

## ST. PETERSBURG in the CULTURAL HISTORY of RUSSIA

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### Abstract

This paper argues that St. Petersburg played substantial and a unique role in the cultural history of Russia. While Russia has been discussing, for centuries, about its part in the Europe, St. Petersburg, as a city which made significant contribution to the ideology of Westernization with its definitive characters, has great importance. Paper tries to take a brief look at the place of St. Petersburg in the cultural history of Russia, within the scope of politics, art, literature and architect. In order to have a comprehensive view on the Westernization and Europeanisation of Russia, it is crucial to make a clear identification of the role and the character of St. Petersburg. Therefore the paper aims to give a brief picture of St. Petersburg in this process and its unique impact on the cultural and the political history of Russia.

**Keywords:** St Petersburg, Moscow, Westernization, Slavophilism

### Özet

#### Rus Kültürel Tarihinde St. Petersburg

Bu makale St. Petersburg'un Rus kültürel tarihinde önemli ve benzersiz bir rol oynadığını ileri sürmektedir. Asırlardır Avrupa'daki konumunu tartışan Rusya'da özgün karakteri ile batılılaşma ideolojisine kayda değer katkıda bulunan St. Petersburg şehri, yüksek ehemmiyete sahiptir. Makale bu şehrin Rus kültürel tarihindeki yerini politika, sanat, edebiyat ve mimari kapsamında özetlemeye çalışmaktadır. Rusya'daki Avrupalılaşma ve batılılaşma noktasında kapsamlı bir görüş sahibi olabilmek için St. Petersburg'un rolü ve karakterinin tanımlanması elzemdir. Buna bağlı olarak makale St. Petersburg'un bu süreçte ve Rus kültürel ve siyasal tarihindeki etkisini özetlemek gayesini taşımaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** St. Petersburg, Moskova, Batılılaşma, Slavofili

The name of St. Petersburg has been changed three times based on the political climate in the country but it is called 'Peter' in short, by its residents. Foreigners describe it as one of the most beautiful cities in the world but as Nikolai

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Karamzin<sup>1</sup> described, it is a city founded on bones and blood.<sup>2</sup> As a matter of fact during the construction of St. Petersburg significant amount of the workforce died. In 1703 on a misty spring morning a dozen Russian horsemen rode across the barren marshlands where the Neva River runs into Baltic Sea. They were looking for a site to build a fort against the Swedes, and the owners of these long abandoned swamps. The Tsar of Russia, riding at the head of his scouting troops was full of hope, as he realized the promising vision of the wide and bending river flowing to the sea. He approached to the coast and dismounted from his horse and he cut the two strips of peat and arranged them in a cross on the marshy ground. And Peter said: ‘Here shall be a town.’<sup>3</sup> The area which was underneath the sea a thousand years ago was not a place for human habitation. It was a place for wolves and bears<sup>4</sup>, there was a channel where today Pargolovo and Pulkovo heights found. Even during the eighteenth century, Tsarskoe Selo, where Catherine the Great built Summer Palace, was still known as Sarskoe Selo by the locals. The name was coming from the Finnish word *saari* which means island.<sup>5</sup> But as Peter determined the motto of the construction – ‘‘Every Russian should bring a stone here’’- St. Petersburg founded after a long, furious and bloody process of construction.

St. Petersburg was growing up with amazing speed like a magical city of Russian fairy tale. As everything about the city was so fabulous and amazing, soon the city also became enshrined in myths. One of the first structures built in the city was Peter and Paul Fortress, the island where the fortress sits today was slightly higher, it was the only place to lay firm foundations. As the soldiers dug into the ground they found water a meter below, 20 thousand conscripts were digging out

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<sup>1</sup> Nikolai Mikhailovich Karamzin, Russian historian, author of the famous ‘History of the Russian State’.

<sup>2</sup> Nicholas Riasanovsky and Mark Steinberg, *Rusya Tarihi Başlangıçtan Günümüze*, trans. Figen Dereli, İnkılap Kitabevi, İstanbul 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Figes, Orlando, *Natasha’s Dance’ Cultural History of Russia*, New York, Metropolitan Books, 2002. (2003)

<sup>4</sup> ‘Peterburg v 1720 g. Zapiski poliaka-ochevidtza’, *Russkaia starina*, 25 (1879).

