

FRIEND OR FEMME FATALE?: OLGA NOVIKOVA IN THE BRITISH PRESS, 1877-1925

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## ABSTRACT

MARY MELLON: Friend or Femme Fatale?: Olga Novikova in the British Press,  
1877-1925

(Under the direction of Dr. Louise McReynolds)

This thesis focuses on the career of Russian journalist Olga Alekseevna Novikova (1840-1925), a cosmopolitan aristocrat who became famous in England for her relentless advocacy of Pan-Slavism and Russian imperial interests, beginning with the Russo-Turkish War (1877-78). Using newspapers, literary journals, and other published sources, I examine both the nature of Novikova's contributions to the British press and the way the press reacted to her activism. I argue that Novikova not only played an important role in the production of the discourse on Russia in England, but became an object of that discourse as well. While Novikova pursued her avowed goal of promoting a better understanding between the British and Russian empires, a fascinated British press continually reinterpreted Novikova's image through varying evaluations of her nationality, gender, sexuality, politics and profession.

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The removal of national misunderstandings is a task which often baffles the wisdom of the greatest statesmen, and defies the effort of the most powerful monarchs. For a humble person like me to work in that direction, however feebly, is naturally regarded, even by myself, as somewhat ridiculous. My *rôle*, however, is that of a *pis aller*, whose abiding hope has been, that ere long so great a work may fall into more able and powerful hands.<sup>1</sup>

-Olga Novikova, 1880

When Olga Alekseevna Novikova, née Kireeva (1840-1925), arrived in London in 1868, she had little idea that she would soon become one of the most celebrated and most reviled Russian women in Great Britain. Born in Moscow to an affluent aristocratic family, Novikova possessed all the tools she needed to gain a foothold in London society. Besides the qualification of her class, she spoke English fluently, was by all accounts witty and charming, and enjoyed stimulating intellectual and political debates. When living with her husband in St. Petersburg she ran a salon, where she entertained many prominent European statesmen. Through her salon she became close friends with Lord Napier, the head of the British embassy in St. Petersburg, which increased her chances of being accepted in London society. Novikova, as a foreigner, also must have possessed an aura of the exotic that her English hosts might have found intriguing.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> O.K. [Ol'ga Alekseevna Novikova], *Russia and England from 1876 to 1880: A Protest and an Appeal* (London: Longmans, Green, 1880), 367-68.

<sup>2</sup> For biographical information on Novikova, see W. T. Stead, ed., *The M.P. for Russia: Reminiscences and Correspondence of Madame Olga Novikoff* (London: Andrew Melrose, 1909); Madame Olga Novikoff [Novikova], *Russian Memories* (New York: E. P. Dutton, [1917]); Mary F. Zirin, "Meeting the Challenge: Russian Women Reporters and the Balkans Crisis of the Late 1870s," in Barbara T. Norton and Jehanne M. Gheith, eds., *An Improper Profession: Women, Gender, and Journalism in Late Imperial Russia* (Durham, NC: Duke University, 2001), 145-48.

The year 1873 was an auspicious one in many ways for Novikova. In March she was formally presented to Queen Victoria by the Countess von Brunnow, the wife of the Russian ambassador, which helped to solidify her status in London society.<sup>3</sup> Bonding over a shared interest in ecclesiastical matters, Novikova became close friends with then-Prime Minister William Gladstone.<sup>4</sup> She felt comfortable enough in British society to host her own salon in London, where she struck up friendships with some of the leading politicians, publicists, and intellectuals of the day, including William Harcourt, the Earl of Clarendon and other members of Parliament and the historians A. W. Kinglake, Thomas Carlyle, Edward Freeman, and James A. Froude. If Novikova expounded on the relations between the Russian and British empires during these years, she did so in private social settings, but the series of events surrounding the unfolding crisis in the Balkans would soon prompt her to assume an active role in defending Russia's image in the British press.

The late nineteenth century was a period of mounting tensions between the Russian and British Empires. While the Crimean War (1853-56) was the only point at which open military conflict erupted, each side continued to be concerned with the other's growing territorial gains and spheres of influence in Asia. Politicians and intellectuals also became immersed in the "Eastern Question," or "*vostochnyi vopros*," which centered on the decaying hold of the Ottoman Empire on its territories in the Balkans, as well as imperial competition in Central Asia.<sup>5</sup> When overtaxed, mainly

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<sup>3</sup> "The Queen's Drawing Room," *Daily News* (London), 15 March 1873, <http://newspapers.bl.uk/blcs/>.

<sup>4</sup> Gladstone held the office four times in his political career (1868-74, 1880-85, 1886, 1892-94).

<sup>5</sup> See R. W. Seton-Watson, *Disraeli, Gladstone and the Eastern Question: A Study in Diplomacy and Party Politics* (London: Macmillan, 1935), Mihailo D. Stojanović, *The Great Powers and the Balkans, 1875-*

Christian peasants in the regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina began an insurrection against their Ottoman overlords in 1875, public opinion and political leadership in England and Russia polarized over the possibility of yet another military conflict.<sup>6</sup>

The peasant uprisings of 1875, followed by insurrections in Bulgaria and Serbian military intervention in 1876, invoked an outpouring of public sympathy for opponents of Ottoman rule from segments of both British and Russian societies. In Russia, Pan-Slav societies sent humanitarian and military aid to their “Orthodox brethren” in the Balkans, and many prominent cultural figures such as Lev Tolstoy and Fedor Dostoevsky took up their cause in print.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps the most prominent role during the crisis was played by that of Russian journalists. According to Louise McReynolds, the Balkans crisis was a “coming of age” for the Russian mass-circulation press in which it proved its power to influence national politics.<sup>8</sup> While the government was reluctant to enter into a military conflict, preferring to seek diplomatic intervention on the part of Europe’s “Great Powers,” the incessant clamoring for war from below finally forced the Russian government into declaring war on the Porte in April 1877.

The Balkans crisis proved to be a contentious issue for the British press, with opinions sharply divided according to the stances of the major political parties. Debates in Parliament revolved around the preservation of Ottoman territorial integrity and the

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1878 (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1939), Barbara Jelavich, *St. Petersburg and Moscow: Tsarist and Soviet Foreign Policy, 1814-1974* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1974).

<sup>6</sup> For more on the Balkans crisis and Russo-Turkish War, see Dennis P. Hupchick, *The Balkans: From Constantinople to Communism* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 255-67.

<sup>7</sup> Jelena Milojković-Djurić, *Panslavism and National Identity in Russia and in the Balkans, 1830-1880: Images of the Self and Others* (New York: Columbia University, 1994), 97-99.

<sup>8</sup> Louise McReynolds, *The News Under Russia’s Old Regime: the Development of a Mass-circulation Press* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1991), 74-75.

specter of Russian intervention in the Balkans. After the Conservative [Tory] Party gained the majority in Parliament in 1875, the newly established Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli (1868, 1874-1880) privileged British imperial interests above all else and thus continued to support the sovereignty of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans and the containment of Russia at all costs.<sup>9</sup> Conservative either by ownership or editorship, London newspapers such as the *Standard*, the *Pall Mall Gazette*, and the *Daily Telegraph* accordingly stressed Russia's imperialist designs in taking action against the Ottoman Empire. It was during this period that the term "jingoism," based on a song that was popular in pubs and music halls at the time, was first coined, as politicians and journalists clamored for British military intervention after Russia's declaration of war on the Ottoman Empire in 1877.<sup>10</sup>

British Liberals [Whigs], at the time in the minority in Parliament, generally resented what they perceived as Disraeli's reckless attempts to drive England into a potentially costly war with Russia. The Liberal Party gained considerable ground in August 1876 when the London *Daily News* broke a story about atrocities that Ottoman troops committed against Bulgarian civilians while trying to put down the rebellion. Liberal editors like William T. Stead, a determined Nonconformist who believed that the rule of Christians by Muslims amounted to heresy, seized upon the example of the "Bulgarian atrocities" as proof of the need for the Great Powers to intervene against Ottoman leadership, rather than against Russia. Although former Prime Minister William

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<sup>9</sup> Jelavich, *St. Petersburg and Moscow*, 177. Although his contemporaries often referred to Disraeli as Lord Beaconsfield, the title the Queen conferred on him in 1876, the general trend of histories of the era has been to refer to him by his birth name.

<sup>10</sup> Peter Hopkirk, *The Great Game: On Secret Service in High Asia* (London: John Murray, 1990), 379. The song went as follows: "We don't want to fight, but by jingo, if we do/ We've got the men, we've got the ships, we've got the money too./ We've fought the Bear before, and while we're Britons true,/ The Russians shall not have Constantinople."

Gladstone had been on the “back bench” of the party since the Conservatives gained the majority, his publication on the atrocities, titled *The Bulgarian Horrors*, propelled him back in the spotlight.<sup>11</sup>

Beginning with a survey of official diplomatic documents that confirmed the *Daily News*’ account of the atrocities, Gladstone castigated the Conservative leadership for its supposedly nonchalant attitude toward the plight of Balkan Christians. He lamented the fact that Russia had gained the moral high ground over Britain through the latter’s inactivity. He stated, “It is melancholy, but it is also true, that we, who upon this Eastern ground fought with Russia, and thought Austria slack, and Germany all but servile, have actually for months past been indebted, and are even now indebted, to all or some of these very Powers, possibly to Russia most among them, for having played the part which we think specially our own, in resistance to tyranny, in befriending the oppressed, in labouring for the happiness of mankind.”<sup>12</sup> Gladstone argued for a concerted effort by the above-mentioned powers to intervene on behalf of the rebels, stating that “the time has come for [England] to emulate Russia by sharing in her good deeds, and to reserve [British] opposition until she shall visibly endeavour to turn them to evil account.”<sup>13</sup>

It was from the sea of sparring politicians and journalists that Olga Novikova emerged as a public figure in the British debate over Russian intervention in the Balkans. Novikova was by upbringing a staunch Pan-Slavist and felt that the liberation of Slavic subjects from “foreign” rule, which included Hapsburg as well as Ottoman, and an

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<sup>11</sup> Richard Shannon, *Gladstone* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, [1999]), 2:168-73.

<sup>12</sup> W. E. Gladstone, *Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East* (London: John Murray, 1876), 29-30.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.



alliance with Russia represented the natural order of things. In the end it was a personal tragedy that encouraged her to commit her views to paper. Her brother Nikolai Kireev had been one of many Russians to travel to Serbia to aid insurgents. He eventually volunteered in the Serbian army under the alias “Khadzhi-Garai” and was killed in action in July 1876.

In her own words, Novikova “simply lost [her] head.”<sup>14</sup> After Kireev’s death she sent impassioned letters to Gladstone and other prominent politicians, blaming England’s pro-Turkish policies regarding the Balkan uprisings of 1876 as the source for her brother’s untimely demise; he “would not have been the first hero to be killed at the head of the unarmed Serbian troops, if those had been enrolled as official soldiers, well-armed and ready for battle.”<sup>15</sup> Realizing the power of the British and Russian presses to influence public opinion, Novikova began writing articles for newspapers in both countries to promote the Pan-Slavist cause. She was already good friends with the conservative editor Mikhail Katkov in Moscow and joined fellow Pan-Slavs in lobbying for Russian aid to the Balkans in the pages of his *Moskovskie vedomosti* [*Moscow Gazette*]. In England she formed an alliance with William Stead in late 1877 and became a frequent contributor to his paper, the Darlington *Northern Echo*.

Although Novikova considered it her duty to explain the noble aims of her compatriots in going to war against the Ottoman Empire, she soon found herself taking on another cause: the correction of negative stereotypes of Russia and its people that pervaded coverage of the Russo-Turkish War. Indeed, one of the most remarkable aspects of the British press, whether leftist, rightist, or in between, during this period was the

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<sup>14</sup> Novikova, *Russian Memories*, 39.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

tendency of journalists to express their opinions on Russian foreign policy using a rhetoric of civilization. As Larry Wolff has demonstrated, in the age of the Enlightenment Western intellectuals constructed the idea of Eastern Europe, which included Russia as well as the European territories of the Ottoman Empire, as barbaric, exotic, and unenlightened. While Wolff stresses the discourse on Eastern Europe as a foil for Western Europeans' self-definition as civilized and enlightened, his discussion of its legacy during the Cold War and afterward demonstrates how these ideas had a lasting impact on how populations of Eastern Europe were treated by outsiders.<sup>16</sup>

Other scholars have explored British views of Russians in the decades leading up to the Russo-Turkish War. In his study on the interaction of public opinion and foreign policy in early-nineteenth-century England, J. H. Gleason demonstrated Russophobia to be a persistent and highly influential sentiment within the British press and policy circles throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>17</sup> In her recent survey of impressions of reform-era Russia in the British press, Iwona Sakowicz argues that "Russia was, for the majority, an Asian barbarism and despotism."<sup>18</sup> The opinions of British correspondents who reported on Russia did not differ significantly from those of the travel writers of Wolff's account because they were already conditioned to look for differences rather than similarities between the two countries. During the late 1870s and early 1880s, press coverage of terrorist activity in Russia and the testimony of political exiles also provided powerful images of the Russian government's oppression of its population. Despite the violent and

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<sup>16</sup> Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University, 1994), 1-16.

