The Soviet Connection:
Russian Orientalism's Long March 1800-1930
by
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BA (Honors), University of Tennessee, 2020

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS
In the Department of History

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Abstract

Although Edward Said's 'Orientalism' has been widely acknowledged for providing a necessary critical lens for the analysis of Orientalism in Western Europe and North America, whether post-colonial ideas neatly translate to the Russian example is still a question that provokes some uncertainty. This is largely due to the supposedly different ways in which Russian Orientalism evolved, namely that it never became a central component of Russian colonial policy in quite the same way that Western academic Orientalism did. The goal of this thesis, therefore, is to prove that post-colonial modes of analysis do have utility in the Russian context, and that this becomes clear once we make the historical connections between Imperial Russia's Orientalism and its Soviet successor more explicit. This is not to say that Russian Orientalism produces the exact same results as its Western counterpart, but rather to demonstrate that we are nonetheless left with a system that bears many of the same traits. As such, this thesis will consider Russian Orientalism as one continuum of discourses and literature that begins in the 1800s and continues into the final days of the USSR, with a special focus on the years between 1890 and 1930. As a brief addendum, this thesis also draws historical connections between these developments and the contemporary geopolitical situation of the post-Soviet space.

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Acknowledgements

As an Armenian American, my scholarship is deeply affected by my experiences as someone who is partly from one of the so-called “Soviet nationalities”. Although my mother emigrated from Armenia to the United States in the wake of the tumult that was the post-Soviet 1990s, our family retained close ties in Armenia. Much of my family on the Armenian side still lives there, and we keep in close touch.

I myself have lived in Armenia, and over the years have witnessed first-hand its social and economic problems, the horrific episodes of the never-ending war with Azerbaijan, and the indelible marks left on this land by the multiple empires that have passed through it. Armenia is a country that is proud of its history, but it is also one that is perpetually haunted by it. Most relevant for our purposes, the Armenian nation, like all nations of the post-Soviet space, is afflicted by the ambiguity of its identity. As former constituent republics of a defunct state, the former Soviet Republics must now fashion themselves as independent states with all the associated political and socio-economic structures that entails. However, this effort is perpetually hampered by the simple fact that all of these states were not constructed nor even envisioned as wholly independent states, but rather as semi-autonomous parts of a larger empire.

This can be seen not just in their common pervasive systemic problems that are a direct product of the Soviet era including corruption, nepotism, and oligarchy, but also in their tendency towards clientelism and economic dependency to Moscow, their inability to maintain well-defined frontiers, and the general instabilities of these national identities in the post-Soviet space with regards to the Soviet legacy. In short, these states do not “work”. For many of my early years as an academic, I could not find the words to fully describe these material conditions that I, and indeed many others, observed in the post-Soviet space. This thesis is therefore an attempt to explore the historiographical roots of these challenges, and in doing so to understand what may be required to supersede the current mediocre status quo of much of the post-Soviet world. This thesis as originally conceived was going to be far narrower in scope, both with regards to period and area of study. My original idea was to study the First Armenian Republic (1918-1920), namely its ideological origins and philosophical roots, the events of its short lifespan, and the

possible lessons that could be gleaned from this first dashed attempt at constructing a sovereign Armenian liberal democratic republic.

However, as I fleshed out the project further, I quickly understood that this scope was far too narrow to fully explain the systemic scale of the issues involved in this topic. It was also around this time that I took an interest in applying a more post-colonially oriented critique to the material conditions of the post-Soviet world. For this, I am grateful for the invaluable guidance of my academic supervisor Dr. Serhy Yekelchyk, for encouraging me to develop this analytical approach further and by pointing me towards the relevant literature that would later become the bedrock of this dissertation. I am also deeply grateful to Dr. Sara Beam for providing an excellent and in-depth introduction to the fundamentals of historiography, and for enriching my understanding of post-colonial modes of analysis. Additionally, I would like to express my appreciation to my second reader Dr. Neilesh Bose both for broadening the horizons of my understanding of post-colonial histories and for agreeing to provide valued guidance in the final editing stages of this dissertation.

Finally, I want to extend a heartfelt thank you to my dearest friends Chris Aino Pihlak, Baktash Goudarzi, Katherine St. Arnaud, Nick Paquin, Ana Paul Bertho, and Cory Wilcock for all of their support, love, and encouragement throughout my MA degree program. Moving to a new country during one of the worst public health crises in modern history proved to be one of the most difficult periods of my life, and I truly could not have survived and thrived as I have if it were not for these beloved friends.

I wish everyone mentioned here only the greatest of success in their future endeavors and look forward to the day when I will get the privilege of working with you again.

Dedication

To my parents and friends for all the invaluable support they have given in ways that are impossible for me to adequately acknowledge.

And to all those everywhere

Who strive for a better world for all people.

Introduction:
Russian Orientalism's Contradictory Evolution

> "We think that we have brought civilization […] we think that we have given the Asians whom we have subjugated peace, calm, and security […]. But there is a greater treasure than this. This is nationality, national feeling [*natsionalnost, natsionalnoe chuvstvo*] […] political death is traumatic, but the death of a nation is even more difficult to accept."[1] Nikolai Veselovskii, Russian Orientalist (1848–1918)

In Russian Orientalist literature, few stories were more influential that those set in the Russian Imaginary of the Caucasus. It is no surprise, then, that the Caucasus as a region was a significant space in the mind's eye of countless Russian artists and writers during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Whether they set their stories in the Chechen mountains, in a Circassian village, or on the Tatar steppe, the place that these stories depicted is one conceived in the imagination of Russian popular culture.[2] It is a space constructed of real interactions between Russians—such as Russian authors who travelled to the Caucasus—and those cultures they came into contact with, as well as a collection of tropes, stereotypes, and cultural understandings acquired over centuries of Russian imperialist wars and settler colonial expansion.

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[1] From B. V. Lunin, *Sredniaia Aziia v dorevoliutsionnom i sovetskom vostokovedenii* (Tashkent: Izdatelstvo Akademii Nauk Uzbekskoi SSR, 1965), 34–5.

[2] David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Russian Orientalism: Asia in the Russian Mind from Peter the Great to the Emigration.* (London: Yale University Press, 2010), 15–22. Because it is a constructed space, the boundaries of the Russian Oriental imaginary are quite abstract, and can range from the North Caucasus to Tatarstan, to far-flung places such as Iran, Mongolia, Afghanistan, and China. There are also distinctions between the Christian East and the "East of Xerxes" in Russian Orientalism, as Russia's Orientalists often cast their country as the Eastern defender of Christianity against various "paganists" to the east.

In the words of Eleonora Shafranskaia, a professor in Russian literature at the Moscow State Pedagogical University, "The Caucasus was Russia's Orient."[3] In particular, the North Caucasus was a special area of focus for Russia's Orientalists, although South Caucasian nations such as Georgia were not exempt from the imperial center's Orientalizing gaze. In the popular imaginary of Russian literature for instance Georgia is embodied as a beautiful woman who comes under the watchful protection of the Russian Empire after Georgia's men "failed to protect her from Islamic invaders".[4] Russian official narratives asserted that Imperial Russia's armies "saved" Georgia from being conquered by the Persian Empire, and more to the point, Russian masculinity "saved" the Georgian nation.

To wit, Russian literature centered on the mystique of this feminine archetype, representing Georgia as a woman endowed with unique natural beauty but that was also a latent danger to any unwitting men who let down their guard. The Georgia of Russian Orientalism, in other words, is a woman that must be and indeed secretly yearns to be tamed by Russian masculinity. By contrast the Georgian man—if he is not an inept drunkard or a supporter of Russian hegemony—does not feature in this narrative in any significant role and is often portrayed in an emasculated state.[5]

There are few who would argue that this is not a quintessentially Orientalist narrative concocted by an empire to reinforce and naturalize the hierarchy of the colonizer over the

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[3] Eleonora Shafranskaia, "O russkom orientalizme, «russkom mire» v kolonial'noi literature i ikh pereosmyslenii v literature postkolonialnoi" *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, no. 161 (January 2020): 732–801.

[4] Faced with the threat of invasion by the Persian Empire, King Heraclius II of the Eastern Georgian Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti opted to ally with the Russian Empire for protection and signed the 1783 Treaty of Georgievsk. Although the Russians initially failed to assist the Georgians when the Persians invaded in 1795, later Russian Orientalist narratives cast Georgian men as cowards who were saved by Russian Imperial might.

[5] This is a reference to *The Imeretian* by Yakov Polonskii, a Pushkinesque poet [ergo a Romanticist] who became the standard bearer of the genre during the heyday of Russian Realism. The poem is written from the perspective of a Georgian who supports Russia's domination of Georgia and extolls its benefits. See Susan Layton, "Eros and Empire in Russian literature about Georgia," *Slavic Review* 151, no. 2 (January 2017): 197, https://doi.org/10.2307/2499527.

colonized. Seemingly, Russian Orientalism in this instance represents a perfect mirror of similar trends in the metropoles of Western Europe's imperial powers. A foray into the writings on the Caucasus by Russian romanticists in the early nineteenth century yields a veritable treasure trove of literature reminiscent of the works of Western authors such as Lord Byron. Beyond the jingoist works of Alexander Pushkin, Mikhail Lermontov's 1840 novel *Hero of Our Time* also drew from a distinctly romanticist style by using picturesque imagery to depict the North Caucasus as an exotic land of majestic mountains foreign in appearance and populated by fierce Muslim tribals. These Oriental characters are at once a fearful presence but also a curiosity to the Russian reader due to their "strange" habits and traditions alien to the stifled world of Russian metropolitan society.

As with natives in Lord Byron's work, the native of the North Caucasus is to be feared as the Other, but the raw freedom and unbridled masculinity he represents was also something to be admired. Romanticist tropes featured prominently in Russian literature on the Caucasus prior to the late 1840s, clearly indicating that these literary trends were conversant with contemporary trends in Western Europe. This is unsurprising given Russia's ascendance during this period onto the stage of European imperial powers and its systematic attempts at Europeanization. Russian Orientalism's shift towards realism led by writers such as Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Lermontov, and others only reinforces this notion. The transfer to realism coincided with a general move away from the more one-dimensional depictions of exotic places characteristic of Romanticist depictions of the Orient in Western Europe as well.

In Russian Orientalist literature the rise of realism meant a move towards a more ethnographic and "physiological" approach that aimed to accurately depict the various peoples and cultures of the Orient. Authors attempted to infuse their works of fiction with accurate

contextual information, thereby rejecting the superficial representations of romanticist stories and embracing a more "scientific approach." Some authors took this approach to extremes as in the case of Alexander Bestuzhev-Marlinskii, whose stories often feature extensive footnotes filled with encyclopedic local knowledge on the places in which the stories are set.[6]

Interestingly, Russian Orientalist literature's turn towards greater objectivity also coincided with a growing suspicion of the very Western trends that the genre drew from. By the dawn of the twentieth century Russia's academic and literary Orientalists increasingly came to question many of the preconceptions that were inherent to Orientology itself as these more prejudicial and essentialist assumptions now came increasingly under suspicion both in the literary world and in academia. There are many reasons that explain this divergence, some of which are intimately interlinked with Russia's conception of itself. Namely, what it means to be Russian—especially in relation to a normative Western European liberal democratic status quo—is a definition that remains in a constant state of flux. Save for a brief period in the aftermath of Napoleon's disastrous Russian campaign, the Europe's great powers never fully accepted the Russian Empire as fully equal in the realm of European power politics. This only became truer with time as Moscow increasingly lagged behind its European rivals into the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

This doubt of Russia's place in the world and amongst those within its empire manifested in Orientalist stories such as Lev Tolstoy's "Prisoner of the Caucasus" [*Kavkazskii Plennik*]. While on its face a simple short story of a Russian army officer escaping the captivity of Tartar tribesmen, the story is unique for the apparent combination of romanticist and realist elements.

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[6] Kyohei Norimatsu, "The Reality of Falsehood: Leo Tolstoy's The Cossacks and the Romantic fashion of the Caucasus in Russian literature." *Neohelicon* 43, no. 2 (October 2016): 399–406; Susan Layton, *Russian Literature and Empire: Conquest of the Caucasus from Pushkin to Tolstoy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 233–37.

The stark contrasts between these two diametrically opposed motifs in *Kavkazskii Plennik* work to dispel the notion of inevitable dominance by an imperial power. The Russians clearly do not have full control of the restive mountains described in *Kavkazskii Plennik,* and they risk kidnapping and/or death the moment they go outside the walls of their military fortress. The plotline of this story revolves around the idea of a Russian noble trapped in an unfamiliar environment where they must struggle to survive and where none of the morals of polite society hold any water.

In this case the protagonist is left with no choice but to acquiesce to the demands of this culture in order to survive. As in the classic Romanticist story *Kavkazskii Plennik* gives us the exoticized perspective of an outsider looking in, a bird's eye view of a culture that seems strange and alien. In fact, the manner in which the work depicts the "Tartars" dovetails quite nicely with its tendency to exploit the existing discord between realism and romanticism. Tolstoy's work does betray the imperial ennui of an empire that struggles to control its frontier, but it also relies on Orientalist tropes to create that image. The short story adds to the retinue of Russian literature that sought to define the other, and by extension to define Russians and Russianness. Even as it takes liberties with romantic descriptions of an idyllic aul, sweeping valleys and mountain ranges, it tempers those images with an often-violent reality, one in which Russian soldiers are caught in the fray of a violent and untamed frontier land. These stories define Russian-ness in principally by differentiation with this savage other. What it means to be Russian is therefore an unstable definition predicated on what Russians are not, that is how they differ from the North Caucasus native.

