Russian history offers numerous examples of the exploitation and de-basement of human beings.

After the Mongols invaded in the mid-thirteenth century they extracted obeisance, financial tribute, and military assistance from the princes of Rus' lands for at least the next century and a half. As the Mongols lost their grip, the Muscovite state expanded, its tsar enforcing unrestricted despotic rule over all citizens.

By degrees, starting roughly at the end of the fifteenth century, Russian peasants became more and more obliged to their landowning masters. From the late sixteenth century, they—that is, the vast majority of the rural Russian population—were bound from cradle to grave as serfs to their masters (or to the state directly), and they were not released from this form of involuntary servitude until 1861.

The Russian Orthodox Church, since the time of Peter the Great, was under the thumb of tsarist authority, and after the 1917 Revolution has endured periods of anti-religious persecution.

Russian women of all historical periods have been victimized by their men, whether they were being beaten for disobedience in accordance with the principles of the sixteenth-century Domostroi, or were holding down full-time jobs while at the same time being responsible for the bulk of household labor in the twentieth-century Soviet state.

For nearly three decades during the Soviet period of Russian history, forced labor was a way of life for the millions of inhabitants of the so-called gulag or system of concentration camps. Both Western and Soviet historians have acknowledged that this was outright slavery.\(^1\) With the
onset of collectivization in the 1930s an aspect of serfdom was reinstated, for a large portion of the Soviet population was restricted by means of an internal passport system to living in designated agricultural areas.

To this day ordinary Russian citizens, who often have difficulty obtaining the minimum goods and services necessary for subsistence, contribute to the production of certain goods and services which only an elite class, formerly known as the nomenklatura, has access to.

These facts are very diverse, and they are of course somewhat oversimplified. But a general picture emerges which is accurate—and appalling. The sheer quantity and diversity of suffering that has gone on in Russia, and still goes on there, boggles the Western mind.

The American psychoanalyst Edmund Bergler treated a class of masochistic neurotics whom he termed “injustice collectors.” I know of no nation which has collected more injustices for itself than has Russia.

What are the causes of the great suffering that goes on in Russia? Whence the Russian “need to suffer” (“potrebnost’ stradaniia”)\(^2\)—as Dostoevsky put it? Who is to blame?—to ask the perennial Russian question.

Russia is customarily characterized as an “authoritarian” or “patriarchal” culture. This is no doubt true, but the very terms tend to attract blame toward those exercising “authority,” and draw analytic attention away from those over whom “authority” is exercised, that is, away from those who do the suffering and who might possibly be complicitous in the “authoritarianism.”

In the political and historical spheres, for example, this means (or has meant in the past) undue attention to leaders and inadequate attention to the servile psychology of subordinates and ordinary Russians. I am inclined to agree with Nicholas Vakar: “historians who have written that the tyranny of the Tsars conditioned the nation to accept the tyranny of the Communists have missed the fact that Russian habits of obedience have been the cause, not the result, of political autocracy.”\(^3\)

In the gender sphere exaggerated attention to authority has meant a certain kind of male chauvinism, even among those feminist critics of Russia who are so busy blaming the pampered Russian male ego for female oppression that the female psyche goes unexamined.

Analogous statements could be made for other spheres of Russian
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life. Little effort has been made to understand just how the Russians manage to consistently get themselves into situations where they appear to have no choice but to submit and to suffer. How did Russians come to acquire their well-deserved epithet of “long-suffering people” (“terpelivy narod”)? Or, to utilize an alliterative epithet recently invented by poet Andrei Voznesenskii, why has Russia always been a “country of suffering” (“strana stradan’ia”)?

The Soviet prose writer Vasilii Grossman proffered his controversial notion that the “Russian soul” is by nature a “slave” (“raba”). This is a metaphorical characterization of the phenomenon in question, not an explanation of it. But, frankly, literary artists have exerted more effort in this area than anyone else, and their explorations have been very fruitful. Grossman is hardly alone. All of Dostoevsky’s major novels, for example, offer insights into masochism. The poetry of Blok is filled with suffering welcomed by the sufferer. Much of Solzhenitsyn’s writing glorifies suffering behind prison walls. And so on.