<sup>5</sup> Wikipedia, "Saari (name)," Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Saari\\_\(name\)&oldid=87057419](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Saari_(name)&oldid=87057419) 1 (accessed July 24, 2019).

the land -sometimes with bare hands-, and dragging logs and stones. More than the half of the workforce died but Peter's fortress was built after four months.<sup>6</sup>

Soldiers together with the serfs came from Caucasus and Siberia worked to clear forests, to lay down roads and dig canals.<sup>7</sup> Carpenters and stonemasons were forbidden by decree to work elsewhere, so they came to build the Petropolis. New industries appeared in order to manufacture brick, glass and mica, sailing boats on the waterways and millions of logs flooding down the river added busy waterway traffic to city's atmosphere. Words of Peter's declaration were like a divine command, 'Let there be light.'<sup>8</sup> According to the myth, as he was saying these words, an eagle dipped in flight over Peter's head and settled on top of two birch trees which were tied together to form an arch. Such mythical stories helped panegyrists to elevate Peter to the status of god: he was Titan, Neptune and Mars rolled into one.<sup>9</sup> And people of the city were comparing Petersburg to ancient Rome, but it was not only people of the city making this comparison, Peter himself, who adopted the title of Emperor and casted his own image on the new ruble coin, with laurel wreath in emulation of Caesar, was also making this comparison. Opening lines of Pushkin's *The Bronze Horseman* is one of the literary examples of this mythical approach:

On a shore by the desolate waves  
He stood, with lofty thoughts,  
And gazed into distance...<sup>10</sup>

Commerce and geopolitics are quite crucial in case of the development of a city. But St. Petersburg grew in a unique way. Neither geopolitics nor commerce did account the development of the city. Peter's new capital was built as a work of art. Particularly European visitors to Petersburg were struck by the

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<sup>6</sup> Peterburg petrovskogo vremeni (Leningrad, 1948), Opisanie Sanktpeterburga i Kronshlota v 1710-m i 1711-m gg.', in Russkaia starina, 25 (1879)

<sup>7</sup> A. Darinskii, *Istoriia Sankt-Peterburga* (St Petersburg, 1999)

<sup>8</sup> Figes, Orlando, 'Natasha's Dance'.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Aleksandr Sergeyeovich Pushkin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 17 volumes (Moscow, 1937-49) vol. 5.

exceptional beauty of its ensembles. As Marquis de Custine<sup>11</sup> wrote in 1830s, “at each step I was amazed by the combination of architecture and stage decoration”. Peter the Great and his successors looked upon their capital as a theater.<sup>12</sup> It was indeed like a great theatre stage, people and its building serving as theatrical props. In 1812 upon her visit to the city, French writer Madame de Stael said, “Here everything has been created for visual perception”.<sup>13</sup>

Peter’s visit to European cities such as Venice and Amsterdam let the first inspirations to spark for the layout of the canals and embankments. And Peter the Great, who was such a sea lover, had determined the natural elements of the city; they were stone, water and sky. Composition of these elements was beautifully reflected in the city’s panoramas. Peter was borrowing what he liked from Europe based on his architectural taste. While he was coming back, he also brought engineers, architects, artists, craftsmen and landscape designers, such as Domenico Trezzini from Italy, and Jean Le Blond from France. Petersburg started to look like a combination of European capitals, churches of the city with classical baroque style were setting themselves apart from Moscow’s intensively coloured onion domes, and they were mixture of St. Peter’s cathedral in Rome and St. Paul’s cathedral in London. The city was a combination of Rome, Paris and Amsterdam. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century Count Algarotti<sup>14</sup> said ‘There reigns in this capital kind of bastard architecture. It steals from the Italian, the French and the Dutch’.<sup>15</sup>

Peter was attaching great importance to the development of the city even during the war with Swedes in 1710s he was spending time with the details of the plans. No expense was avoided during the constructions and developments; citrus

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<sup>11</sup> Marquis Astolphe de Custine, French writer, known for his travel writings. See Anka Muhlstein, ‘A Taste of Freedom: The life of Astolphe de Custine’ Helen Marks Books: New York, 1999.

<sup>12</sup> Marquis de Custine, *Journey for Our Time: The Journals of the Marquis de Custine*, trans. and ed. P.PennKohler (London, 1953)

<sup>13</sup> Figes, Orlando, ‘*Natasha’s Dance*’

<sup>14</sup> Count Francesco Algarotti, a Venetian philosopher, art critic and collector.