It is also unsurprising that the new cultures on the southern periphery of Russia's empire became areas of interest for Russian Orientalism. The Muslim tribes of these mountainous

reaches became subject to a variety of tropes and stereotypes in the form of several archetypes in Russian literature. Most notably, the trope of the North Caucasus man, a strong, independent, and ultra-masculine character who represented the antithesis of Russia's stultifying polite society became a recurrent theme in multiple works of Russian Orientalist literature. When put alongside similar tropes from Western Orientalism, the familial similarity is undeniable. The Oriental man of Russian literature is a character who is quick to violence, largely ignorant of European norms or rules, and indeed is resistant to being taught them.

And yet, as a character the Russian popular imaginary does not completely reject the North Caucasus man. Rather, the Caucasian Muslim warrior is in many ways glorified as an aspirational example of "true" masculinity. This character is also deeply reminiscent of the eroticization and exoticization that emerges in Western European Orientalist literature, particularly in the works of Byron. The North Caucasian warrior may be a savage in Russian eyes, but his raw masculinity is portrayed as highly desirable to women, and therefore something that Russian masculinity should appropriate.

Rather than being relegated to the role of an antagonist or background caricature as with the Georgian man, the North Caucasus man of Russian Orientalist literature often takes center stage as the protagonist of the story as in Bestuzhev-Marlinskii's *Ammalat-Bek*, Tolstoy's *Hadji Murat*, or even Lermontov's *Izmail-Bei*. Further, these stories blur the lines of racial or cultural division between the North Caucasus man and those Russians he interacts with. Multiple stories set in the Russian Orientalist imaginary of the North Caucasus depict "tribal" character traits as something that can "transmit" into Russians colonizers sent to his native land as with Maksim Maksimich in Lermontov's Hero *of Our Time*. In *A Russian Circassian* by Alexander Druzhinin, the North Caucasus man is an independent and often unpredictable agent who can outmaneuver,

trick, and take advantage of those Russians sent to subdue him. In effect, Russian Orientalism represents a distinctly Russified imperialist narrative that seeks to assimilate these traits to Russianness while also enforcing difference between the colonizer and the other.

Even in these early iterations, the narrative of Russia as a nation of nationalities is discernable thanks to these rhetorical tendencies. The Russian metropole sought to define what it means to be "native" and incorporate those definitions into a wider imperial tapestry of Russianness. These inconsistencies also speak to divergent strands of Russian Orientalism which in turn hint at political divisions amongst Russia's elites, namely between those more predisposed to Western-style liberalism and those supportive of Tsarist conservatism. One only has to look at the discourse surrounding Alexander Griboedov's 1828 proposal for a Russian-Transcaucasian trading company for a clear example of how the Russian ruling class were divided on the question of endorsing Western European Orientalist ideas.

Griboedov's proposal and his arguments in support of it along with those of his partner in the project Petr Zaveleisky paint a clear Orientalist picture of how the Russian center should see its newly acquired Imperial periphery in the same manner as London would regard its African possessions. According to Griboedov, these new provinces should have become centers for resource extraction and industrialist capitalization to enrich the empire. However, Griboedov's textbook example of "benevolent imperialism", i.e., the very phenomenon that Orientalism facilitated and rationalized in Western European empires, was met with ambivalence and opposition in the halls of Russian military power.

Most notably, Russia's military administration in the Caucasus largely rejected this plan, appealing instead to a more conservative form of martial rule for Russia's new provinces.[7] In the

[7] Laurence Kelly, *Diplomacy and Murder in Tehran: Alexander Gribojedov and Imperial Russia's Mission to the Shah of Persia* (New York: Bloomsbury USA, 2006), 275.

eyes of Tsarist Russia's military officers—those with the most power in questions of colonial administration—the main objective of imperial expansion was to create a more secure frontier for the Russian imperial core.[8] Russia's periphery was only to be developed insofar as this would provide security for the Russian metropole. It is also likely that the Russian military establishment's antipathy towards these liberalized Orientalist ideas of colonial administration was connected to their reticence to cede political power to a civilian government. Russian colonial administrations were characterized by strict authoritarian control exercised by military governors, and the civilian system necessary to realize Griboedov's resource-extraction project would challenge this status quo.[9]

This state of affairs persisted into the mid-nineteenth century. Liberal-minded civilian administrators in Russia's colonies continued to advocate for a "softer", less coercive form of colonial administration but found themselves again sidelined by the military establishment. Such was the case for Vasilii Grigorev, who worked as an ethnographer and colonial administrator in the Orenburg *guberniia*. Grigorev fully believed in Russia's capacity to "civilize", i.e., impart Russian values and ways of life upon the nomads of Central Asia and he worked to achieve this through non-violent means.[10] Grigorev rejected the binaries instilled by Byronic-style Orientalism and instead argued that understanding native cultures would help Russia to build trust with colonized peoples and thereby convince their leaders to adopt Russian ways. Grigorev called on the Russian Empire to invest more in Orientalist academic fieldwork and research

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[8] Anna Aydinyan, *Formalists Against Imperialism: the Death of Vazir-Mukhtar and Russian Orientalism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2022), 19.

[9] Examples of these elites include the Armenians Khachatur Abovian, Gabriel Sundukyan, and the Azeri Mirza Akhundov. All of these men of letters viewed the Russian Empire as a benign imperialist presence that could pull the Caucasus out of its "backwardness" and into modernity. Abovian specifically hoped that cooperation between Russian intelligentsia and Armenian intelligentsia could function as a secularizing influence in his country where the Armenian Apostolic Church retained significant political influence and authority, and Akhundov had similar hopes for unseating the political hegemony of mullahs in Azeri society; Aydinyan, *Formalists,* 13.

rather than military expansion. Much as with Griboedov, however, Grigorev failed to gain the support of Orenburg's military administrators for his proposals.

In a characteristic turn of events, Russia developed a tradition of Orientalism supported by elements of its intelligentsia who were willing to instrumentalize it in service of Russian imperialism but failed to exploit this to its fullest extent. There are several reasons for this failure, chief of which was the political reluctance to give Orientalist institutions the autonomy to grow and play a larger role in Russian imperialist ventures. This would have necessitated some decentralization of Imperial Russia's governmental structure, something its elites stubbornly resisted until historical developments forced their hand in the early twentieth century. However, there has also long been a consistent theme of permeability in Russian Orientalist dichotomies that render them necessarily less effective in the realm of imperialist stratification. Because Russia's definition of itself and the other was in a constant state of flux, this uncertainty complicated the Russian position as the unchallenged imperial master of an "Oriental" realm.

Although these complications only work to make the topic of Russian Orientalism even more nuanced, they also leave plenty of unanswered questions. Namely, if there was such an apparent reluctance in both the political and art worlds of Russian society to instrumentalize Russian Orientalism in the same manner as in Western empires, how do we account then for the imperial hierarchies that define contemporary geopolitics in the realm of the former Russian Empire? To explain this, we must delve into the trajectory of Russian Orientalism's various tendencies, and more to the point, explore the connections between Orientalism in both the Imperial and Soviet eras. Although Russian Orientalism's development was uneven and disjointed, academic Orientalists nevertheless did succeed in developing systematic models for the anthropological stratification of Russia's colonized peoples. Moreover, these models

eventually became integral components of Russian/Soviet ethno-territorial delimitation, but this process would not come to fruition until the advent of "Orientology" in the late nineteenth century.

Although the Tsarist establishment successfully resisted more liberal implementations of Russian Orientalism, the idea of a "reformed" Orientalism persisted into the late nineteenth century in the scholarship of Grigorev's disciple, Baron Viktor Romanovich Rozen. Influenced by Grigorev's explicit linkage of Russian Orientalism and Russian national identity, Rozen succeeding in establishing Orientology as a more systematized discipline within the Russian Academy of Sciences. Rather than just replicating Western European trends, Rozen wanted Russian Orientalists to be trend setters in international Orientalist scholarship. Rozen's Orientology therefore questioned Western and by extension Russian chauvinistic assumptions and hoped to reform the discipline into a tool that would transform Russia into a country with better minority representation and civil rights for its many minority groups. Whereas it had been a vague concept in its previous iterations in Russian academia, Orientology was greatly expanded upon thanks to pioneering work of Rozen and his allies in academia.

Rather than cast the colonized peoples of the Russian periphery as subaltern outsiders then, Rozen's Orientology included them as part of a greater Russian national family. Unlike his predecessors, Rozen succeeded in establishing his ideas as a concrete tendency in Russian Orientalist scholarship. While Rozen did not establish Russia's Institute of Oriental Studies (*orientalistika*) of the Russian Academy of Sciences, his work laid the foundations for the Institute's modern identity.[11] It was thanks to his initiative that the Institute became one of the main advocates for governmental rationalization via the systemic ethnographic study of Russia's

[11] Based in St. Petersburgh, Russia, the institute was founded in 1818 and has maintained this name into the present day.

populace. Many of the Institute's leading scholars—including Nikolai Marr, Fedor Shcherbatskii, Sergei Oldenburg, and Vasilii Bartold—continued to develop Rozen's ideas and put them into practice in the early Soviet era. This gradual yet significant change in Russian Orientalism was intimately connected with Russia's socio-political climate in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

By the early twentieth century Imperial Russia's urban centers had developed a robust reading public, along with a limitless number of journals on every conceivable subject. This was therefore a period of unprecedented intellectual activity in Russia's metropole, with elevated levels of public participation in political and social questions on a level that had not been seen before. Along with the rise in a reading public came growing political awareness amongst Russians as well as a growth in political radicalism. Increasing numbers of ethnic Russians and ethnic minority groups representing a wide range of political positions organized and advocated for major systemic reforms during this period. Beset with growing social unrest, growing economic inequality, and various calamities including Russia's defeat by the Japanese in 1905 and the ensuing First Russian Revolution, Imperial Russia therefore became the center of intense political activism during this period.

The rise of the Russian reading public proved a veritable catalyst for all forms of political activism to a Russian public that was increasingly vocal in their disagreements with the authoritarian nature of the Tsarist regime. Russians also became more critical of the binaries of Russian Imperial narratives. The increasingly evident decline of Russia's imperial machine only further encouraged dissent among those critical of Orientalist racialist binaries and other versions of Great Russian chauvinism. This trend was not exclusive to leftist political movements and extended to liberal and centrist political factions in the Russian intelligentsia as well. In line with

this more critical stance, liberals and social democrats alike advocated for major reforms to allow for better representation and inclusion of ethnic minorities in Russian national affairs.

These major social developments had been partly the result of an ongoing process of reform undertaken by the Tsarist regime following the abolition of serfdom in 1861. These reforms included major industrialization efforts as well as the slight relaxation of the regime's harsh censorship laws. Although the Tsarist regime never fully endorsed the idea of rationalized government, its reforms gave the concept's proponents the space in which to further develop these ideas in Russian academia. Rozen and his colleagues thrived in St. Petersburg's vibrant political discourse and found significant support for their ideas amongst the Russian capital city's intelligentsia.

Much of this discourse was conversant with similar trends in Western Europe. Most notably, both liberals and revolutionaries alike espoused the European idea of government rationalization, ergo the idea that a "scientific" approaches to ethnic relations, economics, and infrastructure would lead to more effective governance. However, Orientology was also influenced by distinctly Russian discourses—especially amongst the Slavophiles—regarding Russia's uniquely "Asiatic elements". Slavophiles, including Grigorev argued that Russians were uniquely well-placed as the steward of Asian cultures because Russians themselves were Asiatic. This ideological position drew in part from Russia's history under Tatar-Mongol rule, but it was also motivated by Russia's extensive imperial contact with various nations throughout Asia. This Pan-Russian position was also deeply invested in an assimilationist version of Russian nationalism. Because Russia was an expansive contiguous empire-nation, love of country meant

demonstrating as much nationalist fervor for the empire's far-flung provinces as for any other part of the Russian "fatherland".[12]

By the logic of this position, the many nationalities of Russia's empire could also be "Russian" as they were part of the same "Asiatic" empire. As Rozen's mentor, Grigorev's vision proved quite influential for Rozen's own assimilationist pan-Russian idea of an empire of nations. It was in this dynamic political atmosphere that future Soviet nationalities policies gained the academic foundations required for their implementation. Rozen and his disciples worked to bring their pan-Russian interpretation of Orientalist into practice through extensive ethnographic studies of the peoples of Imperial Russia. Thanks to Rozen's work and that of his colleagues such as Bartold and Oldenburg, Orientology flourished into a diverse body of anthropology, cartography, and ethnographic taxonomies of the Russian Empire's various minority groups. Neither the Tsarist regime nor the Provisional Government that succeeded it made full use of this work, but Russian Orientalists found enthusiastic support from the Bolshevik regime after it seized power in 1917. Orientology's pan-Russian vision proved quite compatible with the Bolshevik party's own vision for an ethnically pluralistic union of socialist states, and both groups likewise advocated for government rationalization.

As the result of a seemingly unlikely alliance between liberal academics and Leninist-Marxist revolutionaries, the Soviet regime instrumentalized Orientological scholarship for the Bolshevik statecraft project. Rozen's Orientology therefore became a crucial element in the creation of the modern states of the Soviet and now post-Soviet realm, leaving us with a profound and deeply complex imperialist legacy in the present day. Russian Orientalism's evolution proved to have deeply consequential outcomes for hundreds of millions of people.

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[12] Vera Tolz, *Russia's Own Orient* (New York: Oxford University Press USA, 2011), 21–2.