The literary imagery of Russian self-abnegation can be wide-ranging, even flamboyant. It is hardly falsifiable (in the Popperian sense), but at the same time it is highly interesting. Take, for example, the Russian Symbolist poet Viacheslav Ivanov, who in his essay on “the Russian Idea,” declares: “our most attractive, most noble aspirations are imprinted with a thirst for self-destruction [zapechatleny zhazhdoiu samorazrusheniia].” “We” (Russians), Ivanov says, act as though other peoples are terribly stingy, and we try to prove ourselves a selfless people, a “self-immolating people,” a “butterfly-Psyche” longing for a fiery death. Ivanov uses the imagery of downward movement in an attempt to convey what he means. Russians have a “love for descent,” they are inclined to voluntary subordination of the will to another (as in the religious practice of washing another’s feet, or in the sectarian’s utterance “You are greater than I”). The “law of descent” (“zakon niskhozhdenia”) is the essence of “Russian soul,” and the lowly, humiliated, but enlightening Christ is the perfect model for this Russian tendency. It is as if the words “imitation of Christ” (“upodoblenie Khristu”) were inscribed on the forehead of the Russian nation. It is as if Russians were born Christian: “Hic populus natus est christianus.”

These very heterogeneous images explain nothing, but they offer a treasure trove to the scholar seeking explanations. They make it easier to go about asking blunt questions: How do Russians endure their pain?


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What mental processes permit them to go on living even as they perceive themselves as victims? Might there be a widespread mentality which encourages their victimization? Do they have some secret need or wish to suffer, or even to destroy themselves? If so, what is the ontogenetic background to the wish in individual Russians? Why is the wish so difficult to dislodge?

These are psychological questions, and they have not been answered in any substantive fashion in the past. They are of particular interest to the psychoanalytically oriented scholar. Of course other scholars, too, have taken an indirect interest. Considerable historical, philosophical, political, anthropological, and sociological research has been devoted to patterns of exploitation, subjugation, and even self-destruction in Russia. But psychological, and in particular, psychoanalytic study has been very scarce.

What I am proposing to do here is to construct a psychoanalytic model of the mentality behind both slavish behavior and its cultural signification in Russia.

The social practices and cultural phenomena in question exist at the level of the collective, not at the level of the individual. That is, they are sociocultural facts. But such facts depend on the actions of individuals, and individuals have feelings about what they are doing collectively. An individual who regularly participates in a social practice has a persisting attitude toward, a mentality concerning what he or she does (or signifies doing, or fantasizes doing) in his or her social environment. That mentality, or aspects of it, may be shared with other members of the collective. To the extent that sharing takes place, or to the extent that the shared mentality contributes to social developments and signifying practices, the mentality deserves the attention of historians, literary scholars, linguists, sociologists, anthropologists, and others who study human collectives.

But a mentality is first and foremost an object for psychological study. It persists in the face of historical and environmental change. For example, when Alexander II liberated the peasants from serfdom, the psychology of peasants did not just suddenly change—as Merezhkovskii understood when he said that "the liberty of slaves is a slavish liberty, little better than voluntary slavery." Similarly, when Soviet power disintegrated, Russians did not suddenly become different people.

What I am going to call a slave mentality is something that psy-
chologists, and in particular psychoanalysts, will be interested in. If I go so far as to speak of the Russian slave mentality, then I mean for historians, literary scholars, anthropologists, Slavists generally, and culture theorists to take an interest as well. But the primary focus of this study is nonetheless psychoanalytic.

One thing should be emphasized: in no way is the term “Russian slave mentality” (or the more poetic “slave soul of Russia,” or the more clinical “Russian masochism”) meant to imply that only Russians have such a mentality, or that all Russians have such a mentality, or even that the slave mentality is the most important psychological feature shared by significant numbers of Russians.

But there is a consensus among highly diverse observers—native Russians as well as foreign visitors, impressionistic literary artists as well as rigorous scholars, historians as well as commentators on the current scene—that there exists a widespread attitude of submissiveness toward authority and a tendency toward self-defeating and self-destructive behavior in individual Russians. Russians do not merely suffer. They have concocted for themselves a veritable cult of suffering.