<sup>15</sup> Algarotti Francesco, ‘*Letters from Count Algarotti to Lord Harvey and the Marquis Scipio Maffei, containing the state of the trade, marine, revenues, and forces of the Russian empire: with the history of the late war between the Russians and the Turks*’, (Glasgow, 1770).

and peonies was ordered from Persia, singing birds from India and ornamental fish from Middle East just to make Summer Garden better than Versailles.<sup>16</sup> Even the abattoir was rebuilt in the rococo style by his order.<sup>17</sup> The fine granite of river banks came from Karelia and Finland; gabbro and porphyry were from Sweden; dolerite from Onega; the marble for the palaces from Urals, Middle East and Italy, only limestones were local product.<sup>18</sup> In 1902 Alexander Benois<sup>19</sup> remarked, ‘‘If it is beautiful, then it is so as a whole, or rather in huge chunks’’.<sup>20</sup> Besides, while Count Algarotti was blaming Petersburg for stealing from other cities, Alexander Herzen<sup>21</sup> said, ‘‘Petersburg differs from all other European cities by being like them all’’.<sup>22</sup>

Catherine the Great was determined to follow the path of Peter the Great. As she ordered the Falconet equestrian statue of Peter the Great, she had her name written under the name of Peter to show that she will be a loyal follower of his policies. Furthermore, she had her and Peter’s name written in Latin on the other side of the statue, showing she will also continue to Europeanize Russia as Peter did. In this respect, Commission of Orderly Development of St. Petersburg was established in 1737. And with the establishment of the Commission for the Masonry Constructions of St. Petersburg, the planning of the city as a series of ensembles became more evident.<sup>23</sup>

Projects of the city were not only aiming to build a European city, they were almost utopian cultural engineering projects to reconstruct the Russian as a European man.<sup>24</sup> Peter was instructing the nobles how to and where to build their

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<sup>16</sup> ‘Peterburg v 1720 g. Zapiski poliaka-ochevidtsa’

<sup>17</sup> S. Luppov, *Istoriia stroitel'stva Peterburga v pervoi chetverti XVIII veka* (Moscow - Leningrad, 1957).

<sup>18</sup> A. Bulak and N. Abakumova, *Kamennoe ubranstvo tsentra Leningrada*, (Leningrad, 1987).

<sup>19</sup> Alexandre Nikolayevich Benois, Russian artist and art critic and one of the founding members of ‘Mir Iskusstva’ which was a magazine and artistic movement.

<sup>20</sup> A. Benua, *Zhivopisnyi Peterburg*, Mir iskusstva, volume 7, number 2. (1902).

<sup>21</sup> Aleksandr Ivanovich Herzen, famous Russian thinker. See Acton, Edward. *Alexander Herzen And the Role of the Intellectual Revolutionary*, Cambridge University Press, 1979.

<sup>22</sup> A. I. Gertsen, *Moskva i Peterburg, Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 30 volumes. (Moscow, 1954), vol. 2

<sup>23</sup> Figes, Orlando, ‘*Natasha’s Dance*’

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

houses, how to act around the city, the number of servant they should keep, the way of eating banquets, how to cut their hair and how to converse with people in polite society. Petersburg, in which this new culture was reigning, was intended to negate medieval Muscovy. Dostoyevsky called this city as “the most abstract and intentional city in the whole round the world”.<sup>25</sup> With this massive effort, to create a European city with European-like residents, a mythical perception of ‘unreal city’ which contradicts with the Russian way of life was appeared. Alexander Benois tackled this case by saying that the city was like a “sergeant with a stick and it had a machine-like character” whereas the Russians were like a ‘disheveled old woman’.<sup>26</sup> And in his writings Marquis de Custine mentioned that it was more like ‘the general staff of an army than the capital of a nation’.<sup>27</sup>

Nevertheless, reconstruction process of Russian as a European was perpetuating. And in case of noble Russians, the most definitive thing to show that a Muscovite *boyar* turns to an aristocrat of Petersburg was constructing a palace in the European style. A palace where the members of the aristocracy can play out their airs and graces in its ballroom; an oasis of European culture in the desert of Russian peasant soil.<sup>28</sup> Art and literature were also making contribution in order to educate Russians in the values and ideas of European life. Nikolai Karamzin’s *Letters of a Russian Traveler* was quite substantial in this respect. After his travels to Poland, Germany, Switzerland, England and France, he presented the ideal European world to his readers. Historian Mikhail Pogodin took this book with himself when he traveled to Paris.