Despite this, Russia's veritable wealth of Orientalist literature from the Tsarist and Soviet eras has received little post-colonial analysis within Russian academia. Critical reflection on this colonial legacy has only just begun in some corners of Russian academia but is largely absent in Russian politics.[13] In fact, Russia's present regime has committed itself to the glorification of Russian imperialism in both its Soviet and Tsarist manifestations, a propaganda effort that has only intensified in the wake of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Russia's contemporary leaders have made deliberate choices to associate the identity of the modern Russian state with both Soviet victory in the Second World War and with Imperial Russia's countless campaigns of conquest against various peoples.[14] Case in point was the 2018 art exhibition of the of the realist and *Peredvizhnik* Vasilii Vereshchagin at the Moscow New Tretyakov Art Gallery.[15] The exhibition focused on Vereshchagin's Orientalist depictions of Central Asia and marked the 150th anniversary of the Russian conquest of Central Asia. Also on display were various ethnographic artefacts from Central Asia and other former Russian imperial possessions such as the Caucasus. Rather than present an opportunity for post-colonial discourse, this event exemplified the Russian state's symbolic reassertion of an imperialist aesthetic. The centering of Vasilii Vereshchagin's graphic realist depictions of "Oriental despotism" distanced Russian imperialism from a colonialist context by rationalizing Russian conquests under the

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[13] Shafranskaia, "O russkom orientalizme": 732–801.

[14] Shaun Walker, *The Long Hangover: Putin's New Russia and the Ghosts of the Past* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 33–37. The Putin regime makes direct connections between this victory and the Russian "victory" over Ukrainian "fascism", forging a direct rhetorical connection between the two conflicts that casts Russia as the anti-fascist hero and Russia's opponent as the stand in for the Wehrmacht.

[15] The *Peredvizhniki* (lit. "wanderers" or "itinerants") were an artists' cooperative of Russian realist artists, all of whom had left the Imperial Academy of Arts in protest of the academy's harsh academic restrictions. They are most known for their realist landscapes, and their work helped to engender a nationalist tradition that considered the "Russian landscape" a *lieu de mémoire* for Russianness. Similar tendencies also show up in the books of realist writers such as Dostoevskii, and this tradition remains a component of contemporary Russian nationalism. See Rosalinde Sartorti, "Pictures at an exhibition: Russian land in a global world," *Studies in East European Thought* 62, (2010); 377–99, 10.1007/s11212-010-9128-5.

banner of a civilizing mission.[16] Conversely, although critical discourses of Russian imperialism and Russia's present post-imperial realities are present in the Russian polity, such discussions are very seldom allowed the same mass audience as the Putin regime's chauvinist narratives and are actively suppressed by the state.[17]

Additionally, post-colonial analyses of Russian imperialism in all its manifestations have been complicated in Western Europe and North America owing to the outwardly anti-colonial stance of the Soviet Union, and the significant contributions of Soviet Orientalists to the precursors of post-colonial thought. These are indeed important facts for any wholistic analysis of this subject, but they should not detract from readily observable material conditions that any post-colonial scholar would find immediately recognizable. The former constituent parts of Russia's empire—and indeed those territories that remain under direct Russian occupation or dependence to the present day—are marked with the unmistakable scars of colonialism, with many of the systemic problems and inequalities such material conditions dictate. Post-colonialism remains a very potent frame of analysis for Russian imperialism and its long-term consequences for the post-Soviet space. As the Russian nation state has sought to forge a new national identity that remains deeply imbedded in a narrative of imperialist glory, the need for such incisive analyses have only become more urgent.

This thesis therefore is an attempt to fill that gap, and to explain the roots of several major issues that affect the modern nation states of the former Soviet Union into the present day.

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[16] Sergei Abashin, "Vereshhagin bez kolonializma: kak postsovetskaia Rossiia ne otmechaet 150-letie zavoevaniia Srednei Azii," *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie (NLO),* no. 1 (2020).

[17] Take for example Sukhbat Aflatuni, "Povest: Penuel,"*Oktiabr'*, no. 9 (2007): 3–73, https://magazines.gorky.media/october/2007/9; Andrei Volos, *Vozvrashhenie v Pandzhrud: roman* (Moscow: Izdatelstvo AST, 2016); Saniar Yanyshev, *Umr. Novaia kniga obrashhenii* (Moscow: Art Khaus Media, 2017); and Vladimir Medvedev, *Zakhok* (St. Petersburg: Arsisbooks, 2017). Although not all post-colonial in tone, these works contend with post-colonial realities throughout the post-Soviet space with a special focus on the instability of identities and uncertainties of life brought on by the Soviet collapse.

The goal of this dissertation is to make more explicit these connections between Orientalism in the late Imperial Russian and Soviet eras, and specifically to achieve this via a post-colonial analysis of Russian Orientalist discourses in the arts, academia, and colonial administration. The specific focus of this analysis is from 1890-1930, as these are formative decades in Russian Orientalism's progression. In this short time span, Russian Orientalism weathered multiple regime changes in Russia to become a central component of Soviet nationalities policy and national delimitation. Decoding the binaries of Russian Orientalism and understanding its progression from Romanticist tendencies towards the more "scientific" Orientology is crucial for understanding later Soviet developments.

Having said this, 1936 is also a central year in the development of Soviet nationalities policy since this year marked the complete end of *korenizatsiia*, the introduction of Russification policies, and the onset of the purges. However, I did not include this within the scope of the dissertation for several reasons. Although 1936 is quite important in charting the history of Soviet nationalities policies, it is not as central to understanding the intellectual foundations of Soviet/Russian Orientalism, nor does it play as direct a role in creating the ethnic conflicts incited or exacerbated by National Delimitation. To be sure, Stalinist developments in 1936 and subsequent years do contribute to these problems and facilitate Russian cultural and linguistic hegemony throughout the Soviet Union.

However, as this thesis will demonstrate, Russo-centric modes of ethnonationalism, militarism, and national identity dominated throughout the National Delimitation project. Additionally, Stalin played an instrumental role in the 1920s in laying the foundations for his later more radical policies long before he seized complete power in the 1930s. In addition to being a vocal proponent of the ethnographic policies that became national delimitation and

korenizatsiia, Stalin also briefly served as the Commissar of Nationality Affairs during the 1920s. In this role the future strongman contended with Soviet nationality questions on a daily basis and played a key role in the formation of Soviet nationalities policy.[18] This thesis therefore choses to not cover Soviet developments after 1930 for the sake of providing sufficient contextualization for early Soviet nationalities policies.

The epistemological roots of Orientalist policy in the early Soviet Union stem from intellectual developments in the late Imperial period, and as such this period and the subsequent Soviet transition after 1917 are more central to this history. Additionally, the changes the Stalin began to implement in 1936 had such deep ramifications that they would require their own dissertation to be fully unpacked and understood. Because this thesis' central focus is on the transition from late Imperial Russian Orientology to Soviet Orientalism and National Delimitation, it is not possible to adequately cover the political developments of 1936 and subsequent Stalinist "reforms" in this dissertation. The historiographical analysis of this thesis will therefore focus principally on the implications of the major intellectual developments in Russian Orientology during the late nineteenth century and the discipline's subsequent Sovietization after 1917 and into the late 1920s. To achieve this analysis, this dissertation builds on the historiography of several scholars in Russian and Eastern European studies including various works by Susan Layton on Imperial Russian Orientalism, Vera Tolz's work on the emergence of Russian Orientology, Anna Aydinyan's coverage of Orientalist discourse in the Caucasus, and Francine Hirsch's exhaustive examination of the national delimitation project.

[18] Jeremy Smith, *The Bolsheviks and the National Question, 1917–23* (London: Macmillan Press, 1999), 57–62, 200–5; Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 169.

Owing to the extensive and complex body of historiography covering Russian Orientalism in its various iterations, the first chapter of this dissertation functions as a historiography, summarizing the current discourses on Russian Orientalism in Western and Russian academia as well as examining the most recent developments in these fields. This chapter also contends with theoretical discussions surrounding post-colonialist analysis and its application, namely the growing deconstructivist discourse in Western Academia embodied by Homi K. Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* and its contrast with generally more structuralist analyses such as Edward Said's *Orientalism.* Finally, the first chapter contends with the inherent uncertainties in Russian identity, Russian conceptualizations of the nation, and Russian Romanticists' effort to fill those gaps and therefore reify Russianness by defining the Other.

The second chapter continues the analysis of Russian Romanticism by linking this tendency to early manifestations of Russian Orientalism in the arts and literature. The goal of this chapter is to cement certain tropes and rhetorical devices that instill racialist binaries between "European" Russians and the "Asiatic" other, thereby demonstrating that Russian Orientalism was conversant with similar tendencies in Western Europe. Furthermore, the second chapter links this Romanticist narrative to debates on Russian colonialism within the intelligentsia and ruling classes of Russia's metropole, namely via an examination of the discourse surrounding Alexander Griboedov's Russian-Transcaucasian Trading Company Proposal. This analysis demonstrates that although some members of Russia's intelligentsia advocated for more "liberal" interpretations of Orientalism, the Tsarist ruling class rejected these ideas and did not incorporate them into Russian colonial administration.

Finally, the third chapter charts the further development of this more "liberal" form of Orientalism, termed "Orientology" by Vera Tolz, and its gradual rise to prominence in Russian

academia. This chapter analyzes the theoretical foundations of Orientology as espoused by Baron Viktor Rozen, namely Rozen's investment in Western European ideas of government rationalization, his critical denunciation of more binary forms of Orientalism, and his support for pan-Russian nationalism and Eurasianism. This chapter also contextualizes Rozen's ideas in the wider context of a growing liberal intelligentsia in the Russian metropole and in the metropolitan centers of Russia's imperial periphery. In its last section, this chapter covers the Sovietization of Orientology after Bolshevik coup in 1917 and connects the discipline directly to subsequent manifestations of Soviet Nationalities policy and National Delimitation. By making more explicit the linkage between Russian Romantic Orientalism, Orientology, and National Delimitation implementation of Orientological ideas, this chapter highlights important connections between these intellectual tendencies critical for understanding the current geopolitical realities of the post-Soviet world. Linking these intellectual and socio-political developments more explicitly gives us important insight instrumental for more effectively discerning and deconstructing the post-colonial constructs of the post-imperial realm that is the former Soviet Union.

I opted for this set of case studies in chapter two and three for two principal reasons. The first is that I intended for this thesis to be as all-encompassing as possible in its exploration of Russian Orientalism in all its manifestations. To achieve this, this thesis highlights the transmutability of these ideas throughout the various spheres of Russian society including politics, academia, and the arts. This dissertation covers a wide range of different countries that have come under Russian domination to prove common material realities, namely that Russian Orientalist ideas played and continue to play a significant role in the formation, perpetuation, and entrenchment of imperial stratification and other Orientalist constructs in these countries.

The second reason that the thesis casts such a wide net in its case studies is that it aims to provide a baseline of understanding, a foundation for further exploration of this topic. This thesis cannot be a "grand theory" work that seeks to provide a perfect explanation for all forms of Russian imperialism. Rather, by exploring a diversity of places where Russian Orientalism influences the formation of ideas of the nation, nationality, and empire, this dissertation helps make more explicit the continuity between Orientalist discourse in the late Russia Imperial and early Soviet eras. In achieving this, the dissertation thereby elucidates colonial structures that persist in all former realms of Russia's empire, providing a solid base for further post-colonial analysis within this framework.

Chapter One
A Historiography of Russian Orientalism

Introduction

Although it has a rich multi-century history, Russian Orientalism has become the subject of serious Western scrutiny in a post-colonial framework only since the fall of the Soviet Union. This is for several reasons, chief among which is the availability of sources previously guarded behind the iron curtain that allow for a fuller picture. Additionally, the decline of the polarizing binaries of the Cold War atmosphere has also encouraged a more critical look at this complex history. Indeed, Russia's unique positionality as both a subject of Orientalizing narratives and an originator of them inevitably complicates this history. Post-colonialism owes some of its ideas to those articulated by members of the Soviet school of Oriental studies, especially tendencies that questioned Eurocentric and pro-imperialist assumptions that Western European Orientalism took for granted.

It is also clear that even prior to this anti-imperialist shift Russia was somewhat reluctant to utilize Orientalist narratives in the same ways as they were used in Western countries. Rather, Russian Orientalism frequently vacillated depending on who made use of it and what their political sympathies were. Oftentimes Russian Orientologists and Orientalist authors alike blurred lines of distinction between Russia and the colonized other, or between Russia and Europe itself. Other times, Russian Orientalist literature falls neatly into the "classic" Saidian conceptualization of how Orientalism functions, complete with the same dichotomies between "civilization" and "barbarism" that often showed up in Western Orientalism as well. The question therefore becomes: "To what extent is a post-colonial critique applicable to what is considered Russian Orientalism, if at all?"

Layton and Postmodernist Assessments of Russian Orientalism

Because of its outsized presence in Russian Orientalist literary fiction, the North Caucasus is a special area of focus in answering this complex question. Existing scholarship on this topic has adopted a similar conclusion regarding the applicability of post-colonial theories to this area of study. Namely, although Russian writings from academia and literary fiction do exhibit clear Orientalist tendencies, these examples do not align well with the understanding of Orientalism outlined by post-colonial writers such as Edward Said. This is due to a simple reason: the models of intercultural interaction between the imperial center and the imperial periphery articulated by post-colonial academics are too rigid and do not account for the unique features of Russian Orientalist literature. Post-colonialism does not account for the critical tendencies in Russian Orientalism that denounced Eurocentric assumptions and sought to reform the discipline.