It may be objected that masochistic attitudes and behaviors have simply been unavoidable in Russia, for reasons quite outside of the individual’s control, and that it is therefore unfair to tag them with the derogatory-sounding epithets “slavish” or “masochistic.” Why blame the victim? Why require heroism from an individual in an unbearable situation?

This objection is certainly valid when a victimized individual plays no role whatsoever in his or her victimization. An upstanding Soviet citizen who is suddenly and unexpectedly arrested by the KGB, for example, is not necessarily a masochist. But even a social system which is oriented toward victimizing individuals requires a certain amount of cooperation from those individuals, and to the extent that individuals do cooperate they are behaving more or less masochistically. Russian dissident V. Gorski observed: “The rejection of freedom does not leave man unpunished. It turns him into a slave of necessity.” But (and I am sure Gorski would agree) a slave of necessity is no less a slave. In other words, the easiest or most adaptive solution in a specific situation may well be the masochistic one, but that does not make it any less masochistic. Medical researcher V. D. Topolianskii emphasizes this important point in a recent interview with Literaturnaia gazeta:
In the context of a totalitarian government the nontraditional choice requires courage. Here an essential question arises: what do you call those people who attempted to fight the system? Were they people who behaved self-destructively (after all they knew they were in danger of being repressed), or were they persons who were trying to preserve their integrity amidst the general collapse? Official [Soviet] psychiatry insisted that the actions of Sakharov, Solzhenitsyn, and Grigorenko fell under the category of paranoia insofar as these individuals were characterized by an inability to make compromises. But I am strongly inclined, on the contrary, to label those who opted for compromise as the ones with self-destructive behavior. For, in a situation of unfreedom, compromise is always a betrayal of the self [predatel'stvo samogo sebia]. It has always seemed to me that a readiness to compromise and, consequently, to carry out assignments handed down from on high, is itself self-destruction [samorazrushenie].

This is an essentially psychoanalytic insight. If in place of every occurrence of the word "self-destructive" we read instead "masochistic," then the passage would sound like a straightforward psychoanalytic interpretation of individuals acquiescing to the authoritarianism of the Soviet regime.

Masochism, like the heroic resistance Topolianskii speaks of, is an individual matter. Masochism is not a phenomenon of the faceless masses—although the self-destructive behavior of groups is itself an observable phenomenon in Russia, and a legitimate object of sociological study. Russians may sometimes seem to resemble a herd of lemmings headed into the sea, but that does not make the individual lemming any less interesting.

Psychoanalysis is, quite literally, analysis of the individual psyche. The collective is something else again. Many Russians feel that the collective is the most important thing in the world, but in psychoanalysis the individual reigns supreme. This is certainly one reason why there was a long history of hostility to psychoanalysis in Soviet Russia.

In any case, psychoanalysis understands that the individual who knuckles under to the collective is betraying himself or herself. The psychoanalyst cannot but observe that such submission, however understandable in context, is a form of masochism.

**Masochism and the Slave Image**

It is important to define the central concept of this book from the very start. Masochism, in the broadest sense (as opposed to the original,
narrowly erotic sense), is defined by psychoanalyst Anita Weinreb Katz as follows: “any behavioral act, verbalization, or fantasy that—by unconscious design—is physically or psychically injurious to oneself, self-defeating, humiliating, or unduly self-sacrificing.” This is roughly what Freud meant by his term “moral masochism.” Note that enjoyment is not part of this particular psychoanalytic concept, although the masochist, like anyone else, does strive for pleasure, and sometimes even achieves it. It should also be pointed out that, according to this definition, masochism can exist not only at a literal, behavioral level, but at other levels as well (one may wish to be beaten in reality, but one may also wish to be beaten only in fantasy—which means that masochism can occur in dreams, folklore, literary works, political commentary, religious teachings, etc.). The definition of masochism is not normally extended so far, however, as to include aggression directed outward, away from the self, for then we would be dealing with what psychoanalysts term sadism, or with the fuzzier and more problematical notion of the death instinct. The definition of masochism utilized here also does not require a sadistic partner to participate in the masochistic act. Although sadomasochistic relationships are common, it is perfectly feasible to engage in masochistic behavior or fantasy without the participation of a sadist (e.g., one can beat oneself). Similarly, it is quite feasible to be a sadist without the participation of a masochist (e.g., one can beat others against their will).