Yet, despite the constructions of palaces and the aristocrats acting in European way in the ballrooms of those palaces, underneath the surface of this European world the old Russia was still seen. Many of the nobles allowed their animals to roam in the yards of their palaces in St. Petersburg, as they are used to

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<sup>25</sup> Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Notes from Underground*, The Double, trans. J. Coulson (Harmondsworth, 1972).

<sup>26</sup> A. Benois, ‘*Zhivopisnyi Peterburg*’ Mir iskusstva I, (1902).

<sup>27</sup> Marquis de Custine, ‘*Journey for Our Time*’.

<sup>28</sup> Figs, Orlando, ‘*Natasha’s Dance*’

do in Moscow. Thus Peter the Great issued several decrees forbidding pigs and cows from roaming around.<sup>29</sup>

Although Count Algarotti was claiming that Petersburg was stealing from other European cities and it is a copy of them, it was the people in fact copying the Europe; everything about this new capital was compelling its residents to act like European, to become European. It was not Peter's dream to see noble Russians allowing their animals to walk around in his European city which was compared to Rome once. Current residents of the city, living in European style houses, are still struggling to define themselves due to the fluctuant political dynamics. Karamzin emphasized this confusion of Russians by saying "we became citizen of the world but we could not become a Russian citizen".<sup>30</sup> In 1837 Winter Palace was gutted by an immense fire which could be seen from kilometers away. In the city which was built on the myths of apocalypse, this fire was considered as the revenge of old Russia. The wooden Russia underneath this unreal European world was burning.

On the other hand, efforts to Europeanize Russians made significant contribution to the society; women became quite influential in Russian social and political life. Women set the manners in the ballrooms: the balletic genuflections and the kissing of the hand. The art of salon conversation was mostly feminine. Women, who were excluded from the public in Moscow, took up leading roles in the 18<sup>th</sup> century's European culture. There was even a succession of female sovereigns. French ambassador in Petersburg remarked that "Russian noblewomen had outstripped the men in this progressive march towards improvement; elegant women and girls, remarkable for their graces, speaking seven or eight languages fluently, playing several instruments and familiar with the most celebrated romance writers and poets of France, Italy and England".<sup>31</sup> As Pushkin demonstrated in his *Eugene Onegin*, it was not polite to talk for long on serious masculine topics such as philosophy or politics in such feminine saloon

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<sup>29</sup> Hughes, *Russia in the Age of Peter the Great* New Haven, (1998).

<sup>30</sup> Riasanovsky and Steinberg, *Rusya Tarihi*

<sup>31</sup> Louis Philippe Comte de Segur, *Memoirs of Louis Philippe Comte de Segur*.ed. E. Cruickshanks, London, (1960).

conversations. As a matter of fact, in Pushkin's age the readership of literature was female by large. *Eugene Onegin's* heroine Tatiana, who lost herself in the stories of novels, depicted with a French book in her hands. Authors and poets such as Pushkin were developing the Russian literary language to reflect female taste. After all, perhaps the Russian women were more successful and more inclined to become European than Russian *mujik*. As Princess Dashkova<sup>32</sup>, who was the only female president of Russian Academy of Sciences and who spoke French fluently, was lamenting "why was I not born an Englishwoman?"<sup>33</sup> This sense of being part of Europe caused division amongst Russians. Dostoyevsky preferred to stay in the middle by saying, "we Russians have two motherlands: Russia and Europe". This ambivalence of controversial identity was effectively reflected in the art and literature. Kniazhnin's<sup>34</sup> premiere of comic opera titled *Misfortune from a Carriage* staged at the Hermitage court theatre in 1779. This comic opera was a satire on blindly imitation of foreign ways. Elite public was participating to this opera in the latest clothes and hairstyles, as always. Count Rostopchin in Tolstoy's *War and Peace* was saying "Paris is our kingdom in heaven".<sup>35</sup> In fact the satire was directly targeting and blaming its audience, who look a lot like Count Rostopchin, due to the moral corruption of the society and the addiction to anything that is French. This satire of Kniazhnin was one of the many others to equate foreign imitations of the residents of Petersburg with the moral corruption of the society. In the comedy of Kheraskov<sup>36</sup>, *The Detester* character Stovid advises a friend, who cannot convince a girl to go out with him, wishes, to "convince her that in Paris a child's love to her parents is considered philistine". Upon Stovid's advice his friend wins the girl. But as Stovid hears the conversation between the girl and her father; girl says: "stay away! In France, fathers do not

