic feeling evident, but the social discourse that extended women's roles to social and philanthropic work can be discerned in her provision of help through medical care and knowledge. This highlights a significant area that Lindenmeyr could have explored further: Russian noblewomen's philanthropy addressed a range of social issues besides pauperism. Anna Vyubova's memoir attests to this. During the First World War she joined the Empress and her daughters in nursing work.⁹¹ Furthermore, after she was severely injured in a railway accident in 1915, she used her compensation to establish a convalescent hospital for wounded soldiers:

This, it is needless to say, became a great source of happiness to me, since I knew as well as the soldiers what it meant to be crippled and helpless... [But] not this action of mine, patriotic though it must have appeared, [and] no amount of devotion of the Empress to the wounded, sufficed to check the rapidly growing [anti-imperial] propaganda.⁹²

There is an uncontested adherence to Russian and European ideas of femininity, as her roles as nurse and patroness reflected women's supposedly innate caring nature. Furthermore, she draws an explicit connection between her philanthropy and her patriotism. Both accounts therefore demonstrate the highly personal nature of philanthropic work, but also its centrality to the Russian national character. This latter theme is all the more glaring for its appearance in the memoirs of two radically different noblewomen. English observers confirm this. The Englishwoman wrote that, 'in a thousand instances I have remarked acts of

⁸⁷ W. Rosslyn, 'Benevolent Ladies and Their Exertions for the Good of Humankind: V. A. Repnina, S. S. Meshcherskaia, and the Origins of Female Philanthropy in Early Nineteenth-Century Russia', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 84/1 (2006), pp. 54-55.

⁸⁸ A. Lindenmeyr, *Poverty is Not a Vice: Charity, Society, and the State in Imperial Russia* (Princeton, NJ., 1996), pp. 5, 8, 10, 23.

⁸⁹ Figner, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, p. 56.

⁹⁰ Figner, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, p. 54.

⁹¹ *Alexander Palace: Anna Vyubova, Memories of the Russian Court, '1914 - The Great War'*.

⁹² *Alexander Palace: Anna Vyubova, Memories of the Russian Court, 'Railroad Accident, Tsar at Stavka'*.

benevolence and charity that would do honour to the name of Russian,⁹³ while Amelia Lyons declared:

I but rarely knew a case of distress left unrelieved, and I have frequently been astonished at the considerable personal inconvenience the Russians will cheerfully bear to afford assistance to anyone in a difficulty...⁹⁴

Their observations were likely informed by the contrast between the prevailing English view of poverty and pauperism—that it was a social evil requiring state direction to tackle—and the Russian culture of giving.⁹⁵ This explains their tones of admiration, suggesting Russian charity was carried out to a degree and with a dedication with which the English women were unfamiliar. When engaging in philanthropy these Russian noblewomen adhered firmly to a Russian cultural framework, which they and their observers equated with Russian national identity.

Finally, women as activists must be examined in the charged atmosphere of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries, for activism was influenced more than any other vocation by an individual's character and experiences, shaped by their engagement with the national and international contexts. Vera Figner had a conventional noble upbringing and institute education. She became disillusioned with that life as she read socially and politically charged Russian literature outside of her domestically oriented schooling and took up radical socialism while studying in Zurich. She was active in the 1881 assassination of Alexander II, confessing her part with pride while incarcerated. She believed she had carried out her duty to her native land and was horrified at her mother's procurement of a commutation of her death sentence: she wanted 'to drain the cup to the end together with [her] comrades.'⁹⁶ Sofia Panina, in contrast, passionately pursued self-proclaimed apolitical social and philanthropic work, which she believed was the best means of forming a solid basis for a better Russian society. After the February Revolution she joined the Kadet party to disassociate herself from the socialists and became the only female assistant minister in the Provisional Government, first as Deputy Minister of State Welfare and later as an assistant Minister of Education. She did, however, take up activism against the Bolsheviks, who she believed were devastating her country.⁹⁷ Despite the different contexts, these two types of activism demonstrate the significance of Russian women's engagement with national and international developments. For Figner, this was facilitated by the freedom she acquired abroad to adopt new ideas about Russia and her role in it. For Panina, this occurred through her engagement with traditional philanthropy and social work, and her translation of this acceptable female role into an official government capacity. The English observers writing before 1860 unfortunately do not provide comment. A comparison of national and international influences on Russian and British women's activism may therefore be an area for further study with an amended source base. What can be tentatively concluded here is that Russian noblewomen did engage with pervasive international and national developments frequently in a variety of ways, but the production of the same end result—a

⁹³ *The Englishwoman in Russia*, p. 43.