<sup>17</sup> John Howes Gleason, *The Genesis of Russophobia in Great Britain: A Study of the Interaction of Policy and Opinion* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1950), 272-79.

<sup>18</sup> Iwona Sakowicz, "Russia and the Russians: Opinions of the British Press During the Reign of Alexander II," *Journal of European Studies* 35, no. 3 (2005): 281.

destructive nature of their crimes, high-profile terrorists such as Vera Zasulich and Sofia Perovskaia gained sympathy in the British press for their struggle against the tsarist regime.<sup>19</sup> Political exiles such as Petr Lavrov, Petr Kropotkin and Sergei Stepniak-Kravchinskii continued to protest against the Russian government in revolutionary publications throughout Europe and found avid audiences among those members of British society that prided themselves on their democratic institutions.

In response to the pervasive rhetoric on Russian barbarism and despotism in the British press, Novikova became the self-appointed defender of autocratic Russia in Britain. As such, she became a well-known and controversial figure among her contemporaries. Disraeli famously derided her as “the M.P. for Russia,” while her opponents in the press accused her of being a political agent and spy for her government. Yet Novikova overcame such claims to enjoy a prolific journalistic career spanning the years from 1877 through the 1917 revolution. Besides the *Northern Echo*, her articles were published in the *Nineteenth Century*, the *Contemporary Review*, the *Quarterly Review*, *Fraser’s Magazine*, the *Asiatic Review*, the *Pall Mall Gazette*, the *Times* (London), the *Daily Mail*, the *Spectator*, and the *Review of Reviews*, while in Russia she contributed material to *Moskovskie vedomosti* [*Moscow Gazette*], *Rus’*, *Sovremennye izvestiia* [*Contemporary News*], *Novoe vremia* [*New Times*], *Zhivopisnoe obozrenie* [*Review of Painting*], and *Russkoe obozrenie* [*Russian Review*].

This paper is an attempt to explain both the nature of Novikova’s contributions to the British press and the way the press reacted to her activism. While the few historians that have dealt directly with Novikova’s career have characterized her as a conduit for

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<sup>19</sup> Cynthia Marsh, “The *Times* (1881) and the Russian Women Terrorists,” *Scottish Slavonic Review* 21 (1993), 53-63; Steven G. Marks, *How Russia Shaped the Modern World: From Art to Anti-Semitism, Ballet to Bolshevism* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2004), 18-20.

Pan-Slavist ideology to reach Great Britain, such arguments minimize her individual contribution to the ongoing debate.<sup>20</sup> While introducing her readers to the tenets of Pan-Slavism and Slavophilism, Novikova tailored them to fit particular notions of British imperialism in an effort to win over the British reading public. Working independently of the Russian embassy, she provided a popular appeal for sympathy with the “Slavonic cause” and encouraged her readers to reflect on their own country’s conduct at home and abroad before judging Russia’s policies. In the process, she provided Liberal oppositionists with the alternate narrative of Russian civilization they needed to combat pro-war agitation rooted in Russophobic rhetoric. In the years following the Balkans crisis, Novikova continued to act as Russia’s defender in England. Novikova’s continued ability to get published even after the crisis was over attests to the sustained interest in her arguments within British society.

In this paper I intend to demonstrate that Novikova not only played an important role in the production of the discourse on Russia in England, but became an object of that discourse as well. Operating in the same period that the *femme fatale* type became prominent in British literature, Novikova was portrayed by many as a female agent whose mission was to seduce British politicians into complacency over Russian expansionism. Invoking the name of “Madame de Novikoff” therefore became a way of exposing the threat that Russian expansionism continued to pose to the civilized world. Others accepted Novikova as an intelligent, cosmopolitan woman whose independent status belied the narrative of a universally oppressed and superficially civilized Russian society. As women’s rights movements gained steam in England and abroad, Novikova became a

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<sup>20</sup> See Joseph O. Baylen, “Madame Olga Novikov, Propagandist,” *American Slavic and East European Review*, vol. 10, no. 4 (Dec., 1951), 256; Zirin, “Meeting the Challenge,” 146.

symbol of both derision and empowerment over the issue of female political participation. By the end of her career, she had become, for better or worse, a fixture both in the British press and popular imagination.

In examining Novikova's career and interpretation by British commentators, I rely on newspapers, journals, and other published sources available in American libraries or online. Many British newspapers from the period are preserved in online archives, although most of the major Conservative papers are not. Although I provide general details of Novikova's career through her death in 1925, the source analysis is weighted toward the end of the nineteenth century, as a greater quantity of newspapers and journals are available for this period.

Although much more work needs to be done on Novikova's journalistic endeavors in Russia, the issue lies beyond the scope of this paper due to source limitations. When possible, I will refer to her Russian articles to put her English writing into perspective, but many of the Russian publications that her writing appeared are not available outside of Russia. All of the published biographical material on Novikova, even her own memoirs, *Russian Memories* (1917), focuses on her career in England. While such sources provide lists of the publications to which she contributed, they give little idea of when or how often her articles appeared. Furthermore, although given Novikova's celebrity abroad it is difficult to imagine that no Russians knew of her activities, there is little reason to suppose that Novikova's Russian writings would have caused the same sensation there as her English ones caused in Great Britain. In Russia, Novikova was a known entity, and even if her contemporaries did not agree with her views, they would at

least have been familiar with her Slavophile ideology. Abroad, however, Novikova could be considered an exotic foreigner and a novelty.

### **The Genesis of a “Lady Diplomatist”**

Both Novikova’s Pan-Slav sentiments and her interest in England were rooted in her early childhood. She was born Olga Alekseevna Kireeva in Moscow in 1840 to a Aleksei Kireev and Aleksandra Kireeva nee Alab’eva. Aleksei Kireev was a retired army officer who had been decorated for his role in quashing the Polish rebellion in 1832. The Kireevs owned estates in Moscow and Tambov province and were also extremely well connected.<sup>21</sup> Nicholas I (1796-1855) was godfather to all three of the Kireev children, and Olga’s brothers Aleksandr and Nikolai served as pages to the empress before their entrance into the prestigious Horse Guards Regiment. Both of Olga’s parents spoke English fluently, and her father had developed an appreciation for English culture through the efforts of a Scottish tutor. Rather than sending Olga to a girls’ educational institute, the Kireevs provided her with private tutors and governesses.<sup>22</sup> She learned English, German, and French, and this would facilitate her later European travels. The Kireevs also interacted with many of Russia’s founding Slavophile and Pan-Slav thinkers, including A. S. Khomiakov and Konstantin Aksakov, and in this environment Olga grew to espouse similar views. It was through this circle that she became acquainted with Ivan Aksakov and Mikhail Katkov, who would play major roles in her future journalistic endeavors in Russia.

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<sup>21</sup> “Russia and England,” *Quarterly Review* 149: 298 (Apr. 1880), 520, <http://britishperiodicals.chadwyck.com/>.

<sup>22</sup> W.T. Stead, *MP for Russia*, 1:7-8.

Olga joined another prominent Russian family when she married Ivan Novikov in 1860. Novikov, a scion of the ancient Dolgorukii family, was a general on the staff of Grand Duke Nikolai and twenty years Olga's senior. The couple's only son, Aleksandr, was born in 1861 and, despite her new duties as a mother and wife, Novikova's horizons seemed to broaden considerably in the following decade. Whereas the Kireevs moved in conservative, Slavophile circles in Moscow, her husband's family was much more cosmopolitan. Her brother-in-law, Evgenii Novikov, was Russian ambassador in Vienna, a fact that would bring Novikova into contact not only with Russian but foreign statesmen. In the early 1860s she also began attending the salon of Grand Duchess Elena Pavlovna (1807-1873), the sister-in-law of Nicholas I and an influential member of the Russian Court during the reign of Alexander II.

When Stead later characterized Elena Pavlovna's salon as the source of Novikova's social rather than political development, he probably underestimated the political significance of salons both in England and in Russia during the nineteenth century.<sup>23</sup> The salon in Russia, introduced in the late eighteenth century after the French model, had by the early nineteenth century become an important outlet for public opinion.<sup>24</sup> As the autocracy discouraged expression of oppositionist views, salons also represented safe settings for political debate and represented a rare space in which women could participate in the political sphere. In a time when the need for sweeping political and economic changes was becoming increasingly apparent to the tsar, imperial

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<sup>23</sup> W.T. Stead, *MP for Russia*, 1:22.

<sup>24</sup> Alexander Martin, *Romantics, Reformers, Reactionaries: Russian Conservative Thought and Politics in the Reign of Alexander I* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University, 1997), 12.

bureaucracy and intelligentsia, Elena Pavlovna used her gatherings to foster discussion of pressing issues of reform among the diverse attendees.<sup>25</sup>

As an attendee of Elena Pavlovna's salon, Novikova was able to form acquaintances with a variety of political, social, and cultural figures. Thus from a relatively early age she interacted with the likes of Aleksandr Gorchakov, Russia's foreign minister (1856-1882), and Konstantin Pobedonostsev, tutor to the tsars and the future procurator of the Holy Synod under Alexander III. As Elena Pavlovna's salon declined in importance during the decade and the grand duchess spent more time abroad, Novikova filled the void by holding her own salon in St. Petersburg.<sup>26</sup> In *Russian Memories* Novikova describes this as an independent endeavor, noting that her husband was "not particularly fond of singing or playing" but did not "oppose" her gatherings.<sup>27</sup> Among the early frequenters of her salon were Lord Napier, the British diplomat to Russia in St. Petersburg, the Turkish ambassador Khalil Pasha, and the composer and musician Anton Rubinstein.<sup>28</sup>

After her marriage, Novikova's extensive European travels expanded her network of correspondents. She met British politicians Charles Villiers and the Earl of Clarendon while on a trip to Germany, and she also befriended the Austrian statesman Count Beust while on a year-long visit with her brother-in-law in Vienna in 1871. As her Pan-Slav tendencies meant that Novikova was predisposed to dislike Austria-Hungary, which

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<sup>25</sup> W. Bruce Lincoln, "Russia's 'Enlightened' Bureaucrats and the Problem of State Reform, 1848-1856," *Cahiers du Monde russe et soviétique*, vol. 12, no. 4 (Oct-Dec, 1971), [pp. 410-421], 417.

<sup>26</sup> For the declining influence of Elena Pavlovna's salon, see W. Bruce Lincoln, "The Circle of the Grand Duchess Yelena Pavlovna, 1847-1861," *The Slavonic and East European Journal* 48, no. 112 (July 1970), 386-387.

<sup>27</sup> Novikova, *Russian Memories*, 72.

<sup>28</sup> Novikova, *Russian Memories*, 71-72.



maintained sovereignty over many of her “co-nationalists,” it was British society that proved the most captivating for her. After her 1873 visit she made annual stays in the country that ranged in duration from weeks to months, during which she interacted with some of England’s leading intellectual and political figures. Besides Gladstone, Carlyle, and others already mentioned, Novikova rubbed shoulders with the likes of Disraeli, poet and literary critic Matthew Arnold, and her literary idol George Eliot.

By the time of her brother’s death in July 1876, Novikova had compiled a vast network of correspondents that she could utilize to spread the message of the “Slavonic cause.” Before her initial forays into the British press, she participated in the Balkans debate behind the scenes, circulating translations of Ivan Aksakov’s speeches to the Moscow Benevolent Committee and Mikhail Katkov’s articles and exchanging opinions with Gladstone and other Liberal politicians. While it might seem contradictory that British Liberals would align themselves with the staunchly conservative Novikova, their complementary goals in terms of foreign policy trumped differences in political ideology in this instance. Few of Novikova’s associates, Gladstone included, could technically be considered “Russophiles,” but most shared her desire to avoid a potentially disastrous military confrontation between the two empires.

### **Novikova Goes to War**

When Novikova began contributing to Katkov’s paper at the beginning of 1877, she was part of a broader movement in the Russian press that succeeded in stirring up popular sentiment in favor of a formal declaration of war on the part of the Russian government against Turkey. Novikova’s numerous articles, usually under the rubric

“News from England” [*Vesti iz Anglii*], were intended to allay fears that England would come to the aid of the Turks if Russia declared war. In order to achieve this goal, Novikova tried to convey the existence of a robust Liberal opposition that was supportive of Russia and could keep Disraeli and the Conservative ministry in check.