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<sup>32</sup> Yekaterina Romanovna Dashkova, Russian princess and the first elected female member of the Russian Academy of Sciences. See Sue Ann Prince, *The princess & the patriot: Ekaterina Dashkova, Benjamin Franklin, and the Age of Enlightenment*, Volume 96, Part 1, American Philosophical Society, 2006.

<sup>33</sup> Figes, Orlando, 'Natasha's Dance'

<sup>34</sup> Yakov Borisovich Knyazhnin, famous Russian tragic author.

<sup>35</sup> Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoy, 'War and Peace', trans. Aylmer and Louise Maude, Oxford, 1998.

<sup>36</sup> Mikhail Matveyevich Kheraskov, Russian poet and play writer.



keep the company of their children, and only merchants let their hands be kissed by their daughters”, the girl finishes the conversation by spitting at his father.<sup>37</sup> These comedies were containing elements of national consciousness based on the contrast between foreign and native. A character that admires France and despises Russia was common in such comedies. They were all giving the same message: blindly imitation of West, the aristocrats are losing their own nationality. “Striving to make themselves at home with foreigners, they had become foreigners at home”.<sup>38</sup> In their satires, Kniazhnin and Khearskov, started to define the Russian personality in terms which were far from the values of the West. The main aim of this approach was to imply the old romantic ideal motherland – the uncorrupted Russia. And in the society this was reflected as the idea that Petersburg was all about deceit and vanity, “a narcissistic dandy constantly observing its own reflection in the Neva River”.<sup>39</sup> From the perspective of Gogol, Petersburg was a place becoming alien; in the tale of *Nevsky Prospekt* in his *Tales of Petersburg*, he warns, “do not believe in Nevsky Prospekt... It is all about deception, a dream, nothing is what it seems! Nevsky Prospekt deceives at all hours of the day, but the worst time of all is night, when the entire city becomes a welter of noise and flashing lights... and when the Devil himself is abroad, kindling the street-lamps with one purpose only: to show everything in false lights.”<sup>40</sup> The provinces of Russian land where presentations or conventions did not exist, the simple Russian virtues were protected.

The year of 1789 had a significant impact on St. Petersburg; Russia’s dream of Europe was strongly shaken by the French Revolution. Russia’s romantic belief that Europe is the force of progress and enlightenment was deeply undermined. The horror stories, heard by Russians, living in their palaces, from the emigres who had fled from Paris to St. Petersburg, were nightmares for them. A European Russian, Karamzin wrote, “The Age of Enlightenment. I do not

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<sup>37</sup> *Rossiiskii featr*, 43 volumes (St Petersburg, 1786-94), vol. 10 (1786).

<sup>38</sup> Figes, Orlando, ‘*Natasha’s Dance*’

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Nikolai Gogol, *Plays and Petersburg Tales*, trans. C. English, Oxford, 1995.

recognize you in blood and flames.’<sup>41</sup> Karamzin’s view was widely shared by the other European Russians in Petersburg and usual attitudes began to alter in the saloons; use of French words became frowned and the elite of Petersburg gave up on Lafite and Cliquot wines and started to drink *kvas* and vodka instead. The idea of a true Russian self, that had been preserved and suppressed by the foreign conventions of the society of Petersburg, spread. Princess Dashkova, who once was complaining about being Russian, began to share these ideas and wrote: ‘let us remain patriots and retain the character of our ancestors.’<sup>42</sup> Many European Russians started to turn their back to Count Rostopchin of *War and Peace*. The Voltairean climate in Petersburg suddenly began to fade away. Utopia of Enlightenment of universal culture was eventually abandoned for the national way.