Dr. Susan Layton, a research fellow at the *Centre d'études des mondes russe, caucasien, et centre-européen* (CERCEC) at the *École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales* (EHESS) in Paris, focuses extensively on the study of Russian Orientalism and has made a major contribution to scholarship on this topic in the West. The above-described argument about the complex nature of Russian Orientalism is one that has shown up repeatedly throughout Layton's arguments, and its rationale is couched in the postmodernist theories of Dr. Homi K. Bhabha, who applied a postmodernist analysis to Edward Said's *Orientalism* in the 1980s. Bhabha approached Said's work from the perspective of poststructuralism, specifically Derridean concepts of difference, deconstruction, and dissemination.[19] Bhabha's argument is intimately interlinked with the development of a poststructuralist non-identitarian area of post-colonial

[19] Eleanor Byrne, "Said, Bhabha, and the Colonized Subject," in *Orientalism and Literature,* ed. Geoffrey P. Nash, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 155–7.

thought, a vision that challenges the structuralist foundations upon which early post-colonial scholarship sits.

On *Orientalism*, Bhabha opined that the book's dichotomous framing of the colonizer and the colonized contradicted the Foucauldian concept of *pouvoir/savoir* because Said implicitly assumed that power and knowledge could only be the monopoly of the colonizer. Bhabha furthermore disagreed with the assumption that a dominating imperial subject freely invents Orientalist discourse to capture "reality" as the imperial subject themselves are also captured in that narrative.[20] Bhabha asserts that Said's theories on the interactions between the imperial subject and those its others are underdeveloped, and do not fully explore all the nuances of the various roles he ascribes to colonizer and colonized. It is important to note that as is also the case with Layton, Bhabha is not discounting the utility of Said's ideas, but merely articulating where he thinks they fall short. Bhabha does not subscribe to the idea that all colonial discourses were monopolized by the colonizer because he did not think that the role of the colonized in this dichotomy was completely passive.

Instead, Bhabha argues for a more fluid interpretation of the relationship between the imperial subject and the colonized subject, where the colonizer strives for total control of imperial narratives but fails. Eventually, Bhabha contends, the colonized subject will intervene in these narratives and contort them. Instead of perfectly reproducing a European model, the colonized nation creates a hybrid reality where European and Indigenous cultures are interlinked.[21] In this case, Said's notion of the colonizer monopolizing definitions of material reality is not an inevitable outcome, as the colonized appropriate the colonizer's language for

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[20] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 103, 134; Norimatsu, "Falsehood," 414.
[21] Byrne, "Said," 158–161. Note the excerpt from E.M. Forster's *Passage to India* (1924), in which the Indian Dr. Aziz admits to Fielding (the English protagonist) that he dresses in English-style couture to avoid police harassment.

their own purposes, thereby making a mockery of the colonizer's chauvinistic vision. Layton takes this analysis and applies it to the Russian case, arguing that the phenomenon Bhabha delineates is descriptive of Russian Orientalism in the North Caucasus. This is demonstrated by Russian pessimism about the Russian Empire's "civilizing mission" expressed in Orientalist literature of the time.[22]

Layton cites *A Russian Circassian,* a short story penned by nineteenth-century Russian aestheticist Alexander Druzhinin as an example of this ambivalence. Druzhinin's tale depicts a Caucasus in transition where the Russian Empire is solidifying its grip, and yet its dominance seems to rest on shaky ground. Even as the region became a resort destination with new Russian redoubts like Piatigorsk, Russian tourists could not travel through the region with complete confidence in their own security. The countryside beyond Cossack settlements remained the dominion of "mountaineers," the Indigenous Muslim nations of the land. Russian tourists and Cossacks alike had to rely on the expertise of these Indigenous peoples to navigate the treacherous highlands, thereby giving the mountaineers means by which they could exploit these settler-colonial outsiders. *A Russian Circassian* thereby challenges the Russian imaginary's archetype of the rugged and independent Cossacks conquering wild Caucasian lands, demonstrating that the reality was often far more complex.

Druzhinin depicts these Caucasian guides as engaging in "colonial mimicry," whereby they appropriated popular Russian archetypes of mountaineers to make themselves more marketable to a Russian clientele. This form of mimicry reflects Bhabha's ideas of colonial subjectivity and complicates the popular notion that the Imperial core's discourse dominated how colonized peoples came to be seen and stratified. Druzhinin's writings further provoke questions

[22] Susan Layton, "Colonial Mimicry and Disenchantment in Alexander Druzhinin's 'A Russian Circassian' and Other Stories," *The Russian Review* 60, no. 1 (January 2001): 60.

of positionality, namely who exploits whom, and which group is converting the other?[23] This argument has resurfaced in the writings of Kyohei Norimatsu, a professor specializing in Slavic studies at the University of Tokyo (Komaba), in his 2016 article on Druzhinin's contemporaries Tolstoy and Lermontov. In this article, Norimatsu deploys Bhabha's argument to buttress his similar conclusion to Layton, namely that Lermontov and Tolstoy similarly blur the lines between the natives and the Russians, albeit in slightly separate ways.[24]

Another significant contribution to this scholarship is *Russian Orientalism* by David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye who contends that "Saidian" notions of Orientalism are simply too rigid to be applicable to the Russian example. Russian Orientalism, van der Oye argues, presents us with far too many deviations from Said's "Orientalist schema" that allegedly assumes "unanimity" between all iterations of Orientalist scholarship. In other words, because Russian Orientology does not present us with a picture identical to the Orientology of Western European empires, Saidian Orientalism cannot be neatly mapped over Russian Orientalism.

Even the notion of regarding the terms "Orientalist" and "Orientalism" with the same scrutiny as Said does in *Orientalism* is unproductive according to van der Oye. Both of these tendencies are characterized in *Russian Orientalism* as obfuscatory as far as our understanding of the nuances of Russian Orientology is concerned.[25] Because Imperial Russia did not engage as readily with Orientalism as a tool of imperialism, and because Russian Orientalists themselves explicitly rejected Western notions of a racialized Oriental other, there is a real sense in which considering Russian Orientalism as merely an analogue to Western Orientalism is not instructive.

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[23] Compare this with Bhabha's similar observations in Bhabha, *Location,* 105–125 and 98–101. In these pages, Bhabha refers to the "Sly Civility" of Indians under the British Raj. In the words of Druzhinin, this situation prompts the question, "*Kto kogo?"* (who is exploiting whom?).
[24] Norimatsu, *Falsehood,* 414.
[25] Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Russian Orientalism,* 7–11.

Russian Orientalism's Differences

Nathaniel Knight likewise noted Russian Orientalism's tendency to question western preconceptions as early as the 1850s in the writings of Orientalist academic Vasilii Grigorev. A colonial administrator and one of the foremost experts of Central Asian history and languages, Grigorev explicitly denounced the idea that Western academia and its constructs were superior. Instead, he argued that Russia needed to build its own intellectual foundations and concepts for the Russian nation, rather than borrowing these ideas from the West. Russia, Grigorev argued, developed differently from the West, and exited under "completely diverse conditions". Therefore, applying Western Orientalist constructs to it was "completely inappropriate".[26] Russian Orientalism played a key role for Grigorev in the creation of distinctly Russian ways of thinking about nation and empire. Because Russia was itself an "Asiatic" nation in Grigorev's eyes, it was particularly well-placed to understand and study Eastern cultures.[27] The Russian study of Eastern cultures, languages, and traditions would therefore glean insight on those cultures but also on Russia itself. As such, Russian Orientalism would give Russian the tools to integrate these groups into the Russian Empire, and thereby help build the Russian family of nations.[28]

Grigorev considered the relative material differences between Russia and those subaltern groups it encountered to be at varying stages of national development. In Grigorev's view,

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[26] Nathaniel Knight, "Grigor'ev in Orenburg, 1851–1862: Russian Orientalism in the Service of Empire?," *Slavic Review* 59, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 79, https://doi.org/10.2307/2696905.
[27] Mark Bassin, "The Russian Geographical Society, the 'Amur Epoch,' and the Great Siberian Expedition 1855–1863," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 73, no. 2 (June 1983): 243.
[28] It is important to note that Grigor'ev himself never specifically referred to a 'civilizing mission' in his earlier works, his writings do feature this as a general theme. He addresses the notion of Russia bestowing the fruits of Russian civilization to other cultures most thoroughly in the following 1840 speech given at the Richelieu Lyceum in Odessa; Nikolai Grigorev, *Ob otnoshenii Rossii k Vostoku* (Odessa: Rishelevskii licei, 1840); Knight, "Grigor'ev," 79–80; Nikolai Veselovskii, *Vasilii Vasilevich Grigorev po ego pismam i truda : 1816–1881* (St. Petersburg: Izdanie Russkogo arkheologicheskogo obshhestva, 1887), 33.

Russia's colonial subjects were not poor or backwards compared to the imperial core because of some innate and immutable racial deficiency. Rather, those nations were behind Russia merely because they were in an earlier stage of their nation's development, something Grigorev believed Orientology could rectify by compelling these nations to adopt Russian norms and practices. In the words of Knight, Grigorev therefore argued for a form of "conceptual conquest" rather than a military conquest.[29]

Although he hoped to compel the Khanates of Central Asia to Russify themselves, he stressed that the Russian Empire could not achieve this through military coercion but rather through understanding the cultural norms, languages, traditions, and histories of Central Asia's peoples. By accruing this knowledge, Grigorev hoped the Russian Empire would be able to better appeal to these disparate non-Russian subjects and therefore gain their trust and loyalty.[30] Despite Grigorev's vocal denouncement of Orientalism's more racist and prejudicial assumptions, his vision was still quintessentially Orientalist in that it hoped to utilize academic knowledge as a tool for installing Russian power in Russia's "Orient." Despite his efforts, Grigorev and his ideas were ignored by Orenburg's colonial governors, and he was eventually forced to resign his post in desperation. In the end, his more liberal ideas of serving the *narod* collided with the urbane realities of serving the Russian bureaucracy and the inflexibility of official nationality as understood by the Tsarist elites. Imperial Russia's centralized autocracy was unwilling to mobilize institutions such as academia around a set of hegemonic postulates, nor devolve military power to civilian spheres of colonial administration.

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[29] Knight borrows this term from Francine Hirsch, and specifically from her work on Soviet Nationalities policy, thereby making an indirect connection between Grigorev's ideas and later Soviet conceptual conquest in the pursuit of "socialist" statecraft. See "The Soviet Union as a Work-in-Progress: Ethnographers and the Category *Nationality* in the 1926, 1937, and 1939 Censuses," *Slavic Review* 56, no. 2 (Summer 1997): 256; Knight, "Grigor'ev", 81.
[30] Veselovskii, *Grigorev*, 117–8

Because Imperial Russia consistently refused to translate these liberal Orientalist academic tendencies into colonial policy, Schimmelpenninck van der Oye and present-day scholars argue that post-colonial assessment of Russian Orientalism is of limited utility. Put simply, Russia did Orientalism differently, and so a different non-Saidian analytical framework is necessary to provide a wholistic assessment of Russian Orientalism and its legacy. However, Schimmelpenninck van der Oye's dismissive appraisal of the applicability of Said's ideas to Russian Orientalism is not shared by others in this field. Namely, in *Russian Orientology and 'Oriental Renaissance' in Fin-de-Siècle Europe,* Vera Tolz argues that Said's model for interactions between colonizers and the colonized is quite useful in the Russian case. Although she acknowledges that Russian Orientalists vocally rejected Eurocentrism in Western Orientalism, Tolz notes that multiple Russian Orientologists including Vasilii Bartold, Nikolai Marr, and Viktor Rozen all echoed the notion that Russia's role was to act as a civilizing power in its colonial peripheries.[31] Furthermore, Tolz also delineates an incisive conclusion: Said's ideas can be traced back to tendencies in Orientology itself, specifically this impulse to question the dichotomous assumptions of Western Orientalists.

Namely, Tolz explores a shift in Western European Orientology—particularly in Austria and Germany—where Orientalists began to question the Eurocentric prejudices baked into much of Orientalism. Furthermore, Tolz traces a direct line between this new tendency and a similar reformation in Russian Orientology in the 1880s inspired by this Western development but seeking to redefine Russian Orientology as both separate but also superseding European Orientalist assumptions. As in Austrian and German Orientology, Russian Orientologists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries such as Rozen, Marr, Bartold, Oldenburg, and Fedor

[31] Tolz, *Orient,* 30–1.

Shcherbatskii sought to question prejudicial Eurocentric assumptions intrinsic to previous Russian Orientalist works.[32]

Anna Aydinyan echoes this sentiment in *Formalists Against Imperialism* (2022). Aydinyan also draws a direct link between Russian fin-de-siècle Orientology, later Soviet literature building on that Orientology, and the work of Arab academics conversant with that Soviet scholarship such as the Egyptian Marxist Anouar Abdel-Malek. There exist discursive links between the pioneering work of late imperial and early Soviet Russian Orientologists and the later post-colonial language found in the works of Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Frantz Fanon, Chinua Achebe, and others. In effect, post-colonial language can trace its roots back to Russian Orientology and by extension other revisionist tendencies in Orientology in Austria and Germany. Therefore, applying a "rigid" post-colonial frame of analysis to the history of Russia's Orientalist scholarship will obscure that nuance and deprive us of being able to assimilate the variations in Russian Orientalism.[33]

Rozen is one prominent example of Russian Orientalism's active effort to distance itself from European counterparts. Recognized as an expert on Central Asia and as one of the pioneers of this new direction in Russian Orientalist study, Rozen is credited with playing a highly active role in the reorientation of Russian Orientology. Serving as dean of the Faculty of Oriental Languages at Saint Petersburg's Oriental Institute between 1893 and 1902, Rozen led a push to reorient Russian Orientalism away from Eurocentrism.[34] At the same time as his Austrian and

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[32] The link between these late developments in Russian Orientalism and later Western post-colonial discourse has been the subject of much debate. See Adeeb Khalid, 'Russian History and the Debate over Orientalism'; Nathaniel Knight, 'On Russian Orientalism: A Response to Adeeb Khalid'; and Maria Todorova, 'Does Russian Orientalism Have a Russian Soul? A Contribution to the Debate between Nathaniel Knight and Adeeb Khalid', in *Kritika*, 1, no. 4 (2000); Aydinyan, *Formalists*, 5.