In one of her first articles, Novikova described scenes from the National Convention on the Eastern Question, also known as the St. James Conference, to display widespread British sympathy for Russia’s cause. The conference, which began in December 1876, was dominated by Liberal oppositionists condemning the Bulgarian atrocities. Novikova, who had been in attendance, provided an inspiring account of the demonstration for her readers:

One can positively say that the national conference represented the pick of the educated, most intellectual part of England; one also can positively say that we Russians have never seen such an immense gathering of English people, pronouncing such a unanimous sympathy with Russia, trust in our government, [and] protest against base suspicions and scandalous unfairness toward us. Loud ‘hurrahs!’, the waving of handkerchiefs, [and] applause accompanied every expression of sympathy for us.<sup>29</sup>

Novikova also used this description of the enthusiasm at the National Convention to shame members of Russian society that remained holdouts against the Pan-Slav cause. She wrote, “I speak frankly and not without sadness....Gather in any Petersburg salon such a large assembly—and you will not meet with such a unanimous sympathy for the holy cause, which should be dear to every Russian....Englishmen are foreigners, and this matter is for them foreign, but we ourselves are Orthodox, we are Slavs, we are *our own*.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>O.K. [Novikova], “Iz zapisnoi tetradi: Lord Bekonsfil’d,” *Moskovskie vedomosti*, 19 February 1877.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. Italics in original.

Novikova's contributions to the *Northern Echo*, in contrast, were meant to keep Russia *out* of a war. Novikova and Stead's collaboration in England was based on the shared premise that the Conservative press was manipulating British public opinion in favor of war by distorting the nature of Russian society and foreign policy. London papers that typically supported the Conservative party included the *Standard*, the *Morning Post*, the *Pall Mall Gazette*, and the *Daily Telegraph*. In *M.P. for Russia*, Stead included these papers along with *Vanity Fair* and other "society papers" as participants of what he termed the "Jingo press."<sup>31</sup> Although such publications used a number of strategies for promoting military intervention against Russia in the Balkans, one popular tactic was to question Russia's ability to bring "civilized" rule to the area, should it succeed in its war against the Ottoman Empire.

As what Stephen Koss describes as "the fiercest of Gladstone's Fleet Street opponents," the *Pall Mall Gazette* affords an excellent example of how the debate on intervention in the Balkans often became a question of Russia's fitness to govern.<sup>32</sup> During the years leading up to the war through the time it changed ownership in 1880, the newspaper, under the editorship of the Conservative Frederick Greenwood, published a range of articles that not only addressed the suspected materialistic motives of the Russian government for going to war, but a whole range of issues pertaining to its domestic policies, from formal education to peasant administration, in order to demonstrate Russia's unfitness for any kind of civilizing mission.

The *Pall Mall Gazette* ran a series of articles in early 1877 on the impact of emancipation on the peasantry in Russia. Based on the premise that "the Russian

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<sup>31</sup> Stead, *M.P. for Russia*, 1:506.

<sup>32</sup> Koss, *Political Press*, 1:211.

peasantry, who, in a community without a middle class and without a nobility, are, in fact, the Russian nation,” the author suggested that the state of the Russian peasantry should be seen as a gauge for Russia’s fitness to “civilize” Turkey. Focusing on reports of drunkenness, crime, and poor living conditions, he questioned “committing the regeneration of Turkey to the representatives of a nation charged by its Government with universal drunkenness, idleness, and theft, and with more than Turkish ignorance and more than Turkish superstition.”

Commentators also searched Russia’s record in Central Asia, an area where it was also ostensibly carrying out a civilizing mission, for a Russian alternative to the Bulgarian atrocities. One article used a report of a Russian massacre of native civilians by the orders of General Kaufman during a Russian campaign against Khiva in just such a role. The author writer argued that to let the Russian campaign against Turkey continue unhindered would “let commanders of the stamp of General Kaufman perpetrate systematically and deliberately against Mahommedans [Muslims] the same cruelties which savage officers of Bashi-Bazouks [perpetrators of Bulgarian atrocities] committed against Christians.”<sup>33</sup> Further on, the same author posed a series of rhetorical questions: “Are the atrocities we have described irresistible evidence of Russian misrule? Do they show the Russians to be incapable of government, and their civilization to be a sham? There are, again, other persons who, admitting that the Slavonic Christians of the Turkish provinces are extremely barbarous, yet say that their barbarism is the fruit of Turkish oppression. Is Turkish oppression the secret of Russian barbarism?”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> “Russian Atrocity,” *Pall Mall Gazette* (London), 5 October 1876, <http://newspapers.bl.uk/blcs/>.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

British commentators also accessed the views of Russian socialists and nihilists that opposed autocratic rule in order to delegitimize Russian claims to a selfless “holy mission” in the Balkans. In a strange union of British conservatism and Russian radicalism, the *Pall Mall Gazette* reproduced quotes from *Vpered!* [*Forward!*], a journal edited in London by the exiled populist Petr Lavrov, in an article titled “A Russian Socialist’s View of the Eastern Question.” The opinions that the author found in the Russian journal supported the idea that Pan-Slav sentiment was neither genuine nor widespread within the Russian empire. As summarized in the English paper, “In some places ... no enthusiasm can be awakened, and bitter complaints are heard of the ‘dull apathy of society.’ In others, people have made capital out of the agitation, have danced and drunk and made merry in the name of ‘our Slavonic brothers,’ but have given them nothing but fine words and lofty sentiment.”<sup>35</sup>

Even before her collaboration with Stead began, Novikova herself became a part of the narrative of Russian perfidy and backwardness. In her May 3, 1877 installment of “News from England,” Novikova’s usual commentary on the British “Turkophile” press covered a series of articles in the British press that “directly stat[ed] that [Gladstone’s] movement to the aid of Slavs and Russia was exclusively due to foreign female on Gladstone.” She denounced such rumors, stating that “[n]obody that knew of Gladstone and the independent nature of his opinions seriously believed this, but in England they often twist things out of shape when this can be of use to one’s party.”<sup>36</sup> She gave no indication that she herself was supposed to be supplying this “foreign female influence.”

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<sup>35</sup> “A Russian Socialist’s View of the Eastern Question,” *Pall Mall Gazette*, 19 October 1876.

<sup>36</sup> O.K. [Novikova], “Vesti iz Anglii,” *Moskovskiiia Vedomosti*, 3 May 1877.

In fact, by the beginning of 1877, Novikova had become a public figure in the least desirable of ways: as a target for opponents of Russian intervention in the Balkans. Owing to her known proximity to Gladstone and other politicians, members of the press began speculating on the particularly female weapons that Novikova may have been employing with regard to her English political connections. A January 1877 article titled “A Lady Diplomatist” noted, “A story is now circulating ... which says that an extremely clever Russian lady, who during the last twelve months has settled in London, has been of great use to her Government, and has ably seconded Count Schouvaloff [P. A. Shuvalov, Russian ambassador to England] in his necessarily more open diplomacy.” Without naming Novikova outright, the writer proceeded to give details of her biography and connections that would have left the informed reader in little doubt of whom the article described. He credited her “wit, enthusiasm, and intelligence” with effecting a profound change in Gladstone’s opinions on Turkey since the Crimean War and concluded with the ominous statement that “between this lady and Mr. Gladstone there has been a correspondence.”<sup>37</sup>

These few short paragraphs encapsulated many of the anxieties that would be voiced over Novikova’s role in British society in politics in the coming years. First and foremost was the suggestion that Novikova was a Russian agent. The article significantly commenced: “All readers of history ... know the important part which Russian ladies have played in the secret diplomacy of that Power at foreign Courts.” This indicated both a belief in the devious nature of the Russian government and suggested a special underhandedness in the employment of women to further its causes. The implication that

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<sup>37</sup> “A Lady Diplomatist,” *Hampshire Telegraph* (Portsmouth, UK), 13 January 1877, <http://newspapers.bl.uk/blcs/>.

other Russian women were involved was probably a reference to the activities of Countess Dorothea Lieven, nee Benckendorf (1785-1857), who, in her capacity as the wife of the Russian ambassador in London from 1812 through 1834, took on an active diplomatic role for the Russian empire.<sup>38</sup> Many of Lieven's British contemporaries recognized and respected her political abilities, but it was also rumored that she used sexual liaisons to achieve her goals. While more positive representations of Lieven existed, both as a woman of fashion and great intelligence, even Novikova believed that she used sex as a political tool and had a strong aversion to being likened to her predecessor.<sup>39</sup>

Another fear denoted by the article was that powerful members of government were actually being seduced to betray the interests of their country. The comment about the "diplomacy of the *salon*" may have been entirely innocent, as Novikova did hold a weekly salon during her stays in London, yet the idea that her separation from her husband would facilitate such diplomacy suggests that sexual liaisons were a component of her activities. Such sexual connotations of Novikova's activities would be reproduced in the months and even years that followed. Most importantly, the image of Novikova as a female agent served to undermine Gladstone's position, by suggesting both irresponsibility in the form of closely associating with a foreign national, and moral weakness, in the form of lasciviousness.

Thanks to the efficiency of communications made possible by the telegraph, the story of "A Lady Diplomatist" circulated rapidly through the British press. By the end of

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<sup>38</sup> See John Charmley, *The Princess and the Politicians: Sex, Intrigue, and Diplomacy, 1812-1840* (New York: Viking, 2005).

<sup>39</sup> William Tuckwell, *A. W. Kinglake: A Biographical and Literary Study* (London: G. Bell, 1902), available at <http://infomotions.com/etexts/gutenberg/dirs/etext96/awkbi10.htm>.

the month, newspapers in London, Liverpool, Newcastle, Birmingham, Cardiff, and elsewhere had all run adapted versions of the article, focusing on the idea of a compromising correspondence existing the “clever Russian lady” and Gladstone. According to these publications, “it was said ... that [Novikova] held letters which did more honour to the heart than the head of Mr. Gladstone, and the production of which may be exceedingly ‘inconvenient to him hereafter.’”<sup>40</sup> While Novikova may have captivated any number of politicians with her feminine charms, it was feared that she had actually succeeded in gaining power over Gladstone by inciting damaging romantic or political statements. In the end, Novikova served as an object through which Gladstone’s political opponents could malign him, and in this context at least, her actual political inclinations mattered little.

The commotion produced from the first article was enough for Gladstone to make an effort to categorically deny the existence of any such compromising material. After receiving the article from a correspondent requesting an explanation, he replied that the whole matter was “one of those vulgar intrusions into private life which are commonly attended with an unscrupulous rashness in assertion. That any correspondent of mine on the Eastern question is in possession of such letters as it describes is entirely false.”<sup>41</sup> He ended his note by declaring he could not “appear in print in such a matter,” but this statement was more likely a way to appear to not dignify such accusations with a response, although he did just that. While most of the papers that were following the

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<sup>40</sup> “Mr. Gladstone,” *Times* (London), 22 January 1877; “Mr. Gladstone and the Russian Lady,” *Western Mail* (Cardiff, Wales), 22 January 1877; “Mr. Gladstone and the Russian Lady,” *Liverpool Mercury* 22 January 1877; “Mr. Gladstone and the Lady Diplomatist,” *Birmingham Daily Post*, 22 January 1877; “The Russian Lady Diplomatist,” *The Newcastle Courant*, 26 January 1877. All of the preceding articles accessed at <http://newspapers.bl.uk/blcs/>.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.



story printed Gladstone's response, some remained unconvinced. An article in *Vanity Fair* pointed out that Gladstone did not deny "his co-operation and correspondence with a Russian agent," and although he was "prone ... to 'appear in print' on matters of every kind, from vaccination to Papal infallibility ... [it was] therefore rather puzzling to find him dumb upon a point affecting his own personal honour." The suggestion was that Gladstone had something to hide, namely liaisons with the Russian agent "Madame Novikoff," and although such attacks were mainly directed at the politician, they colored perceptions of Novikova's character for years to come.

Gladstone's response was apparently unsuccessful in defusing rumors about Novikova's intentions, as references to her status as an intriguer became commonplace. In November 1877 the *Whitehall Review* attested to the existence of a "Schouvaloff [Shuvalov]-Gladstone-Novikoff conspiracy," stating that the Russian ambassador "induced" Novikova to "enlist [Gladstone] as the champion of the Bulgarian Christians."<sup>42</sup> As in previous articles, the image of Novikova as an agent of the Russian government was employed to highlight the evil motives of Russia's official representatives and to undermine Gladstone's position. Proponents of anti-Russian sentiment also used Novikova as an emblem of Russia's uncivilized repression of its people. The author of a March 1877 article in *Vanity Fair* reasoned that, although from "mere patriotic motives [Novikova] may have set up in London as an amateur diplomatist, ... no Russian, male or female, if not desirous of expatriation or a journey to Siberia, could play such a part in London for a single week without having to submit to

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<sup>42</sup> Quoted in Stead, ed. *M.P. for Russia* 1: 327.

the control and the orders of the Russian Embassy.”<sup>43</sup> Thus Novikova, like every Russian, remained the autocrat’s pawn.