On the other hand, for many this contrast of imitation of European ways and true Russian ways on the other side was a question of the contrast between St. Petersburg and Moscow. Just with the building of St. Petersburg, Moscow’s wealth had declined quickly. Craftsmen and traders of Moscow were forced to resettle in the new capital; Moscow’s population had fallen rapidly and began to seem like a provincial capital. Whilst ‘Old Believers’ started to consider Peter the Great as the Antichrist and Petersburg as the kingdom of the Devil, from the point of Catherine the Great, Moscow was the seat of sloth. The city was full of symbols of churches, fanaticism, miraculous icons and priests.<sup>43</sup> Moscow had rural panorama with its little wooden houses, mansions’ courtyards where cows and sheep were allowed to roam. Pushkin compared Moscow to a faded queen in mourning clothes obliged to curtsy before a new king.

This opposition between Moscow and St. Petersburg was also crucial within the framework of the ideological discussion between the Slavophiles and the Westernizers about the cultural destiny of Russia. For Slavophiles, the Petersburg was the symbol of the catastrophic collapse of Holy Rus’; for

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<sup>41</sup> Figes, Orlando, *‘Natasha’s Dance’*.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Dominique Maroger, *The Memoirs of Catherine the Great*, ed., translation M. Budberg, (London, 1955).

Westerners, it was Russia's Europeanization sign. Yet, the idea of Moscow as a true Russian city was derived from the view that St. Petersburg as a foreign civilization. Most of the Russians thought that Moscow was a place where they feel themselves more Russian. As Viktor Vasnetsov<sup>44</sup>, wrote to Stasov<sup>45</sup>, when he returned from St. Petersburg to Moscow, "When I came to Moscow, I felt I had come home. The first time I saw the Kremlin and St. Basil, tears welled in my eyes: so forceful was the feeling that they are a part of me."<sup>46</sup> As a Russian proverb says, Petersburg is our head; Moscow is our heart (*Петербург - голова, Москва - сердце*). In a sense, Napoleon Bonaparte also was sharing this view, he said, "if I take Kiev, I will take Russia's legs, if I take St. Petersburg, I will take its head. But if I take Moscow, I will take its heart."<sup>47</sup> After 1810s, the conception of St. Petersburg as a foreign and artificial place became common in the literary as the more authentically national way of live became effective on literary imagination. But there had always been attack to Petersburg since its construction began. Rumors spread that Peter was a German, he was not the real Tsar, he brought evils attendant foreigners to Petersburg who dress in European style and shave their beard. Gogol explained the contrast between Moscow and Petersburg in such way:

"Petersburg is an accurate, punctual kind of person, a perfect German, and he looks at everything in a calculated way... Moscow is a Russian nobleman, and if he is going to have a good time, he will go all the way until he drops, and he will not worry about how much he has got in his pockets. Moscow does not like halfway measures... Petersburg likes to tease Moscow for his awkwardness and lack of taste... Russia need Moscow, Petersburg needs Russia."

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<sup>44</sup> Viktor Mikhaylovich Vasnetsov, famous Russian painter. Most known works: A Knight at the Crossroad, Bogatyrs.

<sup>45</sup> Vladimir Vasilievich Stasov, famous Russian critic and the son of famous architect Vasily Petrovich Stasov.

<sup>46</sup> Viktor Mikhailovich *Vasnetsov.zhizn " I tvorchestvo* (Moscow, 1960).

<sup>47</sup> Çiçek Anıl, *Rivalry Between Moscow and St. Petersburg – The Contrasting Ideologies of Conservatism and Westernism in Russia Embodied in The Two Capitals*, International Journal of Russian Studies, (2013).

Balakirev<sup>48</sup> called Moscow ‘Jericho’ implying that it was an ancient city.<sup>49</sup> Moscow was the center of avant-garde but Petersburg was a place of artistic gossiping, academic professors and Friday watercolour classes.<sup>50</sup> Petersburg lovers were depicting Moscow from various aspects, Mikhail Kuzmin<sup>51</sup>, one of them, after a visit to Moscow, wrote: ‘... the loud Moscow accent, the peculiar words, the way they clicked their heels as they walked along, the Tatar cheekbones and eyes, the moustaches twirled upwards, the shocking neckties, brightly coloured waistcoats and jackets, the sheer bravado and implacability of their ideas and judgements – all this made me think: new people have come forward.’<sup>52</sup>

The ideological confrontation between the Westernizers and the Slavophiles laid the basis of the opposition between Moscow and St. Petersburg. Moscow remained as the center of country’s spiritual life. While St. Petersburg aristocracy was representing the European fashion, nobles of Moscow adopted the traditional attitudes of the countryside. In Russian literature, Moscow became the antithesis of the St. Petersburg. In 1805, as Russia went to war against France, the idea of Moscow ‘as the heart of the Russia’ became indisputable.