[33] Aydinyan, *Formalists,* 6. See also Tolz, *Orient,* 5.

[34] A. A. Vigasin, A. N. Khokhlov, and P. M. Shastitko, *Istoriia otechestvennogo vostokovedeniia s serediny XIX veka do 1917 goda* (Moscow: "Vostochnaja Literatura" RAN, 1997), 16.

German contemporaries also began questioning Orientalist narratives, Rozen likewise vocally denounced Eurocentric and prejudicial assumptions in his own scholarship. Much as with his mentor Grigorev, Rozen rejected Eurocentric Orientalist constructs and sough to use a Russified Orientalism to reify the Russian nation. Russia's shocking defeat in the 1905 Russo-Japanese War stimulated further reassessments of Russia's reliance on Eurocentric binaries. Likewise, the unprecedented death toll and horrific atrocities of the First World War further destabilized notions of Europe's innate superiority over "the Orient", and by extension strengthened critical analyses of these Eurocentric constructs.[35]

Rozen and his contemporaries such as Bartold and Marr proved instrumental in the development of these critiques in Russian Orientology. Rozen's ideas also bore the unmistakable mark of their mid-nineteenth-century origins in Grigorev's arguments. Much like his mentor, Rozen ascribed to the idea that Russians were especially well-placed to understand Asians owing to Russia's "Asiatic" characteristics. Rozen also hoped to use the knowledge gained by Orientological study to make the Imperial Russia a more effective colonial administrator that could bring the fruits of civilization to the various nations of the imperial periphery. Despite this, Rozen's revisions of dominant Eurocentric perceptions proved deeply influential for Orientalism in Russia and beyond.[36]

While it was not strictly unique, Russian Orientology's tendency to question these prejudicial preconceptions was uncommon, and it carries significant implications for the argument that the work of Russian Orientalists served Russian imperialism. The Rozen school of Orientology sought not just to destabilize East-West binaries, but further to study the origins of where such binaries came from and explore ways to deconstruct them. However, this does not

[35] Tolz, *Orient*, 48–9.
[36] Tolz, *Orient*, 50.

preclude the validity nor the necessity of critically analyzing Russian Orientology and its hierarchical implications. While Russian Orientology did develop differently and serve roles distinct from its Western European counterparts, this does not mean that Said's ideas are not applicable to the former.

In this context, "Said's ideas" refers to his theories on nationally defined cultures, namely that they all aspire towards sovereignty, sway, and dominance, and that these nationalisms are monolithic articulations of identity that overlook the inherent ethnic and cultural heterogeneity of the colonized world. The people of the post-Soviet space have many overlapping identities that can never be adequately contained or defined by nationalism, and as such the utility of nationalism in replacing the imperial polity is limited and fraught with major reactionary pitfalls that abrogate full liberation for the colonized peoples of the former Soviet Union.[37]

This dissertation also makes extensive use of Said's overarching deconstructivist concepts that seek to critically examine and challenge the discriminating lines imperialism drew between cultures, regions, races, and political factions. Said's ideas allow us to more critically analyze the structure that is Russian Orientalism, its inherent hybridity as an entity that appropriates cultural attributes (as in say, the melting pot of an imperial capital) but also starkly divides peoples, and its function in the construction and maintenance of imperialist hierarchies.[38] Because Orientology served the purpose of providing the metropole with knowledge of its

[37] I should note here that much like Said, I recognize that anti-colonial nationalism has played an integral role in all resistance movements in the colonized world and therefore do not argue that nationalist ideology is wholly bereft of any utility. Rather, the point here is that nationalism should not be the endpoint of anti-colonial movements but rather one of multiple stages on the road to liberation. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993), 19–20, 209–220. For more on Orientalism beyond Said, please see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010); Bhabha, *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990); Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963). For more on Western Orientalization of Eastern Europe and the concept of "Nesting Orientalisms", see Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

[38] Said, *Culture,* 15–20.

colonized subjects, it was complicit in the creation of such hierarchies, and it imposed its meaning on those subjects. As it developed, Rozen's Orientology came to define Russia's ethnic minorities in very precise ways, and specifically in the frame of modern nation states. When these ideas became translated into practice in the Soviet period, their implementation created specifically delineated ways of being for colonizers and the colonized alike. In a word, these ideas generated hierarchical structures that outlasted the Russian Empire, and indeed the Soviet Union as well.

Hierarchy is a paramount consideration for Said. Orientalism according to Said is a tool in the construction of systems of imperial domination. This implies the imposition of hierarchy, namely between the imperial metropolitan core and its peripheral "alien" subjects. This form of othering is indeed perceptible in Russian Orientology. While Tsarist Russia was more reluctant to use Orientalism as an apparatus for empire-building, and indeed tried to mollify Russian Orientalism's more liberal tendencies, this does not preclude the idea that Orientalism served a similar purpose of facilitating imperialism in Russia as it did in other European empires. Said never asserted that all academics enter into the enterprise of Orientology with the explicit purpose of enabling imperial domination. Nor is it argued in *Orientalism* that all Orientalists were transparently racist in their motivations. Indeed, much like Rozen and Grigorev, many notable Orientalists in Russia and in Western Europe demonstrated an evident admiration for the peoples and cultures they studied, and some even betrayed sympathies for those cultures they studied over their own "side."

As Said is quick to point out, however, none of this means that the scholarship of these academics did not serve an ultimate overarching purpose in a larger system of imperialist exploitation. In such a massive, complex, and interlinking web of hierarchies the sympathies of

individuals are not as important as the sum total outcome of their actions. Regardless of their private opinions, the scholarship developed by Arabists, Caucasologists, and Orientalists of other stripes was used to dominate the colonized world. That process of colonial domination came to reshape those nations it targeted both by defining them in academic terms and also redefining them through cultural domination, namely through the suppression of Indigenous cultures and forceful assimilation. This remains true in the case of Russian Orientology as well. Russian academia came to define entire nations, cultures, and histories through its Orientalist study of minorities within the Russian realm. Previously nebulous and disparate groups of people with many overlapping and distinct cultural qualities were inserted into rigid European-style ethnographic categories developed in the late Imperial era and further stratified thanks to further scholarship in the Soviet era.

The Soviet Connection

Given the incredible complexity of the late Russian Imperial and Early Soviet periods, there is a temptation to view the Russian Empire's collapse and the Soviet Union's subsequent rise as a break in continuum, and there are certainly respects in which this is true. The accession of the Bolsheviks to absolute power and the violent overthrow of Russian Tsarism necessarily led to major changes that redefined the Russian socio-political landscape. A multi-century dynasty committed to absolute monarchy experienced a catastrophic collapse overnight. What followed was a devastating civil war—the deadliest in European history—that also contributed massively to these cataclysmic societal shifts.

It is likewise ill-advised to explain Soviet policies solely with reference to Russian pre-revolutionary history, or to attempt to interpret all aspects of Soviet society as merely a

continuation of Tsarist Russia's imperial chauvinist hegemony. Doing so risks oversimplifying what has always been an extraordinarily complex relationship between two very distinct yet interlinked periods. Attempts to understand the Russian "soul" through its imperial "roots" prevail throughout much of Western Cold-War discourse, and indeed many decades before the Cold War. Most notably, Astolphe de Custine's *Journey Through Russia* (1843)—a travelogue that met major success in its own time with 200,000 copies sold in its first ten years of circulation—experienced a second life with its rerelease in the 1950s in numerous languages. Although it has proven to be one of the most popular, de Custine's travelogue was hardly the first diary of a Westerner's impressions on Russia published in the nineteenth century when European interest in Imperial Russia reached its apex, nor would it be the last. Indeed, his work is merely one of several in a genre of literature that was deemed useful by Western diplomats, politicians, and military leaders alike for understanding Russian autocracy throughout the centuries.[39]

The history of the Western travelogue in Russia is in all respects an excellent example of the West's Orientalist aversion to applying a critical analysis to Russian colonialism and imperial

[39] The travelogue was a phenomenally popular form of mass literature in nineteenth century Western Europe, and Russia was one of its most popular subjects. These travelogues offer an interesting perspective of how one country can be both the subject of Orientalist narratives, but also generate those narratives in turn about itself and those subaltern groups it dominates. Without fully appreciating this fact owing to their own imperialist predispositions, Western European travelogue authors showed a marked lack of awareness of Imperial Russia's colonial interactions with ethnic minorities and betrayed ethnic biases both towards Russians and minority ethnicities in Imperial Russia. This can be seen in de Custine's own disparaging remarks towards Finno-Ugric peoples in Marquis de Custine, *Letters From Russia* (New York: New York Review Books, 2002), 193; John D. Cochrane, R.D., *A Pedestrian Journey Through Russia and Siberian Tartary From the Frontiers of China to the Frozen Sea of Kamtchatka* (New York: Collins and Hannay, 1824), particularly Cochrane's remarks on Jews at 61, 63, 136 and his reference to Russian "indolence" at 114; Besançon, Alain, "Chappe d'Auteroche, 'Voyage en Sibérie'," *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique* 5, no. 2 (April–June 1964), see d'Auteroche's commentary on Russian masculinity at 240–2; Elizabeth Craven, *A Journey Through The Crimea to Constantinople in a Series of Letters* (London: G. G. J. and J. Robinson, 1786), note the language Craven uses when referring to Crimean Tartars, esp. 164, and her description of Moscow at 153–5; See also John Parkinson, *A Tour of Russia, Siberia, and the Crimea 1792–1794* (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1971). Specifically, see Parkinson's remarks on Russian "Oriental" hospitality at 138, his remark on the Russian "love of destruction" at 143, his commentaries on Russian society at 99, and his descriptions of the Circassians at 102–105.

policy. Instead, all of these travelogues follow remarkably similar patterns of racial essentialization that are a distinct feature of Western Orientalist literature, regardless of whether the author was a supporter or opponent of the Russian Empire.[40] The Marquis de Custine's book is of course not exempt from this characterization. His description of Russia's newly built European capital of St. Petersburg as a stinking diseased city closer to Beijing in design than to any Western European metropole is especially striking, but de Custine's book is replete with subtler generalizations of broad spectrums of groups within Russia.[41] The Marquis de Custine is absolutely unapologetic is his complete evisceration of Russia's autocratic Tsarist society, and broadly describes Russia as a country where all people are reduced to automatons by Tsarist despotism, whose paper-thin society of European imitation hardly compares to the rich philosophical foundations of Western liberal democracies.

Interestingly, Tsar Nicholas II himself reaffirms the notion that despotism is an inalienable component of the Russian state during a discussion with de Custine at the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg. From the Tsar's perspective, despotism is the guarantor of Russian stability and power.[42] The Marquis de Custine's book therefore also includes self-Orientalizing narratives from the Russian Empire that seek to cast the Russian world as incompatible with Western European notions of liberal representative democracy.[43]

Despite this apparent nuance the book abounds with extremely broad Orientalist castigations of the Russian empire's various ethnic groups that regularly border on overt racism. The peoples of Imperial Russia are an errant and backwards other in the author's estimation. There is little that makes de Custine's book especially unique either, as his apprehension towards

[40] See footnote 35.
[41] Custine, *Letters,* 159, 344, 447.
[42] Custine, *Letters,* 198.
[43] Custine, *Letters.* 105–110, 123–135, 139.

the militarized despotism of Imperial Russia was expressed by European authors from the moment Russia became an imperial power in the late sixteenth century.[44] The othering language that de Custine employs to describe Russia is not an exception, but the general rule of European travelogues. Likewise, Dundas Cochrane, a British Royal Navy officer who journeyed across Imperial Russia in 1824 with the Tsar's blessing could not help but note the autocratic and regimented nature of life in the Russian capital, or the 'indolence' and unproductive nature of the Russian peasant.[45] Nevertheless, the general sentiments expressed in de Custine's work have remained a primary source of mediation through which the Western gaze interprets Russian otherness. The Cold War dichotomy, meaning the conflict between the "free world" and Russian despotism, is what de Custine's work came to represent to several twentieth century academics and political leaders in Western Europe and North America.[46]

The tendency to resort to an Orientalist shorthand to reconcile stark differences between Russia's various iterations and the normative Western world has resulted in multiple pronounced shortcomings in our capacity to understand Russia in past and present iterations. The scope that such a reductive frame of analysis allows is necessarily limited, depriving us of a more incisive critique of the subtler manifestations of hierarchy in Russian Orientalist frameworks. There is no room, for instance, in this analysis for the important discussion regarding the plethora of various ethnic minorities that exist under Russian dominion. Much as in de Custine's passages on the ethnic minorities of Russia's empire, Western writings on Russia often cast the minorities of the Russian Imperium subconsciously or intentionally together with Russians as an esoteric

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[44] While not an Orientalist text per se, the German Heinrich von Staden's *The Land and Government of Muscovy* republished in 1968 is a first-hand account of Staden's journey to Moscow in the late sixteenth century and was intended to persuade the Holy Roman Emperor to invade Muscovy; See Fritz Epstein, "Heinrich von Staden, The Land and Government of Muscovy: A Sixteenth Century Account," Trans, and ed. Thomas Esper, *Renaissance Quarterly* 21, no. 2 (1968): 208–9, doi:10.2307/2859565.
[45] Cochrane, *Pedestrian,* 114.
[46] Milan Subotic, "Rusija u očima Markiza de Kistina," *Socioloshki pregled* 44, no. 1 (February 2000): 81.

subaltern group that merely represented an extension of Russia's otherness. This remains true even for recent engagements with modern forms of Russian colonialism such as the Chechen conflict where the Russian "right" to sovereignty over lands stolen via imperial conquest is taken for granted.[47] Meanwhile, these minority groups struggling under Russian domination are denied the same charity for their own narratives, if those even make it to print. In effect, taking these faulty analyses for granted obscures how this literature can play into the Russian imperialist narrative even when expressing ambivalence towards it.