Note also that no claim is being made here about whether masochism is “pathological,” or “abnormal,” or a “disorder.” Western clinicians may use these terms, which are appropriate in their own cultural context. But I will try to avoid such evaluative epithets to characterize behavior in the Russian cultural context, even though the behavior in question may be fully comparable to what occurs in the Western clinic (and, by the way, in many areas of everyday life in the West as well).

I argue that the traditional submissiveness and self-destructiveness of the Russian slave mentality constitute a form of masochism. To say that the Russian soul is a slave is to say that Russians tend to injure themselves, defeat themselves, humiliate themselves, or sacrifice themselves unduly—all behaviors that characterize masochism in the Western clinical sense of the term.

And again, it is individual Russians who do these things. One may
say that there is a culture of moral masochism in Russia, but it is individuals who enact that culture, who endow it with its masochism. Russia offers opportunities galore for suffering, as we will see, but it is individuals (even if fictitious individuals, such as Stavrogin or Ivan the fool) who take up the culture on its offer to suffer.

I am not going to argue that masochism is the essence of the so-called “Russian national character.” If there is even such a thing as “national character” (or “modal personality,” as some psychological anthropologists prefer to say), it has many aspects. The slave mentality is only one aspect. For personal reasons I became interested specifically in the masochistic feature of Russians. My task is not so much to “characterize” Russians as to examine a particular characteristic, masochism, as it occurs in individual Russians and in some established Russian sociocultural practices.

I want to emphasize that it is Russians who are being studied here, not any other Slavs such as Poles, Ukrainians, Slovaks, Czechs, Croats, Serbs, or Bulgarians. The terms “pan-Slavism” and “Slavophilism” (which all too often have meant pan-Russism and Russophilism) have led to certain misunderstandings among non-Slavists. Some scholars—including psychoanalytic scholars—have tended to play fast and loose with the very term “Slavic,” treating the highly diverse Slavic nationalities as if they were all homogeneous. But they are not. A Russian is not the same as, say, a Slovak—linguistically, politically, geographically—and psychologically. Some psychoanalytic scholars have even confused the non-Slavic ethnic groups of the Soviet Union with Russians (as when the acts of the Georgian Iosif Stalin are said to exemplify “Russian” behavior). The psychoanalytic scholar of Russian culture is just as obliged to learn the Russian language and survey the field of Russian studies as the Slavist is obliged to make an in-depth study of psychoanalysis before applying psychoanalysis to a Slavic topic.

Another sociocultural category that is not being studied here is the so-called Homo sovieticus who, as Mikhail Heller (Geller) and others have argued, possesses a relatively coherent set of (psychological and other) traits. It is true that great changes occurred in Russia when the Soviets came to power, and that these changes could not but be reflected in the psyches of individual Russians residing there. Fear became a particularly important psychological factor, especially during the Stalin period. But my project is tightly focused on Russian masochism, which
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existed continuously before, during, and after the Soviet Union's seventy or so years of existence. *Homo sovieticus* may be a legitimate object of psychological study, just as "national character" may be. In particular, it would be interesting to find out which elements of *Homo sovieticus* are new and which merely derive from the old *Homo russicus* (or the old *Homo ucrainicus* or *Homo belarussicus*, etc., for that matter). But these questions would take us far afield.

I am not the first to apply the clinical term "masochism" to Russians. The most relevant work in this area was done by British psychiatrist Henry V. Dicks, a fluent speaker of Russian who interviewed Soviet soldiers who ended up in the West after World War II. Dicks refers to the "moral masochism," "intra-punitive tendencies," and "self-directed aggression" in his subjects. He provides specific examples:

Frequently described reactions to threats by superiors, e.g., in the Army, are varying degrees of "self-immolation." A man berated by someone against whom he is powerless will suddenly, as it were, throw up his hands and say, "All right—shoot me then if you like—what do I care?"