These initial attacks on Novikova’s character preceded the start of her writing career in England and demonstrate that Novikova was for better or worse established as a “diplomatist” before she became known as an “authoress.” When Novikova began writing for the *Northern Echo*, and later when her letters were republished in collected volumes, her readers would have to contend with conceptions of Novikova’s character before they could judge her as a writer.

Novikova’s first piece to appear in the *Northern Echo* was a letter to the editor demonstrating the genuine zeal of the Russian people in their support for the war. Thereafter, all of her contributions to the paper appeared in article form under the heading “From our Russian correspondent” and signed “O.K.” As Stead later explained, his decision to include Novikova’s commentary in his paper was based on the conviction that “genuine, unselfish enthusiasm was the very element that was the most needed” at the time in the debate over intervention.<sup>44</sup> By billing Novikova as a “Russian correspondent,” Stead indicated that O.K. was a first-hand observer of Russian society, thereby lending authority to her arguments.

Novikova’s decision to collaborate with Stead had both benefits and drawbacks. It is doubtful that Novikova could have found a more sympathetic editor, but if Novikova’s mission was to reach as many British readers as possible, the *Northern Echo* was not the ideal vehicle for her task. As a provincial paper, it could not match the circulations

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<sup>43</sup> Maltman Berry, “Mr. Gladstone,” *Vanity Fair*, 3 March 1877. Reproduced in *Marx/Engels: Werke, Artikel, Entwürfe Mai 1875 bis Mai 1883* (Berlin: Dietz, 1985), 457-459, available at [http://books.google.com/books?id=FvNo3us\\_thoC&lpg=PP1&pg=PP1#v=onepage&q&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=FvNo3us_thoC&lpg=PP1&pg=PP1#v=onepage&q&f=false).

<sup>44</sup> Stead, ed., *M.P. for Russia*, 1:390.

achieved by more prestigious Fleet Street publications such as the *Times* or the pro-Disraeli *Daily Telegraph*, which in 1876 boasted the largest circulation in the world.<sup>45</sup> Stead's journal was extremely popular among Liberal oppositionists, however, and he ensured that issues with Novikova's correspondence reached "about two hundred of the leading members of the anti-Turkish party" in England.<sup>46</sup>

In an effort to access a wider audience, Novikova published her collected articles in three suggestively titled volumes that appeared between 1877 and 1880. The first, *Is Russia Wrong?* (1877), included ten letters that she wrote for the *Northern Echo* between November and December 1877 and included a preface by her close friend James A. Froude. While Novikova maintained the use of her initials to sign her articles that appeared in the actual newspaper, less effort was made to hide her identity in her collected work, as the name that appeared on her title page was "A Russian Lady." The book was also dedicated to "the memory of Nicholas Kiréeff," which provided a further clue to her identity. Froude introduced Novikova as follows: "The writer is a Russian lady well acquainted with England, who has seen with regret the misconceptions which she considers prevail among us as to the character of her countrymen; she has therefore employed such skill as she possesses in an honourable attempt to remove them.... [S]he writes in good faith, and any contribution to our knowledge, which is true as far as it goes, ought to be welcome to us."<sup>47</sup> While none of Novikova's letters explicitly indicated the gender of their author, those involved with the book's production may have felt that a

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<sup>45</sup> Griffiths, *Fleet Street*, 97.

<sup>46</sup> Stead, ed., *M.P. for Russia*, 1:407.

<sup>47</sup> J. A. Froude, preface to A Russian Lady [Novikova], *Is Russia Wrong?: A Series of Letters by a Russian Lady* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1877), vii.

female writer would evoke more sympathy for her cause. British society had certainly not been very receptive to the male-dominated overtures of the Russian embassy, given the prevalence of Russophobia in the press.

Novikova's 1877 letters covered a broad range of topics, including the nature of Pan-Slavism, Russia's autocratic system of government, and perceived "English prejudices" against Russia. In Stead's journal Novikova attempted to demonstrate Russian justifications for going to war, emphasizing the sacrifice of Russian soldiers in the cause of liberating their Slavic brethren. She alternated between pleas for support and understanding from the British people with attacks on Disraeli's government and war-minded journalists, whom she referred to collectively as the "Turkophile press." Her method of criticism was very direct, and she often employed sarcasm and humor to argue her points, which caught the attention of most of the reviewers of her books. She generally used specific speeches or articles that appeared in the press as jumping-off points for her polemics, demonstrating that she was well read on her subject.

Novikova's primary goal was to convince her audience that Russia's war against the Ottoman Empire was a mission of liberation, and one that was uniquely Russia's duty to pursue. As she succinctly stated, it was "the duty of free Slavs to assist their enslaved brethren."<sup>48</sup> While the *Pall Mall Gazette* used the condition of the peasantry as a sign of Russia's general backwardness, Novikova connected Russia's mission in the Balkans with the emancipation of the serfs in Russia under Alexander II, stating that "never were we [Russians] so unanimously and enthusiastically united in support of our heroic Czar, who, after liberating twenty-three millions of serfs at home, is now crowning his reign

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<sup>48</sup> Novikova, *Is Russia Wrong?*, 25.

with glory by emancipating the Southern Slavs.”<sup>49</sup> Novikova also drew on examples from British history in order to convey Russia’s dedication to this cause of liberation. She asked of her readers, “Can Englishmen wonder that we Russians, brethren in race and in religion to the Rayahs [lower strata] of Northern Turkey, should endeavour to assist them as the English of Elizabeth’s reign endeavoured to assist the Protestants of Holland and of France?”<sup>50</sup>

In order to help her audience understand the intensity of Russian sympathies for their oppressed brethren, Novikova invoked the trope of the “Tatar yoke,” which had been popularized by the early nineteenth-century historian Nikolai Karamzin. Posing the question, “Why do Russians hate the Turks?” Novikova answered

Because they know them.... The Tatar wrote his character across our Russia in letters of flame. You English people are not touched with a feeling of the sufferings of the rayahs because you have not been in all points afflicted as they. Russians have. In centuries of anguish they have learned the lesson of sympathy with those who are crushed beneath an Asiatic yoke. We feel for them because we suffered with them. As they are—so we were. They are not only our brethren in race in religion, they are also our brothers in misfortune, united to us in ‘the sacred communion of sorrow.’<sup>51</sup>

The fact the British did not share in this special link with the Balkan Slavs, in Novikova’s view, was all the more reason that England should leave Russia to its own devices.

An important tactic that Novikova employed to gain the sympathy of her readers was to constantly remind them of the sacrifices made by Russians throughout the war. Her book’s dedication to the memory of “Nicholas Kireeff, the first Russian volunteer killed in Servia,” in itself served as such a reminder. When British commentators

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 25-26.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 69.

suggested that support for the war was flagging in Russia after military setbacks,

Novikova insisted that

[b]etween the *status quo ante bellum* and the present lie too many precious graves for it ever to be restored. Our military promenade has transformed itself into a gigantic burial procession; but when its end is attained our regret for the brave who have fallen in the fight will be rendered less poignant by the joy with which we shall hail the resurrection of the Southern Slavs.<sup>52</sup>

Given the fact that her brother died fighting Turkish forces, Novikova obviously had a personal stake in celebrating the sacrifices of Russian soldiers, but her constant reminders in the press also sought to inspire sympathy in her readers and to convey Russia's moral superiority over the other Great Powers.

In order to combat claims that Russian society was not genuinely interested in the plight of Slavs in the Balkans, Novikova invoked the idea of the existence of "two Russias" that was a common fixture of Slavophile thought. She portrayed the Western-minded imperial bureaucracy centered in St. Petersburg as a "mere dead cold cinder in the midst of the glowing warmth of our national revival," while Moscow, the seat of "Holy Russia," represented the Russian people's true "national aspirations."<sup>53</sup> In the following pages Novikova turned her criticisms of Russian society into attacks on British society. She proposed that just as there were "two Russias," there were also "two Englands," which she described as an "England with a soul and a heart, and an England which has only a pocket, ... [i]n other words, ... the England of Mr. Gladstone and the England of Lord Beaconsfield."<sup>54</sup> Novikova divided both countries into the realms of

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 35-36.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 40-41.

cold, rational politics and sympathetic, emotional public opinion, leaving her readers with little doubt as to which side supported the nobler cause.

In her attempts to present Russian foreign policy as a narrative of liberation, Novikova turned to comparisons of Russian and British imperial projects in general. She even went so far as to question the legitimacy of the British presence in India, England's most prized overseas possession. For Novikova, Russia's presence in Central Asia was a necessary civilizing measure as "[e]vils tolerable at a distance [were] intolerable next door."<sup>55</sup> In contrast, India was far away from Great Britain and "the internal tranquillity [*sic*] of India had no bearing upon English interests." Thus, England "had at first no more right to conquer Hindostan [*sic*] than Russia has to annex Brazil."<sup>56</sup> Novikova also included a barb about Britain's slave trade legacy: "In Central Asia Russians suppress the slave-trade as you do on the African coast, although at first your views upon the subject were less philanthropic—if I remember well."<sup>57</sup>

While most of her chapters were constructed around specific articles and speeches, Novikova devoted one specifically to "English prejudices" pertaining to Russia. Novikova addressed prevailing ideas about the treatment of political prisoners in Russia, specifically regarding the use of the knout, a multi-thonged whip that traditionally had been used for corporal punishment. The image of the knout had been a persistent component of what Larry Wolff describes as a "well-established mythology of Russian barbarism" among Western Europeans.<sup>58</sup> Novikova assured her readers that the knout had

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>58</sup> Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe*, 366.

been abolished under Alexander II in 1862. She went on to suggest that Great Britain was less civilized in the area of corporal punishment, as it “retain[ed] the lash in the army and navy, applie[d] the cat-o’-nine-tails to the garrotter, and secretly strangle[d] murderers in the recesses of her gaols.”<sup>59</sup> Novikova used a similar approach on the topic of nationalities in Russia, arguing that, far from oppressing non-Russian nationalities, the government took a much more liberal approach than England did. She wrote, “It is a characteristic of Russia that we open even the highest branches of our service to all our subject races—an example which England, I think, does not follow in India.”<sup>60</sup>

Upon its publication in December 1877, *Is Russia Wrong?* received immediate attention from the British press. At a time when British society was extremely polarized over the issue of military intervention in the Balkans, any review of Novikova’s work, positive or negative, was a political statement. The *Daily News*, the *Northern Echo*, and the *Liverpool Mercury*, all Liberal newspapers, published reviews of her book the day of its release, and reviews appeared in several other papers and journals in the following weeks. Stead’s paper not surprisingly highly recommended *Is Russia Wrong?*, as letters it contained had first appeared in the pages of the *Northern Echo*, and suggested that subscribers who had already read “‘O.K.’s’ brilliant and incisive letters ... [should] avail themselves of the opportunity offered by [their] republication of preserving them in a handy and collected form.”<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Novikova, *Is Russia Wrong?*, 83.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>61</sup> “‘O.K.’ and the English Press,” *Northern Echo* (Darlington, UK), 26 December 1877, <http://newspapers.bl.uk/blcs/>.



The *Daily News* suggested that the author would be “easily recognised by those familiar with English society,” suggesting that “O.K.’s” identity was common knowledge. Commenting on the value of the work, the reviewer gave the following loaded statement:

The English public have hitherto had so little means of knowing what Russians think and say on the question of the day, that we feel sure they will be glad to have an opportunity of seeing Russian opinion reflected in the letters of ‘O.K.,’ which, we understand, have been collected in their present form with the approval of several eminent Englishmen whose judgment is entitled to respect.<sup>62</sup>

On the one hand, the paper endorsed Novikova as an authority on “Russian opinion” and thus amplified the significance of her work. On the other hand, its assurance that the book had the approval of “eminent Englishmen” is suggestive of the taint of amateurism that frequently accompanied women’s forays into male-dominated subjects during the period. Some reviewers paid more attention to Froude’s preface than to Novikova’s own arguments, including one in the *Liverpool Mercury* that referred to Froude as Novikova’s “weighty champion.”<sup>63</sup>

In terms of positive reviews, however, most mirrored the *Daily News*’ evaluation of the book: “It is hardly to be expected that [readers] will agree with every opinion which the writer has put forward; but in all events they will find that she throws considerable light upon the state of public opinion in Russia, and materially helps to remove many of the misconceptions with which ignorance and prejudice have hitherto surrounded the Eastern Question.”

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<sup>62</sup> “Current Literature,” *Daily News*, 26 December 1877, <http://newspapers.bl.uk/blcs/>.

<sup>63</sup> “Mr. Froude and the Eastern Question,” *Liverpool Mercury*, 26 December 1877, <http://newspapers.bl.uk/blcs/>.