Thompson notes that this blind spot reflects a similarly conspicuous silence in Russian imperialist narratives enclosed in Russian literature, film, and academia. This suggests that even while much Western discourse on Russia remains tainted by an Orientalist condescension towards a subaltern "semi-Europeanized" people, this discourse nevertheless "gives the center its due" by not questioning Moscow's overarching claims to empire. Rather, the question rests more on where that empire exists and what position it may take with respect to its Western counterparts. Much as in Russian popular culture since the eighteenth century, the existence of Russia's empire and specifically its domination of various non-Russian groups is taken as a normalized reality. As a consequence, centuries of self-evidently imperialist tactics—frontier fortresses, colonial settlements, mass deportations, massacres, genocides, economic exploitation—escape the post-colonial critique that similar actions have elicited in Western countries.

[47] Take for instance, *Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power* by Anatol Lieven, a work that explores the first Chechen War and its implications for Russia's future as a state. While it provides valuable first-hand journalistic reporting integrated with historical analysis, Lieven abstains from questioning the right of Russia to 'secure its own borders' with regards to invading Chechnya. Lieven's liberal approach to analyzing the conflict confines him to viewing the Chechnya and Russia as two equally wrong parties that do not match up to Western ideals, and a more critical post-colonial analysis is therefore abrogated.

It is true however, that there is much connective tissue that links the Soviet and Tsarist eras together. For all their differences, the Russian Empire and Soviet Union were also necessarily similar to one another by virtue of how much the Soviet system inherited from its predecessor. Multiple new organizational reforms initiated by Lenin and Stalin during the early decades of Soviet rule—a technocratic state bureaucracy, the institutional promotion of national consciousness both within Russia and in its imperial periphery, accelerated industrialization—all trace their roots to the late Imperial era. The foundations for these reforms had been laid in the Imperial era but significantly accelerated during the Soviet one. This is logical as the Soviet Union represented a continuation of several Russian Imperial institutions that were simply reshaped in the Soviet image rather than destroyed entirely.

To that end, much of the basic bones of the Russian Empire's system of rule remained. This also meant that the same challenges of maintaining and legitimating that empire also persisted. Russia's Soviet Empire remained an incredibly vast area where much of the population had still not experienced full Russification. The massive acceleration of industrialization and Soviet technocracy effectively offered the Bolsheviks the capability to initiate a renewed thrust in these imperial policies, but this also came with significant political complications. Bolshevik party members disagreed on the best methods for Sovietizing the new empire and espoused significantly divergent visions of how to build this new "socialist" union.

The forcibly reintegrated provinces of Russia's empire remained in a state of ambiguity regarding their relationship with the imperial center and with other territories of this empire. As noted by Ronald Grigor Suny in *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union,* circumstances forced the Bolsheviks to adapt their ideas regarding national questions in the former Russian Empire so as to accommodate multiple different

versions of ethnonationalist identity. Throughout the 1920s the Soviet Union encouraged the development of ethnonationalism amongst the USSR's various nationalities specifically within the bounds of Russian Orientological ideas of what constituted markers of the nation and of ethnicity. Russocentric ideas of Russian academics and Bolshevik bureaucrats inevitably dominated this statecraft project, but it nevertheless sought to produce a new status quo that challenged and unseated the legacy of Russian imperialist chauvinism. With this in mind, it is more accurate to characterize the nationalisms constructed by Soviet nationalities policy as creations of Soviet/Russian Orientology and a compromise between economic and regional considerations throughout the Soviet Union.[48]

In her book on the history of Soviet national delimitation, Francine Hirsch argues that while the Bolsheviks did aim to create a union of ethnically homogenous nations with well-defined ethno-territorial limits, they also attempted to achieve a balance between "backwards" and "advanced" nations so that no Soviet Republic could be significantly more powerful than the Soviet center or neighboring republics. In effect, political considerations intended to secure the overarching interests of the Soviet center were central in shaping the Soviet nation building project. Thus, even as Bolshevik policy statements called for a utopian vision of ethno-territorial equality, in practice Soviet statecraft curtailed this idea from the start in favor of the Soviet center's own imperialist priorities, to say nothing of the Eurocentric ideas inherent to Soviet Orientological ideas of nation and ethnicity. Indeed, the Soviets cast this intellectual reliance on Eurocentric constructs of the state, the people, and the nation as a necessary step towards a more universalistic society. Put simply, as in the imperial period, the Soviets created a set of

[48] Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993) 85–9; Hirsch, *Empire of Nations*, 101–103.

hybridized identities that incorporated a Soviet interpretation of the nation coupled with the conceptualization of new self-contained Soviet nations and ethnicities. However, these categories were in large part derived from intellectuals constructs of Russian Orientalism from the late Imperial period, and as originally conceived were meant to be transient features of a supra-statal entity that would one day transition to stateless communism.

In this context, the Soviets much like their predecessors required effective methods by which to develop new, more precise imperial taxonomies that could achieve a balance between these identities and the overarching supranational identity of the "Soviet citizen." This was a gargantuan task with high stakes as the failure to achieve this balance or even to acknowledge the separate identities of these various groups was one of the contributory causes of Imperial Russia's collapse. Since the Soviets did not aim to completely abolish all Imperial institutions but merely to build on them, the project of constructing the new Soviet order required the revamping of a creaking imperial bureaucracy that had collapsed in on itself. This called for extensive modernization but also necessitated more taxonomic methods of categorizing people, cultures, and the Soviet imperial periphery. To assist in this effort the Soviets accelerated the development of a highly centralized and technocratic bureaucracy with the aid of academics and experts from the Russian Imperial era.

This unlikely collaboration between imperial bureaucrats and the Bolsheviks gave the Soviet center access to the tools needed to control and manage the disparate groups of this nascent empire more effectively. Moreover, this process entailed a limited degree of power devolvement whereby the center delegated limited autonomy to local elites—in practice merely

replicating the center's power structure on a smaller scale—who were tasked with managing the Soviet Republics (SSRs) and autonomous oblasts (AOs) national delimitation would create.[49]

The ultimate consequence of the Soviet center's compromises in the national delimitation process was that it produced a union of nations with a hierarchy of nationalisms, albeit where all of these various identities remained interconnected and retained varyingly indeterminate boundaries. Particularly after 1936 and to a lesser extent prior to this, the dominance of Russian ideas, culture, and language was a fact of everyday life in the Soviet Union. This was evinced by the inescapable requirement to be fluent in Russian and conversant with Russian-dominated Soviet institutions regardless of one's ethnic background as part of everyday Soviet citizenship.[50] Likewise, even when *korenizatsiia* was in force much of the Soviet statecraft apparatus was administrated by Russians, guided by ideas of Russian academia, and sought to define the Soviet ethno-territorial landscape in distinctly Russocentric ways. For instance, when the national intelligentsia of the Soviet Union's various nations set out to develop and reify the identities of their respective nations, they worked to create composite identities that "purified" the lexicon of their reflective language, and concisely defined what it meant to be of a certain national ethnic group. In function, this meant incorporating Indigenous interpretations of ethno-territoriality and nationalism, but also drawing from Soviet/Russian notions of consolidated nationality. The impulse, in other words, for creating self-contained well-defined nations was inescapably a product of Russian imperial constructs.[51]

However, there was also the Soviet identity, one which was at once a universalist identity that symbolized "fraternity" with people of differing peoples across numerous republics, but

[49] Hirsch, *Empire,* 59.
[50] Suny, *The Revenge,* 99–100.
[51] Suny, *The Revenge,* 100–4.

which was also couched in a common Russified identity. Millions of Soviet citizens found utility in this identifier, especially those who were members of mixed-race families that became increasingly common in the late Soviet period. Identifying as Soviet in this case served as a stop gap for eliminating the ambiguities of belonging to multiple ethnicities as opposed to one distinct identifier such as *russkii,* or *chechenets.*[52] Beyond this, being Soviet also meant recognizing one's common material and cultural experience under a distinct form of Russian empire, allowing two citizens from disparate ends of a vast empire to find commonality. This implied common experience, and common governmental and technocratic social modes of organization that were replicated across the Soviet Union.

Whilst these identities did allow for a degree of distinction between the periphery and the metropole in the Soviet imperium, they also worked to reinforce hierarchy. These precisely defined pre-approved ethnographic categories defined what were acceptable expressions of ethnic difference within the bounds of Soviet society and erased or suppressed politically inconvenient expressions of ethnic identity. This is a crucial detail to bear in mind when we speak of the Soviet promotion of "folk culture" or their preservation of cultural traditions, as this served a very distinct political purpose. The state was quick to violently suppress politically inconvenient expressions of ethnic identity such as say, Siberian Shamanism. Soviet authorities likewise strictly censored ethnonationalist narratives that could disturb the balance of their imposed ethno-territorial boundaries, particularly irredentist discourses throughout the Soviet Republics. Although these national identities have continued to play a role in the identity formation of post-Soviet states, these "nationalities" as defined are therefore creations of Soviet

[52] *Russkii* meaning ethnic Russian (as opposed to *rossiiane* [россияне] which refers to Russian citizens regardless of ethnic background). A Chechen, for instance could be referred to as *rossiianin* even if they are not *russkii*.

Orientalist policy, and as such geopolitical considerations of the Russian imperial core played a leading role in defining them.[53]

Conclusion

The historiography of Russian Orientalism in Western Europe and North America presents a mixed picture of the complex factors that have shaped Orientalism in Russian academia, art, official discourse, and colonial policy. Owing to Russia's complex history as an empire-nation that passed through multiple violent stages of political evolution, Russia's imperium has not developed parallel to the progression of Western European colonial empires. By extension, Russian Orientalism likewise did not follow the same path of development as its Western counterpart. Although Russian Orientalism has taken direct ques from its Western European counterpart, it sports key differences that must be accounted for in our analyses of this form of Orientalism.

Russian Orientalism worked to Orientalize the Other, that is, the colonized people of the Russian imperial periphery, but it also Orientalized Russia itself by declaring that Russians were incompatible with anything other than an autocratic Tsarist government. Furthermore, Russia was both a source of Orientalizing narratives and a subject of such narratives from Western Europe and North America, further complicating this history. Finally, Russian Orientalists did not enjoy unfettered support from the Tsarist regime, and Orientalist scholarship was never formally integrated into colonial policy in quite the same systematic manner as in Western European empires. As demonstrated by Nathaniel Knight's study of Vasilii Grigorev's efforts in

[53] Soviet authorities viewed shamanism as a threat since Siberian Shamans represented a political structure outside the state capable of organizing armed rebellion against Soviet power. Indeed, West Siberian Shamans did lead rebellions against Soviet power on multiple occasions, impeding the implementation of Sovietization and collectivization policies. Marjorie Mandelstam Balzer, "Ethnicity Without Power: The Siberian Khanty in Soviet Society," *Slavic Review* 42, no. 4, (Winter 1983), 641–3.

Orenburg *guberniia*, the Russian Empire preserved a conservative Tsarist-dominated military government throughout the various governorates and viceroyalties of the empire and prevented academics from instating liberal reforms to Russian colonial policy. These centralized colonial administrations made little provision for the authority of civilian administrators and gave no decision-making power to academics since doing so would dilute and decentralize the power of these military dictatorships.

Given these significant dissimilarities in Russian Orientalism and its historical development when compared to Western European Orientalism, Aydinyan and Schimmelpenninck van der Oye assert that post-colonial modes of analysis therefore have either limited or no use in the Russian context. However, a critical analysis of Russian academic and artistic trends in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries demonstrate that Russian Orientalism came to play a crucial role in reshaping the Russian imperium. In *Imperial Knowledge*, Thompson demonstrates that Russians enacted hegemonic relationships of knowledge and ethno-territorial stratification that aimed to contain, subdue, and reshape Russia's colonized peoples in a Russocentric image.

As demonstrated in the works of Tolz, Hirsch, Suny, and Keller, Russian academics gradually refined these notions of ethno-territorial stratification with increasingly systematized criteria for studying languages, cultures, and other ethnographic parameters. These criteria served as the bedrock of Soviet Nationalities policy when the Bolsheviks Sovietized this scholarship and instrumentalized it for their statecraft project after 1917. Russian Orientalist discourses in the metropole in effect facilitated the development of Soviet national identities in the 1920s period. Therefore, the project of National delimitation represents the culmination of Russian Orientalism's development.