Russians have long experience of "absorbing" without rejoinder the insults and indignities of their masters and social superiors. The impassive exterior conceals a reaction which can be verbalized as follows: "You think me a fool and a knave. You think I am a feelingless clot and dumb beast. All right then, that's how I will act!" From this there result, according to my informants, countless acts of calculated clumsiness, spoiling of output or machinery, delays and muddles which are so contrived that while the perpetrators (often acting in silent collusion) are shown up as stupid and may be punished, they chiefly result in the vexation or heavy punishment of their superiors.

The real focus of this author's research was not masochism, however, but "national character." As a result, his observations on Russian masochism were somewhat parenthetical and unsystematic. Similarly, others who have made assertions about the existence of masochism in Russia have not followed through with a detailed examination of this phenomenon. Thus, although the hypothesis of Russian masochism does not originate with me, I do hope to contribute: (1) massive documentation of evidence for the hypothesis from a wide variety of spheres—historical, political, folkloric, literary, and so on, and (2) systematic, in-depth explorations in several narrowly defined areas, such as the folklore of Ivan the fool, the Russian bathhouse culture, the attitude of women toward men, and the attitude of Russians toward the collective. These
explorations, in turn, will lead to a general claim about the maternal nature of the object toward which the Russian self takes a masochistic stance.

This book is about both images and realities. At one moment I may call up the emblem of the long-suffering Russian mother in a poem by Aleksandr Blok, the next I may cite statistics showing that the average Soviet woman put in nearly twice as many hours per week of labor as her husband did. The poetic image and the everyday reality are not always directly related, of course, but I think both need to be considered if there is to be an adequately broad psychological understanding of masochism in Russia.

The poetic versus the literal meanings of the very word “slave” offer an instructive example. Every person in traditional tsarist Russia was supposed to be a “slave of God” (“rab bozhii,” as in the old proverb “Vse my raby Bozh’i [We are all slaves of God]”). This metaphor was very ancient and very ordinary. The Academy dictionary of Russian defines the expression not only as “a Christian,” but also as “a human being generally (from the religious notion of the total dependence of a person on God).” The corresponding feminine form, “female slave of God” (“raba bozhiia”) referred not only to a woman Christian, but to a woman generally.

The anarchist Mikhail Bakunin was thus only expressing a tautological conclusion from ordinary Russian linguistic usage when he declared: “If God exists, the human being is a slave [Esli Bog est’, chelovek—rab].” Maksim Gor’kii, on the other hand, didn’t mind God’s existing as long as humans—Russian humans in particular—didn’t have to be slaves into the bargain. Referring to the condescending generosity of God described in chapter 40 of the book of Job, Gor’kii exclaims: “Whenever I read this chapter, I shout out in my mind to my own fellow-Russians: just stop being slaves of God [da perestan’te zhe vy byt’ rabami bozh’imi]!”

The use of the word “slave” in these contexts is metaphorical and is intended to convey a certain psychological attitude of dependence and submissiveness before God. The metaphor is presumably based on intuitions concerning the attitudes and feelings that real slaves experience with respect to their real masters. As it turns out, these intuitions are quite accurate.

Real slaves existed in Russia well into our own century. There has
been much variation over time and geographic location, of course, in the extent to which Russians have been enslaved. Technically, Russia has had both slavery (until 1723, then renewed in the Soviet period as forced labor) and serfdom (until 1861). Some scholars see little difference between true slavery and serfdom as it existed in Russia after the mid-eighteenth century. Under different sociopolitical conditions the Russian slave has been variously referred to as “rab,” “kholop,” “krepostnoi” (serf), and “zek” (convict, slave laborer). Curiously, the first two of these terms were also applied to Russian nobles in their relationship to the tsar during certain historical periods. The multifarious technical ways in which all these terms differ from one another will not be a concern of this book, nor will the socioeconomic, political, and demographic factors contributing to various enslavement practices in Russia. Rather, my concern will be the masochism of Russians generally, many of whom happen to be literal slaves.