Negative reviews of Novikova's work were considerably less respectful in their treatment of the author and focused on her identity as a female writer to discount her views. The *Saturday Review*, a political and literary journal that espoused moderate conservative views, objected to her tone and several of her arguments. According to the reviewer, "it would be idle and perhaps uncourteous to refute the arguments of a lady who possesses at least one characteristic faculty of her sex. If she is not strong in reasoning, or accurate in historical statement, she thoroughly understands the art of irritation."<sup>64</sup> He particularly objected to her use of the Tatar yoke as an excuse for going to war with the Ottoman Empire, stating that "[s]ince the Inquisition was in the habit of burning Spanish Jews for their share in the Crucifixion, so hypocritical and audacious an excuse for crime [had] not been propounded." Another objection centered on her portrayal of corporal and capital punishment in England; "[f]eminine skill could hardly go further than to describe private executions deliberately adopted by Parliament for reasons of morality and decency as secret strangulation."<sup>65</sup>

The *Pall Mall Gazette* did not review Novikova's book but did publish at about the same time a new installment of "The Russians of To-day" that was titled "Political Agents—Ladies." While affecting to describe a general type, the author detailed the tactical pattern of female agents in a way that clearly referred to Novikova. The typical agent was

some lady of rank who helps to lead the fashion and is very successful in making friends. She is not the ambassadress, but she is always to be seen at the embassy parties. She is on the right side of forty, and if not always pretty she is invariably fascinating, and speaks to perfection the language of the country where she

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<sup>64</sup> "The War," *Saturday Review*, 12 January 1878, 33, <http://britishperiodicals.chadwyck.com/>.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

resides. Her husband is in Russia. Little is known of him beyond his name and the fact that he is a nobleman having general's rank.<sup>66</sup>

The specifications of age and husband's situation leave little doubt that the article refers to Novikova, who was thirty-six years old at the time and whose husband was indeed a general. The author of the article went on to suggest that Novikova's professions of patriotism were a front for darker motives. The Russian female agent was "the first to declare that it is her chief wish to clear up 'misconception' as to Russia's designs; but she professes to be doing this from pure patriotism, from humanity, from the desire to see two great countries understand each other, and so forth. Thus stated, her aims seem legitimate; and her admirers would ridicule the notion of her being a paid agent."<sup>67</sup> These comments perverted all of Novikova's professions in seeking friendship and understanding between Russia and England and co-opted her activities as a further sign of Russian perfidy.

Ultimately, these book reviews cannot demonstrate whether Novikova's arguments succeeded in changing anybody's opinions on Russia in general. *Is Russia Wrong?* did go through another edition within two months of its initial release, suggesting that readers were acting on the endorsements that positive reviews provided. The attention that the book received in the press, both positive and negative, would seem to suggest that the idea of Novikova and her mission was beginning take hold as part of a broader discourse on the subject in the British press.

Novikova's next collection of articles was published in December 1878 as *Friends or Foes?: A Sequel to 'Is Russia Wrong?'*. Russia's fortunes had fluctuated

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<sup>66</sup> "The Russians of To-day," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 17 January 1878, <http://newspapers.bl.uk/blcs/>.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

wildly throughout the year, with the initial peace negotiations between Russia and the Ottoman Empire representing the high point of its wartime achievements. The Treaty of San Stefano, signed by Russia and the Porte on March 3, 1878, among other things provided for the establishment of a large, independent Bulgarian state under temporary Russian occupation. Besides not consulting with other European powers, the treaty violated other international agreements and greatly improved Russia's geopolitical situation. The proposed Bulgarian principality encompassed the majority of the Ottoman Empire's European territories and ran all the way from the Black Sea to the Aegean, potentially nullifying the question of who controlled the Dardanelles. England and Austria immediately protested the settlement, and the threat of war caused Russia to agree to a renegotiation of the treaty at the Congress of Berlin. Under the new treaty, much of the Balkan territory that had been "liberated" by Russia was returned to Turkish rule, which understandably incensed Russian Pan-Slavs.<sup>68</sup>

In her letters leading up to and following the Congress of Berlin, Novikova expressed a sense of betrayal of the Balkan Slavs and a disregard of Russian sacrifices by Europe's Great Powers. She directed much of her anger at England and Austria, who "conspired...to deprive the Slavs of the liberty which [Russia] promised them, and to betray them into the hands of those from whom [Russian soldiers] died to free them for ever."<sup>69</sup> Yet she also heavily criticized Russia's own diplomats, "who from the first derided our [Pan-Slav] object and thwarted our aspirations"<sup>70</sup> and "played at Berlin a part condemned for nearly two thousands of years—that of a 'practical' Pilate."<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Jelavich, *St. Petersburg and Moscow*, 182-185.

<sup>69</sup> O.K. [Novikova], *Friends or Foes?* (London: P.S. King, 1878), 15.

As in *Is Russia Wrong?*, Novikova turned from international to domestic issues, such as the nature of Russia's regime in Poland and the Siberian exile system. She deflected accusations of Russia's oppression of Poland by comparing the two countries' relationship to that of England and Ireland. Novikova argued that England should not "be so horrified with Russia for taking one share of partitioned Poland, while England never seem[ed] ashamed of having conquered Ireland by the sword."<sup>72</sup> She quoted the prince consort himself as saying that the Poles were "the Irish of the Continent,"<sup>73</sup> and claimed that Russians were "sometimes apt to be so far misled by the complaints of the Irish Home Rule obstructionists as to believe that Ireland still writhe[d] an unwilling victim in the grasp of the England—say of 1798." The implication was that ideas of oppression on both sides were unfounded, and that "both Poland and Ireland ... [were] getting on tolerably well under the respective heels of the Muscovite and the Saxon."<sup>74</sup>

Novikova addressed indictments of the Siberian exile system by portraying it as both a practical and humane way of dealing with Russian convicts. Instead of being either "a large torture chamber" or "a gigantic quicksilver mine ... where [Russians] sent innocent persons to be slowly murdered," Siberia was, "on the contrary, a huge emigration field, whither [Russia sent] criminals with the double object of getting rid of them and of supplying a sparsely-populated province with colonists."<sup>75</sup> Challenging the

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>72</sup> Novikova, *Friends or Foes?*, 51-52.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 52-53.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 61.

popular notion that Siberia was a frozen wasteland, Novikova noted that “Siberia, to exiles, with few exceptions, in reality, mean[t] the fertile south, so fertile, indeed , that when set at liberty the exiles very often prefer[red] to remain on its rich and cultivated soil.”<sup>76</sup> Novikova then reverted to her typical strategy of turning the tables on British critics, reminding them that they “exiled [their] convicts to the Antipodes as late as 1853, and that [their] convict establishments at Norfolk Island and Macquarrie Harbour were not supposed to be exactly what philanthropists could wish for.”<sup>77</sup> She concluded by pointing out that even if the “murderers and political prisoners of the worst kind” were sentenced to penal servitude, they were treated much more leniently than they would be in England, where they would most likely be “hanged off-hand.”<sup>78</sup>

Novikova closed her book with appeals for British and Russian cooperation based on a shared responsibility for “civilizing” Asia:

Russia and England, of all nations, ought to be the readiest to excuse each other's failings, because alone among nations we have to grapple with the same difficulties. To us belongs the sceptre of Asia. Whether we liked it or not that continent has been given both to Russia and to England, as a common heritage. Neither can exclude the other from its share in the arduous work of civilizing and educating the Oriental world.<sup>79</sup>

Although she had previously used Russia’s relative backwardness as a justification for its foreign policy, Novikova now presented Russia and England as equal civilizing powers. She concluded that Russia had done its utmost to avoid conflict with England over the

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 60.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 66.

years, and now it was for the British people to “decide whether [they were] to be Friends or Foes.”<sup>80</sup>

Although reactions to *Friends or Foes?* were less in evidence than in the case of *Is Russia Wrong?*, it did receive a very important review from the *Northern Echo*. While it should come as no surprise that the newspaper would endorse its own correspondent, this particular review represented “O.K.’s” official coming-out in the British press. The author of the article, who was in all probability Stead himself, explained the significance of the initials as belonging to “Olga Kireeff, the sister of that Colonel Kireeff [Nikolai Kireev] to whom Mr. Gladstone alludes as a type of those members of the aristocratic and military class of Russians who were moved by a thrill of genuine emotion on behalf of their enslaved and suffering brethren.”<sup>81</sup> The author of the article provided a dramatic and detailed account of Kireev’s death and portrayed Novikova as taking up “the standard which her brother had borne aloft through danger and death.” While this description was probably calculated to gain sympathy for Novikova’s cause, it also appears to be an attempt to mark her activity as socially acceptable. The reviewer also addressed the various accusations that had been levied against Novikova regarding her character:

The work has exposed her to attacks which women often feel more acutely than soldiers suffer from physical wounds. The vulgar and the base in both countries have made her the mark for calumny and abuse... That she can be animated solely by devotion to the memory of her brother, and by the keen sympathies which stir in the heart of every warm-hearted, high-souled woman when confronted with intolerable wrong inflicted by the wicked by the weak, is naturally incredible to those whose only motive-power is the power of the purse.

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>81</sup> “Friends or Foes?,” *Northern Echo*, 2 January 1878, <http://newspapers.bl.uk/blcs/>.

This discussion of Novikova's work was obviously highly gendered, but in a way that encouraged acceptance of her overtures rather than a rejection of them.

Novikova's arguments in *Friends or Foes?* would receive much more attention when they were republished, along with *Is Russia Wrong?* in a new collection, *Russia and England from 1876 to 1880: A Protest and an Appeal*, the following year. According to Stead, the motivation for publishing *Russia and England* was to help turn the 1880 general election in Gladstone's favor. "It was thought by many who were interested in the fortunes of both countries that no better service could be rendered to the cause of the Anglo-Russian entente than to republish before the election a collection of the articles and letters which Madame Novikoff had written since the autumn of 1877."<sup>82</sup> In his milestone "Midlothian campaign" that propelled the Liberals back into the majority in Parliament and himself back to his former role of prime minister, Gladstone and his followers presented the election to the public as a fight between his advocacy of a peaceful, diplomatic foreign policy and the militaristic, imperial policies of Disraeli.<sup>83</sup> Novikova's *Russia and England*, full of biting condemnations of Disraeli's Eastern policy, seemed a perfect way to refresh readers' memories on the way England had almost been driven to war.

While a majority of it had previously appeared in print, *Russia and England* included some revisions and additional articles that were either entirely new or published in the *Northern Echo* since the release of her previous book. One significant difference between *Russia and England* and Novikova's previous books was the author's more

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<sup>82</sup> Stead, ed., *M.P. for Russia*, 2:56.

<sup>83</sup> Michael Partidge, *Gladstone* (London: Routledge, 2003), 164-65.



numerous and intense attacks on nihilists in Russia and abroad, which was not surprising given the increased revolutionary activity in Russia in the late 1870s. Novikova's concern was less for the nihilists themselves than a perceived sympathy for them in the British press. In a chapter written after a recent failed attempt on Alexander II's life, Novikova complained, "In England there is perceptible behind the conventional expression of indignation a sardonic chuckle of satisfaction. Of course, it is very wicked, all your papers say, this attempted assassination; but it is to be hoped that it will lead to the abandonment of Russia's Slavonic mission, the modification of Russia's autocratic Constitution, or some other result desired by our censors. They would not commit the crime, oh no! But, as it is committed, they do their best to extract political capital out of it."<sup>84</sup> Novikova also strove to make clear that the majority of the Russian people did not sympathize with the aims of revolutionaries, providing accounts of popular outrage in the aftermath of the attempt on the tsar.

*Russia and England* received a number of reviews, the most prominent being by Gladstone himself in the review journal the *Nineteenth Century*. The fact that he took the time to do so during a busy election campaign suggests that the political importance that Stead attributed to the work was not exaggerated. While complimenting her style and enthusiasm, Gladstone took issue with a number of her arguments, including the virtues of an autocratic government, which nevertheless gave him ample opportunity to state his own views on England's foreign policy.

Gladstone introduced the author of *Russia and England* as a lady "manifestly possessed of a great talent either for politics or, at any rate, for the effective handling of

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<sup>84</sup> [Novikova], *Russia and England*, 252.

political controversy.” He dealt with the issue of Novikova’s relationship to the Russian government by stating that “her advocacy and partisanship appear to be enlisted not for her Government but for her country.... She is ... a woman of station who goes into society, cultivates the acquaintance of all and sundry, and wears, if not her heart, at least her nationality, upon her sleeve.”<sup>85</sup> He reminded his readers of the sacrifices of her brother, which entitled Novikova to “the regard of every feeling man.”<sup>86</sup>

Gladstone criticized various aspects of Novikova’s book, including her idealization of Russian foreign policy under Nicholas I and oversimplification of the Eastern Question. He described Novikova’s estimate of nihilism as “inadequate,” as she did not “appear alive to the significance that, in the eyes of foreigners, it [could] hardly fail to bear as a symptom of some deep-seated evil, which, lacking remedial appliances, [burst] forth in vile and cruel conspiracies, adding the practice to the theory of pure destruction.” He also did not support the idea that autocracy was the best form of government for Russia and predicted that the consequences of the nihilist movement would be a “Russia more or less constitutional and popular.”<sup>87</sup>

According to Gladstone, it was “the stringency and severity of [Novikova’s] critical remarks which [gave] the book its principal interest and value. It must be read by Englishmen, at a multitude of points, with needful and salutary pain.”<sup>88</sup> Criticisms by an outsider such as Novikova provided the opportunity for Britons to reflect on the potentially harmful consequences of England’s own imperial policies. As Gladstone

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<sup>85</sup> W. E. Gladstone, “Russia and England,” *Nineteenth Century* 7:37 (Mar. 1880), 538, <http://britishperiodicals.chadwyck.com/>.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 539.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 554.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 539.

stressed in his review of *Russia and England* and throughout his political campaign, the path to stability in Europe was through diplomacy, rather than the self-absorbed militarism that he viewed as a hallmark of Disraeli's government.