Specifically, these deeply consequential developments in the 1920s represent the culmination of a long-standing pan-Russianist academic discourse in the late Imperial period under the guidance of academics such as Rozen and Bartold. The creation of these ethno-territorial boundaries within the frame of Orientalist scholarship and Soviet policy represents a continuous process that proceeds in fits and starts over two centuries beginning in the 1800s and culminating in the 1920s. Even as national delimitation policies attempted to reinforce or "Indigenize" the Soviet state's new republics, Russian Orientologists and Bolshevik bureaucrats undertook this effort within the framework of Russocentric academic constructs meant to facilitate and rationalize the governance of Russia's empire. As established by Hirsch, it is demonstrable that Russian Orientology—itself rooted in pan-Russian nationalism and Eurasianism—shared significant overlap in its fundamental principles with the national policies advocated for by influential Bolsheviks including Stalin and Lenin. Furthermore, these two opposite sides of Russian nationalities discourse both drew from similar Western European notions of government progressivism, namely the idea that scientific "rationalization" of administrative state structures could render a state as more just and equal.

Given this, even during the period of *korenizatsiia* the Soviet Union drew heavily from Russocentric—and by extension Eurocentric—notion of the nation state, ethno-territoriality, and similar concepts during national delimitation. Since these new ethno-territorial parameters were defined and imposed by the Russian center and implemented by Russian academics and Russian-dominated communist party structures, this project constituted a form of recolonization, reintegrating divergent parts of Russia's imperium back into an overarching administrative structure dominated by the Soviet center.

Chapter Two
Russian Romanticism and Russian Orientalism

Introduction

Although Russia's literacy rates remained behind much of Europe during the Tsarist era, the abolition of serfdom gave many Russians new educational opportunities, and overall literacy rates rose significantly in the Russian Empire. Whereas Russia's literacy rate stood at an estimated 3% in 1800, it increased to 19.1% in 1857 and then rose exponentially to an estimated 45% in 1907.[54] This was thanks in part to the establishment of the *Zemstvo* in 1864, a system of limited autonomous local government that allowed many *guberniia* throughout the empire to establish three-year schools for former serfs.

The early nineteenth century Russian Empire was characterized by an explosion in literary activity, with an exponential increase in the number of literature journals, publishing houses, and novels. This major social development in the nineteenth century proved central to the formation of modern Russian identity. At the height of its power, the Russian Empire acquired an imperial Eurocentric identity amongst Russia's ruling class.[55] Although this identity had been underdeveloped in prior centuries when the Muscovite Empire had been more isolated, the rise of literacy in Russia now gave this identity the tools required to evolve. The empire began to assert itself as such, and with this newfound identity came a need for more precise definitions of the Russian nation. The push towards this more precise identity can be identified in much of Russian Romanticist literature, most notably in the works of Nikolay Karamzin, who was appointed as Imperial Russia's official historiographer in 1810. Karamzin's seminal work,

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[54] Lenore Grenoble, *Language Policy in the Soviet Union* (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2010), 45–6. Overall literacy rates in the Russian Empire continued to increase gradually until the 1920s. During the 1920s and 1930s, literacy rates increased exponentially in the Soviet Union and eventually reached near 100% by the 1950s. See Charles E. Clark, *Uprooting Otherness: The Literacy Campaign in NEP-Era Russia* (Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 2000) 72–3,

[55] Valerie A. Kivelson, Ronald Grigor Suny, *Russia's Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 116–120.

History of the Russian State (1818–1820) was a multi-volume official historiography of the Russian national story.

As a work of non-fiction, Karamzin's book reads as an epic narrative of Russia's progression from Muscovy to the Romanov dynasty. Although it did not go further than the Time of Troubles or *smuta*, Karamzin's *History* made explicit links between Russia's military history and its imperial prestige and asserted the reified identity of a modern Russian nation, one that could not be separated from Russian militarism, imperialism, or indeed the Romanov dynasty itself.[56] Karamzin identified all of these elements as the primary guarantors of Russian stability and power. In doing so, Karamzin articulated ideas central to intellectual discourses amongst the elite of the nineteenth century Russian Empire concerning national identity, the national journey, and what Russianness meant ethnically, culturally, and historically. These discourses placed Russia as a contemporary in parallel trends throughout Europe and North America, where educated elites developed reified national identities in keeping with international socio-political trends. Russia had admittedly come late into this enterprise, but its position in this project was natural and deserved according to Karamzin. *History* sold thousands of copies, the bulk of which went to Russian elites including the Tsar and his entourage, Russian landowners, and the elites of conquered polities.[57]

In effect, Karamzin's body of grandiose tomes served as cultural instruction to Russia's elites – and by extension to wider Russian society – on their origins and how they were to view

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[56] Dominic Lieven, ed. *The Cambridge History of Russia: Volume 2, Imperial Russia, 1689–1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 87–9. In a secret letter to Tsar Alexander I, Karamzin made clear his convictions in this position, writing that "our government is fatherly, patriarchal, the father of a family judges and punishes without protocol. The monarch too must in conditions of a different nature follow only his own conscience and nothing else". See Richard Pipes, *Karamzin's Memoir on Ancient and Modern Russia: A Translation and Analysis* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005). 196–7; Ronald Grigor Suny, Terry Martin, *A State of Nations: Empire Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 45.
[57] Thompson, *Literature,* 55–7; Kivelson, and Suny, *Russia's Empires,* 177–8

themselves, their history, and their state.[58] Karamzin's perspective of Russian imperial grandeur proved thoroughly Romanticist in multiple respects. Writing in 1802 for *Vestnik Evropy* [Herald of Europe], his own biweekly magazine, Karamzin declared that: "…we do not need to make up stories and fables to elevate our background: glory was the cradle of the Russian nation, […]"[59]. Representatives of Russian high art and literature furnished this Romanticist narrative with an accompanying assortment of novels and poetry to provide it with artistic foundations. Moreover, the Tsarist ruling class attempted to create a balance between these Western European ideas of the nation and distinctly "Russian" ways of being, meaning those of Russian autocracy and centralized bureaucracy. This balancing act represented an attempt to integrate these elements of the Tsarist regime into these new Eurocentric conceptualizations of the Russian nation as a modern, diverse, and Europeanized state. The Russian Empire would have to adapt the fruits of European modernity to Russian realities all while leaving the fundamental aspects of Tsarist absolutist government intact. However, the balance between these two visions of Russianness was never clearcut, and this balance therefore proved quite challenging to achieve.[60]

Despite these uncertainties inherent to Russian conceptualizations of national identity in the nineteenth century, one ubiquitous feature of these new narratives on the Russian nation was the articulation of a distinct binary, namely that between the Europeanized Russian center and the imperial periphery of this growing empire. Russian literature of the early nineteenth century including Karamzin's *History* worked to "de-peripheralize" Russia and by extension assert Russia's place as the imperial center for its own colonized periphery. Because of this, Russian

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[58] For more on Karamzin's ambitions for reifying Russian identity via Romanticism and Sentimentalism, and engendering Russian "enlightenment" see Gitta Hammarberg, *From the Idyll to the Novel: Karamzin's Sentimentalist Prose* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
[59] Nikolai M. Karamzin, O liubvi k otechestvu i narodnoi gordosti," in *Karamzin N.M. Izbrannye sochineniia v dvukh tomakh, T. 2* (Moscow: khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1964), 283.
[60] Kivelson, and Suny, *Russia's Empires,* 140–5.

Orientalist themes and Romanticist themes interlace in Russian literature, as the Russian center often defined itself against an Oriental other.[61] This juxta-positioning became especially relevant in the wake of the Russian empire's multiple victories in the Caucasus after 1820. Even as the initial Romanticist period of Russian Orientalist literary fiction yielded to a Realist bent in the latter half of the nineteenth century, this literature continued to instill distinct hierarchies between Russians and those they ruled and indeed became more explicit in those distinctions with the passage of time. All throughout its development Russian Orientalist literature adopts an ethnographic approach that is meant to "capture" definitions of the other in the Russian literary imaginary, as well as firmly bind Russian identity to its "history" of martial glory, and its difference from these others.[62]

As with other forms of Orientalist literature, the Russian equivalent seeks to achieve distinct rhetorical objectives most expedient for defining Russia's historical narrative in concise terms. In the words of Ewa Thompson, this semi-fictional literature – it is in part based on the lived experience of its authors – worked to instill the notion of "natural" Russian supremacy by comparing a fictionalized narrative of Russia to an equally fictitious image of the periphery.[63] Whilst many of Thompson's sweeping statements about Russia's intellectual development or the various ethnicities of the Russian Empire risk delving into Orientalization themselves, her critical framing of Russian Orientalist literature is nevertheless quite instructive to understanding how Russian Orientalism functioned. Russian Romanticist Orientalist literature's rhetorical

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[61] Katya Hokanson, *Writing at Russia's Borders* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 25–6.
[62] Michael Kemper, "Russian Orientalism" *Oxford Research Encyclopedia: Asian History* (September 2018): 7–8, https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277727.013.297; Andreas Schönle, *Authenticity and Fiction in the Russian Literary Journey, 1790–1840* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 14; Hokanson, *Writing*, 27.
[63] Thompson's broadly post–colonial framework she employs in approaching Russian literature and imperial history is essential to reframing discussions on Russian Orientalism. However, Thompson is prone to making broad over-generalizations that essentialize certain ethnic groups (including Russians) in Orientalist ways. Nonetheless, her literary analyses contain valuable critiques of Russian imperial literature that are seldom voiced in as astute terms in other historiographical works. Thompson, *Literature*, 78-81.

constructs are the product of a distinctly Russian imperial discourse rooted in militarism and an increasingly confident assertion of Russia's "right" to a civilizing mission.[64] This assertion was at first unconfident owing to Russia's initial status as an imperial polity existing outside of the realm of European imperial prestige but became gradually more self-assured in its assertions of supremacy as the Russian Empire ingratiated itself into the inner circle of Europe's great powers.[65]

The Romanticist period of Russian Orientalism coincides with the concretization of Russia's identity as an imperial power, and by extension the rise of Romanticist nationalist sentiment within Russia. Additionally, the concretization of Russia's sense of self necessarily reinforced Russian constructs of the other in literature and in imperial policy. This meant that newly subjugated lands such as the Caucasus required quantification through a Russian lens. The initial challenge in achieving this was that Russians knew little about the Caucasus in the first half of the nineteenth century. Since the Russian Empire only started making significant headway into the Northern Caucasus in the 1820s, few Russians had been to the region and fewer still had written of their experiences.[66] This meant that Russian conceptualizations of the other – meaning those cultural constructs borne of prejudice and inherent to the imperialist

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[64] As with Western European empires, the concept of civilizing or "securing" certain regions of the Russian Empire was also intertwined with brutal genocidal policies, including the mass removal of "rebellious" populations and routine massacres of Indigenous settlements as forms of mass terrorization and communal retribution. Case in point was the "Ermolov era" of the North Caucasus conquest. Ermolov's counterinsurgency tactics were infamous for their genocidal brutality, and yet Russia's Orientalists regarded this period as one of the most successful chapters of the "civilizing mission" in the North Caucasus. See Charles King, *The Ghost of Freedom: A History of the Caucasus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 45.

[65] Lieven, ed. *The Cambridge History,* 10–12.

[66] By the 1820s Russia's genocidal campaigns against the Indigenous peoples of the North Caucasus had sufficiently secured the region to allow for the region's redevelopment into a fast-growing Russian tourist destination, as evinced in the writings of Pushkin, Ilya Radozhitskii, Petr Sumarokov, and in various periodicals. This period also corresponded with a general increase in Russian literary works set in the Russian popular imaginary of the North Caucasus, although Imperial Russia never succeeded in fully pacifying this region. See Susan Layton, *Russian Literature and Empire: Conquest of the Caucasus from Pushkin to Tolstoy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 54–8.

perspective – were imperceptibly woven together with factual information about the regions depicted. This purposeful synthesis meant that what was imperial myth passed as objective fact, a subtle mythologization that permeates Russian Orientalism throughout its various manifestations to the present day.[67]

In this chapter, I will examine these Russian Orientalist mythologies at various stages of their development in Russian Romanticist literature, specifically in the writings of Alexander Pushkin and in Mikhail Lermontov's *Hero of Our Time.* This analysis will demonstrate that Russian Orientalist ideas were rooted in Russian Romanticist nationalist discourses but evolved over time to incorporate more realist elements. This chapter will demonstrate how the ideas within these texts shaped the mentalities and attitudes of colonial administrators, and by extension directly influenced discourses on colonial administration in Russia's imperial peripheries. Finally, this chapter will also highlight a persistent tension throughout Russian Orientalist discourses, namely an ambivalence towards certain versions of Orientalist hegemony amongst the Russian ruling class. Although Russian Orientalism proved instrumental for instituting imperial hierarchies of domination, it also gave anti-Tsarist elements of Imperial Russia the rhetorical tools to resist and problematize those hierarchies.[68] In reaction to this, Tsarist authorities attempted to curb any impetus towards more liberalized versions of Russian Orientalism, fearful that these reforms would challenge their tight grip on power.