For the most part the Russian slave was indeed slavish. But the slave could also be defiant. This can be seen, for example, in various cultural practices, such as satirical folklore in which the peasant turns the tables on the landowner. Defiance could also be manifested in criminal activity, such as stealing grain or timber from the landowner. Or there were more serious manifestations, such as the large uprisings (e.g., the famous one led by Emelian Pugachev in 1773–74), or smaller disturbances (so-called “volneniiia”), or escapes. Sometimes rebellious peasants proffered the cunning excuse that the “tsar-father” was on their side. But direct resistance to enslavement was, in any case, the exception, not the rule. As Peter Kolchgin has pointed out, for example, most Russian serfs did not engage in “volneniiia,” otherwise serfdom could not have been maintained.

Historians are understandably attracted to the various uprisings and rebellions which took place over the centuries in Russia. These are “events” which left extensive paper trails, while the ordinary, everyday slavishness of Russians constituted a distinct nonevent. From a psychoanalytic viewpoint, however, the rule is no less interesting than the exception.

Much evidence is available on slavish attitudes in Russia, some of it going back centuries. In the mid-seventeenth century Adam Olearius, who had traveled in Russia, summed up his observations on Russian servility as follows:

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They are all serfs and slaves. It is their custom and manner to be servile and to make a show of their slavish disposition. They bow to the ground to notables, and even throw themselves at their feet. They give thanks for beatings and punishments. All subjects, whether of high or low condition, call themselves and must count themselves the Tsar's *khlopi*, that is slaves and serfs. Just as the magnates and nobles have their own slaves, serfs, and peasants, the princes and the magnates are obliged to acknowledge their slavery and their insignificance in relation to the Tsar. They sign their letters and petitions with the diminutive form, such as Ivashka instead of Ivan, or "*Petrushka, tvoi khlop* [Petrushka, your slave]." \(^{33}\)

About half a century earlier another traveler, Giles Fletcher, made rather similar observations:

Into what servile condition their libertie is brought, not onely to the Prince, but to the Nobles, and Gentlemen of the Countrie (who themselves also are but servile, specially of late yeares) it may farther appeare by their owne acknowledgments in their supplications, and other writings to any of the Nobles or chiefe officers of the Emperours. Wherein they name and subscribe themselves *Kolophey*, that is, their villaines, or bondslaues: as they of the Nobilitie doo vnder the Emperour. This may truely be saide of them, that there is no servant nor bond slaue more awed by his Maister, nor kept downe in more servile subjection, then the poore people are & that vniversally, not only by the Emperour, but by his Nobilitie, chief officers, and souldiers. So that when a poore *Moujick* meeteth with any of them upon the high way, he must turne himselfe about, as not daring to looke him on the face, and fall downe with knocking of his head to the very ground, as he doth unto his Idoll.\(^ {34}\)

This behavior obviously signifies a masochistic psychological attitude in the slave who performs it. The kowtowing Fletcher describes was called "chelobitie" in Russian, literally "beating the forehead." Nowadays the word has acquired the metaphorical meaning of "petition" or "request." But it was originally—and in some contexts still is—a literal, physical bowing down, so low that the forehead would strike against the ground and possibly be injured. Other travelers' accounts from the sixteenth century, as Ronald Hingley points out, report that Russians "would happily exhibit the bumps on their foreheads raised through excess of zeal in executing the kowtow."\(^ {35}\) During the late Soviet period I actually observed athletic old women hammering a stone floor with their foreheads as they prayed before icons in one of the churches of Zagorsk. The Russian fool, according to a proverb, will go to extremes in this matter: "Make a fool pray to God, and he will break his forehead" ("*Zastav* duraka Bogu molit'sia, on i lob razob'et").\(^ {36}\)
A particularly rich source of evidence about the masochistic attitudes of real slaves comes from Russian folklore gathered before 1861, for much of the peasantry before that date belonged to the serf category. The proverb just mentioned, for example, comes from the classic collection of Vladimir Dahl (1801–72), published originally in 1862. Here are some other lessons in slavishness from that copious work:

Say you are guilty and bow down (or: lie down) (Govori vinovat, da poklonis' [ili: da lozhis']).

He submitted and fell at his feet as well (Pokorilsia da v nozhki poklonilsia).

Keep your head bowed and your heart submissive (Derzhi golovu uklonnu, a serdtse pokorno).

Beat with your forehead lower: the sky is too high and the face of the earth is nearer (Bei chelom nizhe: do neba wysoko, do litsa zemli blizhe).