⁹⁴ Lyons, *At Home with the Gentry*, p. 9.

⁹⁵ Lindenmeyr, *Poverty is Not a Vice*, pp. 9-12, 17; M. E. Rose, 'The Disappearing Pauper: Victorian Attitudes to the Relief of the Poor', in E. M. Sigsworth (Ed.), *In Search of Victorian Values: Aspects of Nineteenth-Century Thought and Society* (Manchester, 1988), pp. 56-58, 64.

⁹⁶ Figner, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, pp. 16-17, 19, 23-31, 39, 75, 77, 156, 166, 186, 290.

⁹⁷ Sofia Panina, 'On the Outskirts of St. Petersburg: Memoirs', in R. Bisha, J. M. Gheith, C. Holden and W. G. Wagner (Eds.), *Russian Women, 1698-1917: Experience and Expression, An Anthology of Sources* (Bloomington, IN., 2002), p. 366, 370-371; A. Lindemneyr, 'The First Woman in Russia': Countess Sofia Panina and Women's Political Participation in the Revolutions of 1917', *Journal of Modern Russian History and Historiography*, 9 (2016), p. 167.

strong national feeling—suggests international influences could not eclipse their sense of Russianness.

The adoption of adult vocations among noblewomen in the changeable Russian context provides insight into their engagement with the world around them on multiple levels, and the impact of this on a multicultural class that bore broad similarities to its British counterpart. The rise of the elite female writer and of the elite female revolutionary demonstrates that noblewomen's engagement with international cultures and developments impacted their life in their homeland. Interpretations of the national context and culture, seen in the specifically Russian traditions adhered to in philanthropy and alternative activism, had a similar influence. The production by both, however, of a class of Russian noblewomen discernably different from their British counterparts, with an obviously strong sense of national belonging, suggests that multiculturalism could not remove nationally constructed boundaries of cultural belonging. As a result of the multiculturalism that impacted Russian noblewomen at some juncture in their lives, they were extremely culturally flexible.

Conclusion

This study has been limited to English language translations of Russian sources and has attempted to strike a balance between a breadth and depth of topics to examine the broad issue of Russian noblewomen's cultural exceptionalism. Mother-daughter relationships, noble girls' home and school education, and Russian noblewomen's activism could benefit from an in-depth study of Russian noblewomen's writings, especially the more numerous Russian language originals. They are a substantial, fruitful and underused resource. This article has demonstrated their potential. Firstly, such accounts have offered highly significant insights into the cultural norms of Russian noblewomen. Secondly, they have demonstrated the impact of both the rigid and flexible aspects of contemporary gender ideology at an individual level. Finally, they have indicated the ways in which cross-cultural contact informed noblewomen's culture and national identity, both collectively and individually.

The extent of cultural exceptionalism among Russian noblewomen must be assessed by degree. The adoption of similar ideologies as the British elite on marriage and family life, education and the "woman question," translating into remarkably similar experiences of arranging marriages, domesticity in marriage, expectations of education, the use of languages, and the rise of the elite female writer, suggests that Russian noblewomen were not culturally exceptional. Resemblance to their British sisters occurs at too great a degree throughout their lives and across the period to reasonably allow for this. However, the variations among women of the two elites in the different manifestations of similar ideologies, seen in responsibilities in marriage, trends in the rejection of marriage, Russia's fledgling secondary education prior to the 1860s, differences in philanthropic ideology and practice, and the nationalistic character of elite activists, indicate the significance of the national context. This influenced elite women's culture as much as, if not more than, their exposure to and engagement with European customs throughout the period.

Russian noblewomen were therefore highly active in the sharing of cultural ideologies and motifs, as Marrese argues. Their engagement with national and international developments caused their group identification to splinter along several fault lines, making it difficult to delineate a single class of Russian noblewomen among which a single culture could exist. What is clear throughout, however, is that whatever path each woman took, Russian and European customs coexisted within individual, group and national identities.

Russian noblewomen were a part of a transnational European elite which did not preclude their identification as Russian. The sources have consistently demonstrated this, from Tatishcheva's diary highlighting married Russian noblewomen's unique responsibilities, to

Figner's and Vyubova's patriotism in philanthropy despite their radically different sympathies. The Russian noblewomen demonstrate an implicit sensitivity to, if not an explicit identification with, their Russian context that places national sentiment at the centre of their identities. The English observers have affirmed this throughout. Despite identifying points of comparison between the Russian women and themselves, they clearly perceived the Russian noblewomen as different. Therefore, there was not a *culturally exceptional* Russian noblewoman, but various *distinctively Russian* noblewomen, who were neither as culturally rigid as Grot believed nor as culturally fluid as Tur proposed.

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