Novikova's book received attention from a number of other publications, although Gladstone's review probably played a significant role in this respect. The *Northern Echo* praised both the writing and the mission of its Russian correspondent, calling Novikova's letters "important" and "eloquent." The reviewer also took the opportunity to emphasize the journal's role in her noble cause, writing that the fact that

we opposed with firm and unfaltering front the criminal madness of that troubled time, and that we not only received but cordially welcomed the assistance of our Russian contributor in pleading for justice to Russia and liberty for the East, at a time when the English Government in the opinion of its late Foreign Secretary, was rushing headlong into war with Russia to undo the emancipation of Bulgaria, forms an episode in the history of this journal, of which we have a right to reflect with some degree of patriotic pride.<sup>89</sup>

The above statement was an indication of the commentator's belief that through their collaboration, Novikova and the *Northern Echo* had already exerted an important influence on the course of history, and it thus attributed to Novikova a kind of power that was not evident in other evaluations of her work.

Novikova's book also received an endorsement from travel writer Paulina Irby in the pages of *Fraser's Magazine*. Irby was predisposed to be sympathetic to Novikova's cause, as she had been a first-hand witness to the troubles within the Balkans:

To the sufferings of the Christians in Bulgaria, Bosnia, and Old Serbia, I, among others, have been able to give the testimony of an eye-witness who had traveled and resided in the Turk-ruled Christian lands many years before the outbreak of the insurrection. The story of the Bulgarian massacres which roused the hearts of

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<sup>89</sup> "Russia and England, 1876-1880: A Protest and an Appeal by O.K.," *Northern Echo*, 4 February 1880, <http://newspapers.bl.uk/blcs/>.

English men and women, came to me and to those who knew Turkish rule as no startling novelty, but as the terrible aggravation of a chronic condition.<sup>90</sup>

Irby described Novikova's work as a whole as "singularly attractive" and a "brilliant and exceptionably readable book." Far from being part of any malicious Russian designs, it was inspired by "genuine patriotism and hearty international goodwill."<sup>91</sup> Irby introduced Novikova to her audience as both an intelligent and talented "Russian lady of station," possessing both "the high culture now common among her countrywomen" and a "rare gift of language which she [had] cherished till she [was] able to write with equal force and fluency in French, English, and in her own native tongue." Irby, on the whole, did not challenge Novikova's criticisms of England, and, in terms of the nature of autocracy in Russia, even pointed out her omission of the example of *zemstvo* reform as further proof of the progressive nature of its rule.

Irby was more or less unique among commentators on Novikova's book, as she, too, was an "authoress" and did not find the need to remark on the specifically female aspects of her writing. Other reviewers took more fanciful views of Novikova and her book. An account that appeared in the *Spectator* projected exotic conceptions of Russia onto Novikova; the reviewer declared that *Russia and England* was "not only readable; it is marked by an easy grace and a picturesque crispness of style which carry the reader over the pleasant pages of 'O.K.' with something of the exhilarating sensation experienced in sledging over the frozen snow of her own northern clime." He also identified her style and argumentation as particularly feminine, stating that "[s]he is very angry with us English for our conduct on the Eastern Question, and she gives her reasons,

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<sup>90</sup> A. P. Irby, "A Russian Lady's Book," *Fraser's Magazine* 605 (May 1880), 614, <http://britishperiodicals.chadwyck.com/>.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 612.

with all the passionate resentment and playful pleading of a woman who has been crossed in love, yet has not quite despaired of recovering her lover.” Such a statement served to undermine the seriousness of Novikova’s claims. The reviewer also dismissed the idea that Novikova might be a Russian agent, as “[s]ome of her most pointed sarcasms are at the expense of [the Russian] authorities.”<sup>92</sup>

Commentators that objected to aspects of Novikova’s work, such as her tone or specific argumentation, also tended to speak in terms of her identity as a female writer. The critic that discussed *Russia and England* in the *Quarterly Review* declared that “it requires no diligent examination of her volume to convince us that even her own conciliatory temper is hardly skin deep,” although he later quipped that “[w]omen are said sometimes to dissemble their warmer feelings; and possibly under all her scorn, O.K. may conceal a burning affection for the English Empire and the English people.”<sup>93</sup> The reviewer ultimately disagreed with Novikova’s habit for blaming most of the discord between Russia and England on the latter and her “framing [of] specious excuses for daring acts of diplomacy.”<sup>94</sup> The *Saturday Review* also presented a negative evaluation of Novikova’s work that was framed around the author’s nature as a woman, noting that “[a]gainst some drawbacks attending feminine participation in political controversy may be set off the advantage of a candid expression of genuine antipathies.”<sup>95</sup> The reviewer portrayed Novikova as overly emotional and somehow lacking in self-control when he

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<sup>92</sup> “English Policy from a Russian Point of View,” *Spectator* (London), quoted in “Our Russian Correspondent,” *Northern Echo*, 1 March 1880, <http://newspapers.bl.uk/blcs/>.

<sup>93</sup> “Russia and England,” *Quarterly Review* 149, no. 298 (Apr. 1880), 524, <http://britishperiodicals.chadwyck.com/>.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 520.

<sup>95</sup> “Russia and England,” *Saturday Review*, 6 March 1880, <http://britishperiodicals.chadwyck.com/>.

mentioned that “the sarcastic outbursts which express her real feelings [were] sometimes more instructive than her deliberate statements.”<sup>96</sup>

Even critical reviews like the one in the *Saturday Review* demonstrated that Novikova’s work demanded and received attention. The desire to refute as well as to endorse her views suggested a general appreciation of Novikova’s ability to influence public opinion. Yet it is also important to note that evaluations of Novikova’s work were deeply personalized. Many of her reviewers found the need to address the idea that she could be working for her government, while others framed their conceptualizations of her writing around their understanding of her as a woman. As Novikova continued to support the cause of a “better understanding” of Russia in England in the coming years, representations of Novikova as a person of interest also multiplied, demonstrating the persistent fascination that she held for British readers.

### **Novikova After 1880**

The year 1880 saw monumental changes in the lives of many members of Novikova’s circle. Gladstone and the Liberals triumphed in the general election, which ushered in the “Grand Old Man’s” second ministry. It remained to be seen, however, whether as prime minister he would be able to avoid the kind of imperial entanglements of his predecessor. The *Pall Mall Gazette*, Novikova’s erstwhile nemesis, passed into Liberal ownership, resulting in the departure of Frederick Greenwood and most of his staff. The new owner, Henry Yates Thompson, hired “ardent Gladstonian” John Morley,

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

formerly of the *Fortnight Review*, as editor, and Stead's growing reputation paid off when he was offered the post of assistant editor.<sup>97</sup>

The attention that Novikova received for *Russia and England* opened new opportunities for her to express her opinions in the British press. Despite the *Northern Echo*'s public invitation for her to continue to contribute to its pages, Novikova appeared to have lost interest in doing so once Stead left his post.<sup>98</sup> By this time, however, Novikova no longer had to rely on his patronage to make her voice heard. Between 1880 and 1882 she published a series of articles that appeared in some of England's more prominent literary journals, including *Fraser's Magazine*, the *Contemporary Review*, and the *Nineteenth Century*. Although fewer in number than during the Balkans crisis, Novikova's contributions were much longer and covered a range of topics, from reviews of recent literature on Russian foreign policy to descriptions of social reform in her native country.

While during the Balkans crisis Novikova had been primarily concerned with attacking the "Jingoist press," in the early 1880s her appointed enemy became the "Nihilist press," meaning those journals that either sympathized with revolutionaries or went so far as to open their pages to them. In order to undercut the legitimacy that nihilist arguments held for British readers, Novikova penned several articles intended to demonstrate the benefits of an autocratic government compared to a parliamentary one, as well as to convey the overwhelming love of the Russian people for the tsar.

Her first article, titled "Emperor Alexander's Reforms," was published two months before the tsar was assassinated in St. Petersburg. Detailing the various agrarian,

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<sup>97</sup> Schults, *Crusader in Babylon*, 16-19.

<sup>98</sup> "Madame Olga de Novikoff," *Northern Echo*, 7 January 1881, <http://newspapers.bl.uk/blcs/>.

educational, judicial and social reforms instigated in the 1860s, Novikova argued that such wide-reaching changes could have been brought about only by the autocracy, “that powerful and effective system, which works more speedily than Western Constitutionalism.”<sup>99</sup> Novikova contrasted British Parliament’s inability to make any headway in the issue of Irish Home Rule with the sweeping benefits that Alexander II was able to confer on Russia’s peasantry through his solitary will.

After the assassination of Alexander II, Novikova reaffirmed the benefits that autocracy conferred on Russia and denounced the nihilists in “The New Departure in Russia,” which appeared in *Fraser’s Magazine* in December 1881. Novikova began her article with a bold statement as to the internal condition of Russia:

Russia, say many profound judges, who seem to derive all their knowledge of my country from the Nihilist Press, is on the verge of a revolution. It is there where they make their mistake. Russia is not on the verge, Russia is actually in the midst of a revolution. But it is not a violent overturn of the existing order of things, accomplished lawlessly from below; it is a great transformation effected lawfully from above that is now in progress in Russia. Russia, which was de-Russianised by Peter, is being re-Russianised by Alexander. That is the revolution in a phrase.<sup>100</sup>

Novikova claimed that, far from being quashed by the assassination of Alexander II, the reform spirit was as alive as ever in Russia. She pointed specifically to the emperor’s convening of an advisory “Commission of Experts” as evidence of his commitment to furthering the welfare of the Russian people. The commission, tasked with ascertaining the greatest needs of Russian society and the appropriate means of addressing them, was

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<sup>99</sup> O.K.[Novikova], “Emperor Alexander’s Reforms,” *Fraser’s Magazine* 613 (Jan. 1881), 52, <http://britishperiodicals.chadwyck.com/>.

<sup>100</sup> O.K.[Novikova], “The New Departure in Russia,” *Fraser’s Magazine* 624 (Dec. 1881), 709, <http://britishperiodicals.chadwyck.com/>.



a sign of the return of the natural communion that existed between ruler and people before it was so rudely disrupted by the Westernization introduced by Peter I.<sup>101</sup>

Novikova's article "The Temperance Movement in Russia," which appeared in the *Nineteenth Century* in 1882, also showcased the philanthropic reforms of the Russian government and upper classes. While she did not deny the existence of an alcohol problem within Russia, she protested "against the common error that [her] countrymen [were] the most intemperate nation in Europe."<sup>102</sup> To demonstrate her point, she provided statistics (from a St. Petersburg newspaper) that showed that per capita consumption of alcohol was greater in England and Germany than in Russia and that British annual income from alcohol sales was greater than that of Russia.

More important to Novikova, however, were the efforts made by the state and educated society in combating alcohol abuse, mentioning the establishment of tea rooms and reading rooms as distractions from drink. Connecting temperance efforts with Russia's international "holy mission," Novikova declared, "It is really remarkable what a strong feeling there is in Russia in favour of improving the condition of the people. We have been crusading all over the world for the benefit of other countries. We are now displaying the same energy for the benefit of our own peasants."<sup>103</sup>

The nature of the Russian penal system and in particular Siberian exile was another important issue for Novikova. Portraying the system as humane and beneficial to the individual corresponded with her overarching anti-Nihilist campaign, as revelations

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 725-726.

<sup>102</sup> Olga Novikoff, nee Kireeff [Novikova], "The Temperance Movement in Russia," *Nineteenth Century* 12:67 (Sept. 1882), 441, <http://britishperiodicals.chadwyck.com/>.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 455.

of mistreatment and suffering from ex-political prisoners raised sympathy abroad for opponents of the tsarist regime. In her 1882 “The Tercentenary of Siberia,” Novikova provided an brief account of the conquest of Siberia under Ermak, the “Russian Pizzaro.”<sup>104</sup> The rest of the article was a review of *Through Siberia*, an account of prisons and convict settlements written by Henry Lansdell, an English missionary. Novikova touted Lansdell’s somewhat rosy account of Siberia as unbiased and authoritative, stating that she “really did not expect so favourable a report from an Englishman, because ‘impartial Englishmen’ often adore[d] their prejudices, as the most tender-hearted mother adores her only child.” Among the observations that she singled out from the book were that exiles complained that they “did not have enough work to do” and that there were far fewer political convicts actually confined to prisons or working in mines. On the whole, Lansdell concluded, Siberian prisons were not any worse than British ones, and “if a Russian exile behave[d] himself decently and well, he [might] in Siberia be more comfortable than in many, and as comfortable as in most, of the prisons of the world.”