Be quieter than water, and lower than grass (Tishe vody, nizhe travy).

Crawl and grovel face down before him (Polzkom pered nim da nichkom).

When they beat you, say thank you for the lesson (Pob'iu, tak skazhi spasibo za nauku).

Do the work of seven, but obey one (Delai svoe delo za semerykh, a slushaisia odnogo).37

These utterances attempt to teach the peasant a sense of absolute submissiveness before authority. In pre-emancipation Russia this meant not only submissiveness before the peasant’s landlord (“barin”), but servility before anyone powerful generally, such as a government bureaucrat, a military superior, and so on. Note that some of the items are in two parts, the second part being a reinforcement of the first. In effect: one act of submission may not be enough, two are needed to convince the dominant party of the slave’s true servility, a servility of the heart as well as of gesture. Note also the “vertical” orientation of many of the sayings, the submissive party being well “below” the dominant party in the spatial configuration. Perhaps this is what Ivanov had in the back of his mind when he spoke of a Russian “law of descent.”
Some of the proverbs describe masochism of a slightly different sort, that is, outright self-destructive behavior:

He offers up the rod to be used against himself (On sam na sebia palku podaet).

He is braiding a whip (or: a rope) to be used against himself (On sam na sebia plet' [ili: verevku] v'et).

The slave is beating herself if she does a poor job of reaping (Sama sebia raba b'et, kol ne chisto zhnet).

He covered his own beard with his spittle (Sam svoi u borodu opleval).

He stepped on the teeth of the rake and hit himself in the head (Nastupil na zub'ia—grabliam i v lob). 38

Such evidence for masochistic attitudes in the Russian peasant would of course have to be matched with evidence for sadistic inclinations (“It's fun to beat someone who is crying”) or rebellious feelings (“A judge’s pocket is like a priest’s belly”) in a balanced study of Russian proverbs.

Indeed, masochism is not the only feature of psychological interest in slaves. It is but one item in a spectrum of psychical phenomena which can be observed in the real slave, including that type of slave who lives in extremity in the forced labor camp, and who resorts to a variety of defenses—especially infantilization and identification with the aggressor—in order to overcome fear and survive physically. 39 The primary concern of this book, however, is masochism.

It should be granted that some aspects of masochism, such as extreme servility, may be appropriate in the situation of direct contact with a powerful master who holds the key to all resources. The shuffling, obsequious muzhik, like the American Uncle Tom in the antebellum south, had something to gain from his servility—which, by the way, is not to say that all muzhiki were docile all of the time, or that all southern black slaves were Uncle Toms in all contexts.

In the political realm servility can be especially useful for obtaining resources and even power (and hence, the possibility of acting on sadistic fantasies). The sycophant uses a form of masochism to manipulate a superior, and as a result can even appear to be in control of the superior. The relationship with the superior is not truly reversed, however. For example, all the tsar had to do was kill or arrest a few important people,
or just withdraw resources, in order to remind his boyars why they were sycophants. Or, all Stalin had to do was eliminate a few honest critics for most of the actors around him to turn servile.

In any case, masochism is no less masochism when it seems appropriate or adaptive in a given situation. It is important to recognize masochism for what it is, even as we never cease to be amazed by the multifarious uses to which it can be put.

What Is Russia?

Throughout this book Russia will be used not only as a metonymic designation of a geographic area occupied largely by ethnic Russians, but as a collective personification of the Russian people as well. Here I simply follow tradition. Russians tend to think of their country as a collective representation of themselves, as a person. Numerous common epithets indicate that Russia belongs to this category: “Mother Russia” (“Rossiia mat’,” “Matushka Rus’”), “Holy Russia” (“Sviataia Rus’”), “Motherland” (“Rodina”), “Fatherland” (“Otechestvo”), and many others which will appear in the following pages. Less common epithets are constantly being invented by Russian poets, but they have the same personifying effect, for example, Blok’s “Beggarly Russia” (“Nishchaia Rossiia”), Belyi’s “Deaf Russia” (“Glukhaia Rossiia”), Andreev’s “Shabby Russia” (“Ubogaia Rus’”), and so forth. Nowadays especially “sick Russia” is frequently encountered in the post-Soviet media.