Immense process of Europeanization with the foundation of St. Petersburg, there emerged an uncertainty in Russian culture about Russia’s place in Europe. This ambivalence, embodied mainly in the characters of St. Petersburg, is still perpetuating in Russia today. For centuries, Russians have never been sure if they are a part of the East of the West. On the contrary to European states, Russia had a great curiosity about the East and they even have some affinity. The ambiguous geography of the country, crossing road to Europe and Asia, caused insecurity in relations with the West. Compared to the East, Russians could define themselves as European, but in the eyes of Europe, they were Asiatic. And representation of Russia in Europe has always been the *raison d’etre* of St.

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<sup>48</sup> Mily Alexeyevich Balakirev, Russian composer and pianist.

<sup>49</sup> M. A. Balakirev, *Vospominaniia i pis'ma* (Leningrad, 1962).

<sup>50</sup> S. Grover, *The World of Art Movement in Russia*, Russian Review, vol. 32, number 1 (1973).

<sup>51</sup> Mikhail Alekseevich Kuzmin, Russian poet, novelist and musician.

<sup>52</sup> Anderi Belyi, *Mezhdu dvukh revoliutsii* (Leningrad, 1934).

Petersburg. As Marquis de Custine remarked, beyond the Nevsky Prospekt was giving the sense of “Asiatic barbarism by which Petersburg is constantly besieged.”<sup>53</sup> The European Russian desired to be accepted by the West as equals, but as they were rejected, they came to realize the values of Russia and that they are underrated by the West. Pushkin, for instance, as Europe denounced Russia due to its suppression of Polish insurrection in 1831, wrote a nationalistic poem - *To the Slanderers of Russia* – and he underlined the Asiatic nature of Russia.

### **In Conclusion**

St. Petersburg, which was like a stage between the sky and earth, was more than a city. While the city was being constructed the Russian were being reconstructed. In order to be a citizen of Petersburg, it was compulsory to leave Moscow’s dark and absolute customs behind and to move forward as a European Russian, to enter the modern, western world of enlightenment. St. Petersburg pioneered the idea of westernization since it was founded and it became a castle for its supporters.<sup>54</sup> As the city was founded where Neva River meets the Baltic Sea, this vey location of Petersburg typified the emancipation of Russia from its absolute traditions and exposed the process of ‘Russian awakening’.<sup>55</sup> As Pushkin remarked in his famous poem, *The Bronze Horseman*:

Here nature instructs us  
To cut a window on Europe<sup>56</sup>

Moreover Petersburg and its unusual identity triggered the longstanding dispute between Slavophilism and Westernization as Moscow and Petersburg the two poles of the dispute. This contrast between Slavophiles and Westernizers was quite substantial for Russia’s cultural fate. While Westernizers were advocating the European ideas and supporting St. Petersburg, Slavophiles on the other hand

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<sup>53</sup> Marquis de Custine, *Empire of the Czar: A Journey through Eternal Russia* (New York, 1989).

<sup>54</sup> Çiçek Anıl, *Rivalry Between Moscow and St. Petersburg*.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> А.С. Пушкин, *Медный Всадник*, Петербургская Повесть.  
<https://ilibrary.ru/text/451/p.1/index.html#fn1> (accessed December 6, 2019).

regarded Moscow as the center of ancient Russian lifestyle. And the reshaped ideological contrast between Moscow and Petersburg still does exist in the Russian popular culture.

As the issue of Westernization and Slavophilism in Russia being tackled from this point of view, the importance of St. Petersburg and its comparison with Moscow throughout the history become more discernible in this respect.

As of today, it is not a matter of debate whether St. Petersburg, 'Russia's window to Europe', is Russian or not but discussions about Russia's place in the Europe are still continuing, and St. Petersburg, with its Slavic heart and European face, has significant importance on these discussions. Yet, it is crucial to tackle Moscow together with St. Petersburg, as Nadezhda Mandelstam said "...only with Petersburg, without Moscow, it would have been impossible to breathe freely, to acquire the true feeling for Russia"<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> N. Mandelstam, *Hope Abandoned*, translation M. Hayward (London, 1989).

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