Novikova ended her article with a quote from Dostoevsky’s *Notes from the House of the Dead*: “In short [Siberia] is a blessed country. The difficulty is to know how to enjoy it; but there are some fortunate individuals who have learned the great secret of satisfactorily solving the riddle of life.”<sup>105</sup> Even though she emphasized that the description of Siberia as contained in Dostoevsky’s work “belonged to the past” and were “not to be regarded as descriptions of the Siberia” of the day, she used his experiences to

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<sup>104</sup> O.K. [Novikova], “The Tercentenary of Siberia,” *Fraser’s Magazine* 625 (Jan. 1882), 56, <http://britishperiodicals.chadwyck.com/>.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

suggest the spiritually transformative role that life in the region could play for its convicts.

Novikova returned to the realm of the daily news when Stead succeeded John Morley as editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1883, where he would remain until he left to found his own journal, the *Review of Reviews*, in 1890. After assuming the helm of the newspaper, Stead quickly became a pioneer in what would be known as the “New Journalism.” New Journalism encompassed a variety of trends, among them the use of catchier layouts and inclusion of illustrations, the attribution of authorship to articles, the pursuit of sensational storylines, and the rise of advocacy journalism.<sup>106</sup> Stead’s most famous display of the last aspect was his 1885 exposé of child prostitution in London in a series of articles under the title “The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon.” He was notably one of the first Fleet Street editors to employ female journalists, a trend that perhaps the experience of his previous collaboration with Novikova helped foster.<sup>107</sup>

After Stead took over the *Pall Mall Gazette*, Novikova again became a frequent contributor to his paper. Novikova used her articles, now usually signed “Mme. de Novikoff,” to present “the Russian view” on pressing imperial debates, to introduce British readers to great Russian cultural figures, and to continue her crusade against the acceptance of nihilists in British society. Her first contributions to the *Pall Mall Gazette* came at a time of growing tensions between Russia and England over their spheres of influence in Central Asia, which, after the Balkans crisis abated, became the new focus of imperial anxieties. In late 1884 these tensions erupted over what was to be known as the

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<sup>106</sup> Griffiths, *Fleet Street*, 114-119; Schults, *Crusader in Babylon*, 29-32.

<sup>107</sup> Griffiths, *Fleet Street*, 117.

Afghan border dispute. At the time, there was no formal border drawn between Afghanistan, which had been a British protectorate since 1878, and Russia's protectorates in Central Asia. While the two governments had agreed on establishing a boundary commission to officially decide the question, Russian troops pushed into the disputed territory in a bid to gain the advantage in the negotiations. In the process Russia conquered the oasis of Merv and routed Afghan forces at Penjdeh in what many British politicians and military analysts interpreted to be the prelude to an invasion of Afghanistan proper.<sup>108</sup>

Novikova contributed several articles to the *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1884 and 1885 regarding Russian and British views of the border dispute, defending Russia's right, "outside the boundaries of Afghanistan, ... [to] advance or retreat, establish garrisons or agents or Residents, annex or protect, or do whatever she pleases and wherever she pleases, according to the dictates of her own interests and the interests of her Asiatic subjects."<sup>109</sup> She caused a minor controversy in February 1885 when she stated that she had heard from "the highest authority on all matters relating to the foreign policy of [the Russian] Empire" that British diplomats had instigated Afghan troops to occupy Penjdeh before their defeat by the Russian army.<sup>110</sup> Other newspapers reprinted her claims, and the question was actually raised in the House of Lords as to whether Novikova's report was correct, where it was demonstrated to be unfounded.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Jelavich, *St. Petersburg and Moscow*, 199-200; Hopkirk, *Great Game*, 425-28.

<sup>109</sup> Madame Olga de Novikoff [Novikova], "A Russian View of the Merv Debate," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 5 March 1884, <http://newspapers.bl.uk/blcs/>.

<sup>110</sup> Madam de Novikoff [Novikova], "The Truth About the Russian Advance," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 24 February 1885, <http://newspapers.bl.uk/blcs/>.

<sup>111</sup> "Our London Correspondence," *Glasgow Herald*, 27 February 1885, <http://newspapers.bl.uk/blcs/>.

Charles Marvin, one of England's most prolific writers on the Central Asian Question, later took special care to refute her claims in his *Russians at the Gates of Herat* (1885). Reminding his readers of "the very strong influence that was exercised in 1877-78, through books, pamphlets, and the press, by Madame de Novikoff, otherwise O.K., and the group of admirers she gathered around her," he referred to her most recent claims about British involvement in the Penjdeh affair as a "pack of lies."<sup>112</sup> Still, he worried, "there are simple-minded sentimentalists who are carried away by the plausibility of O.K. and urge that the British lion should lie down with the Russian bear and surrender Constantinople,"<sup>113</sup> demonstrating his view that Novikova still wielded influence over British public opinion.

The *Pall Mall Gazette* served as a further platform from which Novikova could denounce nihilists and their acceptance by elements of British society. In "The Russianization of England," Novikova accused the British public of hypocrisy in its outrage over a plot to blow up London Bridge:

It was not long ago ... that supreme disdain was displayed whenever Russian dynamitards were discussed. We Russians were dogmatically advised to listen to the voice of such men as Krapotkin [*sic*] and Stepniak. 'Only tyranny,' exclaimed some uninvited judges, 'could breed Nihilism' ... But now you almost all talk and write like sensible Russians. The moral efficacy of dynamite must really be great. It has not secured Home Rule [for Ireland], but it has converted Englishmen to Russian views on the subject of murder and assassination.<sup>114</sup>

In response to the British government's demands for extradition of the plotters from the United States, Novikova scornfully asked her readers, "Was it not too ludicrous? Where

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<sup>112</sup> Charles Marvin, *The Russians at the Gates of Herat* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1885), 89-90.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>114</sup> O.K. [Novikova], "The Russianization of England," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 15 January 1885, <http://newspapers.bl.uk/blcs/>.

was Hartmann sheltered and Krapotkin lionized, and Stepniak accepted as a great authority, all the while they plotted murder against us in Russia ... [W]hen will England realize the necessity of ceasing to be the paradise of assassins?<sup>115</sup>

Stepniak, one of the “assassins in paradise,” actually wrote a letter to the editor in response to her article, in which he fervently denied plotting against the Russian government in exile. According to his letter, “Russian refugees do not plot ... The only use I could make and have made of the liberty and security afforded to me was that of appealing to the public opinion of the civilized world—first, in favour of Russian revolutionists, by explaining their real opinion, aims, and character, so much misrepresented by Mdme. Novikoff’s party; then in favour of the liberty of my country in general by laying bare the views of the political regime Mdme. Novikoff is advocating, and the sufferings of the whole Russian nation, which Mdme. Novikoff represents as being in quite satisfactory condition.”<sup>116</sup> Stepniak’s reply to Novikova was a sign that not only was she becoming part of the British discourse on Russia, but part of Russian oppositionists’ grievances as well.

Besides the numerous articles she contributed to the *Pall Mall Gazette*, Novikova began interacting with the press in different ways, namely through interviews. Stead had come to see the interview as “one of the best methods of ... communication [of thought],” since it brought “the reader and thinker close together.”<sup>117</sup> Although it is not surprising that the *Pall Mall Gazette* would solicit Novikova’s views in this manner,

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> “Correspondence,” *Pall Mall Gazette*, 23 January 1885, <http://newspapers.bl.uk/blcs/>.

<sup>117</sup> Frank G. Carpenter, “William T. Stead,” *Los Angeles Times*, 28 December 1892, <http://proquest.umi.com>.

many other prominent journals did likewise, suggesting that they truly valued her opinions, or at least believed that she was “in-the-know” in terms of Russian foreign policy. The London *Observer*, a Sunday paper, interviewed Novikova over the rumor that Russia was annexing Port Arthur from China in 1895, to which she responded that she wished that her “English friends ... would not always hastily jump to conclusions unfavourable to Russia.”<sup>118</sup> When Turkish atrocities against Armenians raised indignation in the British press, a “special representative” of the *Daily News* called on Novikova to comment on Russia’s firm stance against intervention by other European powers.<sup>119</sup> After Stead founded the monthly *Review of Reviews* in 1890, he referred to Novikova’s views regularly in his segment on international affairs, which he called “The Progress of the World.” The Press Association interviewed Novikova regarding the relief efforts during the Russian famine of 1891-92, and various newspapers that picked up the story referred to her as “a well-known Russian leader” to demonstrate her authority on the subject.<sup>120</sup>

As Novikova’s interaction with the British press expanded during the last decades of the nineteenth century, there was also a growth in references to and portrayals of Novikova as a person of interest. Much of this attention was negative, exemplified by a continuation of the “female agent” narrative and pieces ridiculing her involvement in politics. Yet during this period, Novikova achieved a significant amount of celebrity as well, and all of these different versions of Novikova continued to play a role in the way people thought about Russia.

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<sup>118</sup> Quoted in “Russia in the Very Far East,” *Northern Echo*, 28 October 1895, <http://newspapers.bl.uk.blcs/>.

<sup>119</sup> “Lord Salisbury and the Czar: Who is to Blame?,” *Daily News*, 13 February 1896, <http://newspapers.bl.uk.blcs/>.

<sup>120</sup> “Through Famine-Stricken Russia,” *Birmingham Daily Post*, 8 January 1892; “The Famine in Russia,” *Freeman’s Journal* (Dublin), 8 January 1892, <http://newspapers.bl.uk.blcs/>.

In the years following the “Lady Diplomatist” story, Novikova-the-agent continued as a trope that could be deployed to indicate Russia’s underhandedness. Upon rumors that Novikova was leaving England, an 1882 article in the *Leeds Mercury* judged her to be “a very curious and entertaining specimen of her sex, and a thoroughly typical representative of one of the traditions of Russian diplomacy.”<sup>121</sup> At about the same time, the *Daily News* ran a piece announcing that Novikova had been “recalled” for “incurr[ing] the displeasure of her employers at St. Petersburg.” The author further speculated upon the kind of treatment Novikova might expect after her return to Russia. Referring to a story in circulation that “a lovely Russian lady was flogged, actually knouted, in London, in her own back drawing-room ... by two drummers of a regiment with an unpronounceable name,” he put forth that “the more humane or sentimental of us [“Britons”] may hope that the wrath of this lady’s [Novikova’s] ‘employers’ will not impel them to employ two drummers of a Russian regiment, whether in a back drawing-room or elsewhere.”<sup>122</sup> Despite the slightly satirical tone of the article, the author played upon genuine anxieties that were present at the time in British society, both about the nature of Russian “civilization” and about Novikova’s intentions in her political advocacy.

A later article titled “Spies From the Neva” connected Novikova to the oppressive tactics of the Russian secret police:

Russia’s spy organisation in foreign countries, concerning which so many romances have been written, is divided into two sections. One section is devoted to international questions and to foreign affairs, while the other and far more important is entrusted with the surveillance of the Czar’s own subject abroad. The

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<sup>121</sup> “Politics and Society,” *Leeds Mercury*, 15 February 1882, <http://newspapers.bl.uk.blcs/>.

<sup>122</sup> “London, Wednesday February 15,” *Daily News* (London), 15 February 1882, <http://newspapers.bl.uk.blcs/>.



agents belonging to the former of these two departments are frequently well known, and in some cases make no secret of their relations to the Imperial Chancellerie at St. Petersburg. Mme. de Novikoff, a lady who without good looks or social standing was clever enough to ingratiate herself to such an extent with several of the leading statesmen and principal newspaper editors in London that the whole course of Great Britain's policy abroad was affected thereby at certain critical moments.<sup>123</sup>

Novikova even appeared as a character in one such spy "romance" that was published in London in 1888. The novel in question, *Miss Hildreth*, was written by the American author Augusta de Grasse Stevens and centered on an international Russian spy ring that stretched from New York to St. Petersburg. When the young American hero comes face to face with the evil Count Melikoff, he is told:

Our agents of the first section are generally well known; as a rule they make no secret of their connection with the Imperial Chancellerie, and they consist of both sexes and of all classes. Indeed, we find our cleverest work often accomplished by ladies. I need but mention Mdme. Novikoff, whose influence and power over a certain Premier of England is but a matter of common *on dits*, and who at one time seriously affected the foreign policy of Great Britain.<sup>124</sup>

Stevens appears to have lifted her text from a version of the previous article, but its reproduction attests to the persistent popularity of such narratives.