The personification of Russia is a trope that is often extended, as when Russian soldiers are customarily referred to as “sons of the Fatherland,” or “true sons of Russia.” The poets especially are prone to take liberties in extending the personification. For example, Russia is a “female slave” (“raba”) in the following stanzas from a somewhat sadistic poem titled “Russia” (1915) by Maksimilian Voloshin:

Люблю тебя в лице рабьем,
Когда в тишине полей
Прочитаешь голосом бабьим
Над трупами сыновей.

Как сердце нижет и блещет,
Когда, связав по ногам,
На отмашь хозяйин хлещет
Тебя по кратким глазам.
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I love you in the person of a slave,
When in the quietness of fields
You wail in a woman’s voice
Over the bodies of your sons.

How the heart droops and shines
When, having bound your feet,
The master lashes wildly
At your humble eyes.43

The poets are not alone here. Respected scholars too will extend the personification of Russia to considerable lengths. Literary historian Dmitrii Likhachev, for example, likes to dwell on the generosity and goodness (“dobrota”) of a person called Russia:

Russian culture did not copy, but creatively dealt with the riches of world culture. This huge country was always in possession of a huge cultural heritage, and managed it with the generosity of a free and rich person [s shchedorosti’svobodnoi i bogatoi lichnosti]. Yes, namely a person, for Russian culture and all of Russia with it constitute a person, an individual [iavliaiutsia lichnost’iu, individual’nost’iu].44

Some authors, especially those with a nationalistic or Slavophile bent, extend the personification while at the same time refusing to recognize the poetics of the extension. Vadim Borisov, for example, speaks of the nation’s person or personality (“lichnost’”), which is somehow distinct from the empirical and rationally analyzable manifestations of national life. In this view Russia is very much a literal human being:

This sense of the nation as a personality, which has been expressed by individuals, corresponds with and confirms the people’s awareness of its identity as embodied in folklore. Its image covertly governs our speech, for when we speak of the “dignity” of the people, its “duty,” its “sins” or its “responsibility,” we are making concrete, that is to say, unmetaphorical, use of terms that are applicable only to the moral life of a person.45

On the contrary, such usage is highly metaphorical, or, to be rhetorically precise, such usage constitutes the device of personification (Greek prosopopoeta, literally “face making”). A nation is not literally a person. A population of persons in a specific geographical area is not itself a person or a personality. It merely acquires some attributes of a person in the minds of its citizens (and the attributes it acquires reveal much about these minds). In the opinion of Russian philosopher Nikolai Berdiaev, anyone who actually falls for the idea that a given nation is a person
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"lichnost'") is a nationalist, and is in some sense enslaved by that nation.\textsuperscript{46}

The personification of a nation occurs in other countries besides Russia, of course, and is generally familiar to psychoanalysts:

We tend to regard our native land as a great mother who brings into being, nourishes, protects and cherishes her sons and daughters and inspires them with love and respect for herself and her traditions, customs, beliefs and institutions; in return for which her children are prepared to work and fight for her—and above all to protect her from her enemies; a good deal of the horror and disgust which is inspired by the idea of an invasion of one's native land by a hostile army being due to an unconscious tendency to regard such an invasion as a desecration and violation of the mother.\textsuperscript{47}

There is a fairly extensive psychoanalytic literature on the personification of countries and other groups.\textsuperscript{48} The (mostly non-psychoanalytic) literature specifically on "Mother Russia" is truly enormous, as will be seen below in chapter 7. Given the importance of parental imagery for characterizing Russia, it is not surprising that there is also a substantial (again, mostly non-psychoanalytic) literature characterizing the inhabitants of that country as collectively childlike, infantile, juvenile, adolescent, etc.\textsuperscript{49}

Ultimately it is the real persons inhabiting personified Russia who are my quarry. Any personifying tropes these persons may create regarding their collective identity will here be read as projections or externalizations. The locus of the Russian culture of moral masochism is the mind of the individual Russian. For example, the unfortunate sufferings of "Mother Russia" and of her "true sons" cannot be understood without reference to the real sufferings of real mothers and real sons in a place called Russia.