The Novikova-as-agent story spread abroad as well, making appearances in major dailies such as the *Chicago Daily Tribune* and the *Washington Post*. While some papers merely reprinted articles from British newspapers, others adapted their own stories of Novikova that were often more sensational than the ones that appeared in England. An article that appeared in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* and the *Philadelphia Telegraph*

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<sup>123</sup> "Spies from the Neva: The Russian Secret Police," *Hampshire Telegraph* (Portsmouth), 26 November 1887, <http://newspapers.bl.uk.blcs/>. The article appears to be an adaptation, as its text bears striking similarities to one published in the *New York Times* the previous month. See "The Russian Spy System," *New York Times*, 23 October 1882.

<sup>124</sup> Augusta de Grasse Stevens, *Miss Hildreth: A Novel* (London: 1888), quoted in "Are All Russian Ladies Russian Agents?," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 3 January 1889, <http://newspapers.bl.uk.blcs/>.

painted the “Novikoff woman” as a woman desperately searching for attention after being cast off by her husband and therefore “tabooed in Russian society.” She ended up in England after “the suspicious Pan-Slavists took her for a spy,” and upon starting a salon, “only gentlemen visited her, but her success among gentlemen was most remarkable, and that was better than obscurity.” She did not work for the Russian government until she managed to “ensnare” Gladstone, after which Shuvalov “quietly took possession of her and her salon, and she became thenceforth—according to popular belief, at least—a mere creature of the Autocrat of All the Russias.”<sup>125</sup> Despite some fantastic embellishments, the framework of the “female agent” story survived the crossing of the Atlantic.

In the later years of her career, Novikova also gained a steadily growing celebrity status that countered such negative representations of her character. Much of this trend can be attributed to the way that Stead presented his contributor in the pages of the *Pall Mall Gazette* and the *Review of Reviews*. The inclusion of notices of her comings and goings throughout Europe in his publications was a habit that was picked up by other papers, such as the *Daily News*; this trend promoted the idea that she was a person of interest. Stead also produced some of the first visual depictions of Novikova in the press. In 1884, the *Pall Mall Gazette* ran a story describing portrait artist Schmiechen’s studio as he was painting a full length portrait of Novikova:

The ever changing expression of her mobile features causes every photograph to vary. Mr. Schmiechen, however, has succeeded admirably in transferring to canvas a painted picture of Mdme. de Novikoff as she is in very life. The portrait is three parts length, and after the striking resemblance of the countenance, the most remarkable feature of the painting is the wonderful fidelity with which the artist has made the robed figure stand forth before the eyes in its furs and lace and jewels. The only decoration that she wears in the portrait is a Bulgarian Order in gold, and on the table she rests on lies a copy of the *Pall Mall Gazette*.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> “Mme. de Novikoff,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 4 March 1882, <http://proquest.umi.com>.

The article was accompanied by a rough sketch of the artists work that helped convey the subject's genteelness and allowed readers to put a non-threatening face to Novikova's name.

Many of the newer, positive images of Novikova appeared in columns dedicated to societal gossip and people of interest and took special interest in her physical appearance. In 1889 several papers ran the following story in response to Novikova's arrival in London from Paris:

Madame de Novikoff's personality is one of the most remarkable in London. The brilliant eyes are, perhaps, the only part of her face which can be strictly called beautiful, but the extraordinary flexibility of her features, the play of thought and emotion which runs through them, give her a charm which no *ingénue* could claim. Her talk is as remarkable as her looks; she speaks English with perfect idiomatic correctness, and with an accent which is only peculiar so far as it is delightful. She is one of the best diplomatists in Europe, is very wary when she is in the presence of journalists, and is a wonderful specimen of the race of *femmes incomprises*.<sup>127</sup>

When the term "diplomatist" was first applied to Novikova in 1877, it was in a pejorative sense, but now it was decidedly positive. The original author of the article also paid Novikova a great compliment by considering her "one of the best diplomatists in Europe," suggesting that she was more competent than many of her male peers.

The *London Journal*, a women's magazine, also profiled Novikova in its "People of Interest" column, alongside stage beauty Mabel Love, women's rights activist Emily Faithfull, the author Frances Hodgson Burnett, and the queen of Madagascar. In the article Novikova was described as a "clever and patriotic Russian lady" and "political

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<sup>126</sup> "In Mr. Schmiechen's Studio," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 27 November 1884, <http://newspapers.bl.uk.blcs/>.

<sup>127</sup> "Personal Gossip," *Birmingham Daily Post*, 11 January 1889; "How the World Wags: Celebrities Under the Microscope," *Hampshire Telegraph*, 11 January 1889, <http://newspapers.bl.uk.blcs/>. The *Post* article cited the *Star*, an evening paper, as the source of the story.

journalist.” The writer also noted her “extraordinary personal charm” despite the fact that she was “not in the least good-looking.”<sup>128</sup> The column included a sketch of Novikova sporting a boater hat, the latest in modern women’s fashion.

Novikova’s name also started appearing in biographical dictionaries and encyclopedias. In her biographical dictionary *Women of the Day* (1885), Frances Hays devoted an entry to Novikova that echoed Irby’s review of Novikova’s *Russia and England*. She noted Novikova’s possession of “the high culture now common amongst her countrywomen” and her “rare gift of language.” The piece noted that her articles “had given much offence to the authorities in her own land,” but made no mention of the past controversy surrounding her efforts in England.<sup>129</sup> Novikova occupied three columns of text in *Men and Women of the Day* in 1899, in which she was described as [u]ndoubtedly one of the few remarkable women of our time.”<sup>130</sup>

As a woman engaged in a predominantly male field, her contemporaries also tried to understand Novikova in the context of the growing women’s political movement in England at the turn of the century. While Novikova had extolled the virtues of Russian women in her writing, she never made any arguments concerning women’s rights in England or Russia. Stead himself found this lack of interest noteworthy, writing in the *Review of Reviews* that “Madame Novikoff, although a woman who has written her name

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<sup>128</sup> “People of Interest,” *London Journal*, 21 January 1893, 51, <http://britishperiodicals.chadwyck.com/>.

<sup>129</sup> Frances Hays, *Women of the Day: A Biographical Dictionary of Notable Contemporaries* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1885), 104.

<sup>130</sup> Victor G. Plarr, *Men and Women of the Time: A Dictionary of Contemporaries*, 15th ed. (London: George Routledge, 1899), 809-10.

in legible characters across the history of two countries, is not even now an ardent advocate for woman's rights.”<sup>131</sup>

For one London correspondent, Novikova's career was a “striking demonstration of the influence which it is possible for a clever woman to attain among the leaders of political policy in England.” He lamented that “the leaders of the women's movement in [England] seem to have learned nothing from the personality and methods of the ingenious lady whom Beaconsfield called the ‘Member for Russia,’ although several of them are not inferior to her in culture, persistency, and enthusiasm.”<sup>132</sup> By these statements, the author of the review seemed to argue that women could get along very well without political rights.

In 1909, Novikova gave an interview with *The Common Cause*, a British women's suffragist journal. The author of the article, Sarah A. Tooley, expressed her surprise that Novikova did not support suffrage for women in Russia. In response Novikova stated, “I have spent my life in work for my country ... and there are many ways in which women can work for the public good without taking an active part in politics.” While she interestingly did not consider her advocacy as “active politics,” she did espouse this principle in her own life through her temperance and charity work. After making allowances for belief that the “political representation of all men [was] not to [Novikova] a necessity,” Tooley still held Novikova up as “a striking example of the

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<sup>131</sup> [W. T. Stead], “Character Sketch,” *Review of Reviews* 3:14 (Feb. 1891), 124, <http://britishperiodicals.chadwyck.com/>.

<sup>132</sup> “Influence of a Clever Woman,” *Evening Post* (Wellington, NZ), 8 May 1909, <http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/>.

power of the woman patriot to influence politicians.”<sup>133</sup> Despite the fact that she was not a feminist, Novikova could still act as a source of empowerment for such women.

## Conclusion

When Olga Novikova took up the defense of Russia in the British press, she already had some experience of seeing her image appropriated in ways beyond her control. She was the “lady diplomatist” before she was the “authoress,” after all. But she still probably had little idea about the phenomenon she would become, both throughout Europe and internationally. It would be wrong to isolate any one factor of her personality to explain the ways Novikova was appropriated and portrayed; interpretations of Novikova’s work and constructions of her image both appear to have been based on complex combinations of her nationality, gender, sexuality, politics and profession.

The shifting social and political climates within Great Britain during the last decades of the nineteenth century also appear to have influenced understandings of Novikova. The initial scandal concerning Novikova’s relationships vis-à-vis the Russian embassy and Gladstone erupted at a period of heightened tensions between the Russian and British empires. Conversely, articles that celebrated Novikova’s career tended to appear during more placid junctures in diplomatic relations between the empires. Stead’s *M.P. for Russia*, the most extensive and laudatory biographical account of Novikova, appeared only after the conclusion of the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907, which eased the tensions that resulted from imperial competition in Central Asia and created an alliance that would last into World War I. It is possible that Novikova appeared less

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<sup>133</sup> Sarah A. Tooley, “Madame Novikoff and the Enfranchisement of Women,” *Common Cause*, 15 April 1909, 10.

threatening as she aged, or as the reading public grew more familiar with her image and ideas.

The competing stances on social and political rights for British women near the end of the nineteenth century are also evident in the various commentaries on Novikova's career. The fin-de-siecle saw increases in public roles for women, whether as feminists lobbying for domestic freedoms and women's suffrage, or as "New Women" openly challenging social and sexual norms. In this context, Novikova's vocation as an unofficial diplomat appears to have acquired a greater degree of normalcy, even admiration, among commentators, to the extent that she could even be considered a model of apolitical female public participation for opponents of the expansion of women's political rights.

In a 1909 review of *M.P. for Russia*, one critic complained that while Novikova "probably hastened the conversion of many who were either quite willing or politically inclined to be converted; but that she persuaded any congenitally of an opposite disposition there is no evidence."<sup>134</sup> While nobody can demonstrate how many people Novikova managed to convince with her writing or "feminine sarcasms," her continued ability to get published demonstrates a sustained interest in what she had to say. The controversy that surrounded her at the start of her career probably played a role in this interest as well. Whether as an object for mockery and ridicule or for praise, Novikova played an important role in how her contemporaries thought about Russia.

### **Epilogue: The Lady Vanishes**

Not much is known of Novikova's life after the Russian Revolution of 1917. She had already settled in London for an indefinite period in 1915. By this time Novikova

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<sup>134</sup> "The Member for Russia," *Saturday Review*, 3 April 1909, 433, <http://britishperiodicals.chadwyck.com/>.

was seventy-five years old and had much less remaining to bring her back to Russia as she had had previously. She had outlived almost all of her family, including her husband, son, and brothers, although she still had a niece that acted as her companion. She had also survived many of her closest friends and correspondents. Gladstone died nearly twenty years previously, and William Stead, her steadfast supporter, went down with the *Titanic* in 1912.

Despite these personal tragedies, Novikova revived her career during World War I, providing the *Review of the Reviews* and the *Asiatic Review* with a number of articles relating to the war efforts in both countries. Her optimistic accounts of the internal condition of Russia are full of dramatic irony for the Russian historian. In an article titled “Intemperance in Russia: The Emperor to the Rescue,” Novikova informed her readers that “His Majesty’s noble rescript on the distressing subject of intemperance has made many millions of Russians grateful and happy.”<sup>135</sup> In 1916 she wrote an article titled “Russia’s Faith in Victory,” in which she stated, “We, in Russia, look forward to the future without fear. We stand united as one man. All political strifes and disagreements are forgotten; there is no division of parties, no discussion of any affairs of State except those connected with the war.”<sup>136</sup>

After the Revolution of 1917, Novikova presumably lost her primary means of financial support but not immediately her cause. One of her last known letters to the British press, titled “Russia and Europe,” was an appeal for aid during the famine of 1921-1922. She closed with the following:

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<sup>135</sup> Madame Olga Novikoff [Novikova], “Intemperance in Russia: The Emperor to the Rescue,” *Review of Reviews* 49: 294 (June 1914), 449, <http://britishperiodicals.chadwyck.com/>.

<sup>136</sup> Olga Novikoff [Novikova], *Russia’s Faith in Victory* (London: East and West, 1916), 6.



More than ever the civilized, scientific, and religious element is needed in Russia now, after these last years of bitterest persecution, resulting almost in annihilation. In this respect it seems to me important that England should realize the importance of her own contribution... There was a time not long ago when my dream was to see Russia and England on terms of closest friendship, and some men who could be described as really great worked for it both in Russia and in England. This work will, when the moment comes, have to be taken up afresh in both countries, with God's help. Where are the great men ready for that work? Upon whose shoulders will the mantle of Gladstone descend?<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Olga Novikoff [Novikova], "Russia and Europe," *Asiatic Review* (Oct. 1922), 665.

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