Pushkin: Romanticism in Defense of Russian Colonialism

The *Prisoner of the Caucasus* (1822) by Alexander Pushkin is a notable example of this imbedded mythologization in the Romanticist period of Russian Orientalist literature. *Prisoner of*

[67] Thompson, *Literature,* 91.
[68] Alexander Etkind, *Internal Colonization: Russia's Imperial Experience* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011) 143–4.

the Caucasus tells the story of a Byronic Russian military officer who must use his wits and temerity to escape captivity under a tribe of Circassians. This is a *prima facie* instance of Russian Orientalism's tendency to glorify the Russian spirit by juxtaposing it with an inferior other. In this case that contrast is a literal one between a cultivated member of the Russian elite and the "alien tribesmen" of a wild land.[69]

Pushkin authored the poem in the style of a travelogue and as such the work transports the reader into a faraway realm in the Russian imperial imaginary, a fusion of real elements of the Caucasus and Russian preconceptions of the region. To complete this image, Pushkin interspersed the work with factual geographic and cultural information of the poem's setting. Overflowing with flowery prose describing a vibrant and exoticized Caucasus landscape populated by wild nomads, the poem nevertheless includes much of the coded language that characterized later Orientalist literature with thorough descriptions of Circassian customs interspersed with gross generalizations of various ethnicities.[70] Interestingly, Pushkin also links the history of this region to that of Russia in the poem's epilogue where he references the ancient conflict between the Mstislav I of Kievan Rus, and the precursors to the Circassians. In this fashion, Pushkin envisions the Caucasus as both a part of Russia's Orient but also as a place with

[69] Tolstoy's eponymous short story inspired by Pushkin's poem was later adapted into a 1996 film directed by the late Sergei Bodrov. This film, commonly known as *Prisoner of the Mountains* in English-speaking countries, was a significant deviation from the original text(s). Unlike Tolstoy's or Pushkin's works, the film expresses ambivalence about the moral superiority of Russian imperialism, and on the contrary overtly condemns it as an evil force. Unlike in the novella where the Russians are either positively or ambiguously depicted from a moral standpoint, the film portrays the Russians as a malignant force. The Russian capacity for cruelty and the Chechens' fear of this are both a central driver for much of the violence in this film. Whereas the Chechen characters are merely trying to protect themselves and their loved ones from mass murder, the Russians inflict massive destruction in the face of even minor resistance. Layton, *Empire,* 42–52.

[70] Layton, *Empire,* 156–7; Kivelson, and Suny, *Russia's Empires,* 179–180.

deep historical ties to the "Russian nation". Russian colonization is, therefore, an avenue of Russian nationality or *narodnost* in this framing.[71]

The poem's footnotes add cultural context to *Prisoner of the Caucasus* but as Pushkin put it in a letter to a close friend "[the description of Circassian customs] is all unconnected with anything [in the poem], and is actually no more than *hors d'oeuvre*".[72] Despite their secondary nature in the eyes of the author, these footnotes proved indispensable to the poem's success and became popular in their own right as standalone publications. Aside from offering an extra sense of grounding in the poem's setting, these footnotes also serve a distinct purpose of Orientalist categorization. Specifically, they work to give the poem a "rational" dispassionate air, and by extension lend legitimacy to the concept of inherent racial differences between the Circassians and their Russian captor. In effect, they infuse Pushkin's Romanticist rhetoric with a realist sense of rationality and authority.[73] His information therefore serves as instruction to the reader of the Russian metropole on how to view the colonized and by extension where to place themselves in this imperialist construct. Pushkin's caricatures provide quite a vibrant image of life in a picturesque Circassian aul, but the characters that inhabit it have a principal function, namely, to indicate by their difference those ways in which Russian culture – meaning the version of Russian culture represented in this literature – is superior to the culture of these subaltern realms.[74] From its first stanzas onwards, the poem repeatedly refers to the Circassians as dirty,

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[71] *Narodnost being* the Russian word for "nationality" or "ethnicity". Hokanson, *Writing,* 27; Kivelson, and Suny, *Russia's Empires,* 177.
[72] Alexander Pushkin to Vladimir Petrovitch Gorchakov, October–November, 1823, in *Pushkin, Aleksandr* Sergeevich, *Perepiska s V. P. Gorchakovym.* ed. T. Lovetskaia, http://az.lib.ru/p/pushkin_a_s/text_1823_perepiska_s_gorchakovym.shtml.
[73] King, *Ghost of Freedom,* 110–2; Boris V. Tomashevskii, *Pushkin: Vtoraia Kniga* (Moscow–Leningrad, Akademii Nauk SSSR: 1961), 405; Yuri N. Tynianov, "Pushkin," *Arkhaisty* i Novatory (Leningrad: Priboe, 1929), 253–55.
[74] This is my analysis which builds on Susan Layton's ideas of Russia's "mythologies of Caucasian savagery" and Thompson's post-colonial reading of "Captive of the Caucasus". See Susan Layton, "Nineteenth-Century Russian Mythologies of Caucasian Savagery," in *Russia's Orient,* ed. Daniel R. Brower (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 80–96; Thompson, *Imperial,* 59–62.

cunning, agile, lazy, and quick to violence. Just prior to the Russian captive's dramatic appearance the poem paints a picture of the Circassians sitting idle in their aul, regaling each other with memories of the "good old days" when they raided villages, burnt them to the ground, kept concubines, and lived in "wild bliss".[75]

Such an introduction places these natives squarely in the role of predators, a community whose entire identity revolves around the worship of violence, spoilage, and thievery. Indeed, Pushkin reinforces that impression in the next verse by using the word *khishchnik* – the Russian word for predator – to refer to the Circassian who captures the plucky Byronic Russian officer.[76] The first strophe also alludes to a sense of impermanence for the Circassian reality as the Russian presence closes in on them. The Circassians *used* to conduct violent raids on enemy villages with impunity, but now this is merely a distant memory of their greatness as a band of warriors. The natives, in other words, are in terminal decline, and their ultimate defeat and erasure in the face of a superior Russian force is a foregone conclusion.[77]

Pushkin's Romanticist prose works to overtly ascribe clear differences that relegate the colonial other to an alien identity[78]. In this first strophe of *Prisoner of the Caucasus*, the Circassians are barely human subjects but seem more like predatorial beasts, and this characterization instructs the Russian audience to view the defiant "tribals" of the North Caucasus as such. Moreover, the natives in this text are so accustomed to violence that it is to the point of self-destruction, and not just because of their apparent penchant for constantly attacking

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[75] Alexandr Pushkin, *Kavkazskii Plennik* (St. Petersburg: Gnedich, 1822), Part I; Susan Layton, "Marinsky's 'Ammalat-Bek' and the Orientalisation of the Caucasus in Russian Literature," in *The Golden Age of Russian Literature and Thought. Selected Papers from the Fourth World Congress for Soviet and East European Studies, Harrogate 1990,* ed. Derek Offord (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 35–6.
[76] Alexandr Pushkin, *Kavkazskii Plennik* (St. Petersburg: Gnedich, 1822), Part I.
[77] Thompson, *Literature,* 62–3
[78] Layton, "Russian Mythologies," 36–7.

each other's settlements. At the end of the poem the Russian protagonist manages to escape with the help of a young Circassian girl childlike in her purity and innocence. However, the Circassian tribe later kills this young virgin in retribution for her disobedience.

Even as the natives buckle under Russian expansion, they too are destroying each other through senseless violence, an "Asiatic" inclination that they are incapable of overcoming. By contrast, the Russian protagonist stands out for his apparent Europeanness and clear superiority to the natives.[79] The narrator refers to the captive as "European" multiple times, and the protagonist inhabits a quintessentially European (read Byronic) state of existential ennui. Put simply, even as the poem fails to name this captive, the Russian protagonist receives a more human dimension from the narrative than any of the Circassian captors. The poem directs the audience to identify with the Russian's emotional struggles and sympathize with his fear. The Russian officer's existential questions about his own life, his anguish towards his enslavement, his determination to return home, all work to humanize him.[80]

The colonialist narrative of *Prisoner of the Caucasus* is a direct expression of the author's belief that the native cultures of the North Caucasus are in a state of irreversible decay. Russia's ultimate victory in this region is natural, and inevitable. The Caucasus's decline in the face of Russian power – and this is a desirable outcome – Pushkin represents as a *rational* position taken by a European imperial power.[81] In this respect, the "Circassians" as a people are in actuality a stand-in for all of the intransigent Muslim nomads of the North Caucasus. Pushkin's racialized generalizations are applicable to all natives who violently resist Russian expansion; such is the

[79] Hokanson, *Writing*, 49–51; Layton, *Empire*, 102.
[80] Pushkin, *Kavkazskii plennik*, Part II;
[81] Hokanson, *Writing*, 53–4.

universality of these tropes across various Russian Romanticist authors regardless of which Indigenous group fulfills the role of chief antagonist in the narrative.[82]

Preempting the high-handedness with which European intellectuals approached their Russian counterparts during his day, Pushkin responded by acerbically reasserting Russia's European superiority over the "Asiatic" North Caucasus in every conceivable respect.[83] To wit, the protagonist of *Prisoner of the Caucasus* is highly adaptable to an exceedingly demanding situation and proves able to survive in "alien lands" with little prior initiation. Furthermore, this is a dichotomy that Pushkin's poem – and subsequently much of Russian Romanticist literature – reiterates, stipulating that the natives are not merely inferior but are in fact incompetent in all respects, so much so that Russians are better frontiersman and better fighters than even the natives.[84] In Pushkin's narrative, the Circassians only excel over Russians in their inhuman lust for and love of violence, and this "fact" is instrumentalized to further rationalize the need for Russian "pacification" of these native lands.

This unreservedly hostile approach reflects itself in Pushkin's own travelogue, *Journey to Arzrum,* which chronicles his 1829 journey into the Caucasus. Although he acknowledges that Russian colonization is gradually dispossessing the Circassians of their land and thereby rendering them impoverished and desperate, his main concern is not the horrific abuses committed over the course of Russia's conquest of the Caucasus. Instead, Pushkin is far more concerned that the Circassians will be harder to defend against as Russian advances push them

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[82] In a letter addressed to Gorchakov, Pushkin admitted that he realized his Circassian characters were underdeveloped but decided not to give them more depth as he "did not have the will to start anew". See Tynianov, "Pushkin," 254.

[83] The concept of Russian backwardness influenced both Russian conceptualizations of the nation and also informs Western European relations vis a vis Imperial Russia. See Maria Todorova, "The Trap of Backwardness: Modernity, Temporality, and the Study of Eastern European Nationalism," *Slavic Review* 64, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 157–8.

[84] This notion of Russia's "European" superiority has literary roots before Pushkin's time, but this binary was crystalized in Romanticist literature thanks to Kavkazky Plennik. See Harsha Ram, *The Imperial Sublime: A Russian Poetics of Empire* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 77–8.

deeper into the North Caucasus highlands. Pushkin uses vivid descriptions of the human suffering inflicted upon the Indigenous peoples of the Caucasus by Russian Imperial power to accentuate his confident assertions of Russia's final victory over the Caucasus.[85] These descriptions therefore do not serve to "demystify" Russian Romanticism and in fact reinforce Romanticist notions of Russian Orientalism.[86]

The notion that Russian colonists are better custodians of the land they steal than the Indigenous peoples themselves also surfaces in this travelogue. All throughout his entries in *Journey to Arzrum,* Pushkin makes sure to note any material improvements that have come to the Caucasus as a result of Russia's conquest. On his visit to Georgievsk, a Russian redoubt near the hot springs of Mineralnye Vody,[87] Pushkin points out that the city's previously decrepit bathing facilities have been transformed into "magnificent baths and buildings" where everything from the paths to the springs themselves have been "prettified".[88] Despite this, there is still far too much "Asian poverty" in the Caucasus for Pushkin's liking, and he laments upon his arrival to Arzrum that there are few "European luxuries" available in stores. Indeed, he scoffs at the notion that Asia can have luxuries, asserting that "luxury is, of course, an attribute of Europe."

As if to make the dichotomy even more explicit, Pushkin adds: "In Arzrum, you cannot buy for any money what you can find in a convenience store in any district (provincial) town of Pskov province".[89] In other words, any significant town in Pskov province is well acquainted

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[85] Layton, "Russian Mythologies," 39.
[86] Susan Layton argues that this passage "demystified" the Romanticist image of the North Caucasus by providing stark images of human suffering in sharp contrast to the journal's flowery descriptions of the Caucasus landscape. However, Pushkin does not invite the reader to empathize with these subjects, and the Circassians are nevertheless treated as military targets in the text and not a humanitarian concern. Susan Layton, *Empire,* 66; Alexander Pushkin, "Journey to Arzrum," in *Sobranie sochinenii v 10 tomah,* vol. 5 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatelstvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1962), 420; Hokanson, *Writing,*167–8.
[87] Russian for Mineral Water, a clear reference to the city's main attraction, namely its mineral water springs.
[88] Pushkin, "Journey," 418.
[89] Pushkin, "Journey," 455; Pushkin also adopts a thoroughly imperialist tone in his interactions with various "natives". Thirty versts after Tbilisi, Pushkin is shocked to find a local who speaks neither Russian nor Tartar, and

with the luxuries of Europe, unlike the "Asiatic" frontier towns of Russia's periphery. All of these statements work to endow Russian colonialism – and by extension its atrocities – with moral legitimacy. In the eyes of Pushkin, violent colonial conquest is a worthwhile objective if Russian "tutelage" works to Europeanize the Caucasus.

Lermontov's Chechen Warriors and Circassian Beauties

Mikhail Lermontov's 1840 Romantic-era novel *Hero of Our Time* features similarly disparaging generalizations towards various North Caucasus natives. Despite being published approximately eighteen years later than Pushkin's poem, Lermontov's novel uses near identical ethnic stereotypes as Pushkin to describe various Indigenous groups such as Ossetians, 'Chechenes', and Circassians.[90] Lermontov's novel describes these natives as variously cunning shysters, brutal vainglorious warriors, thieves that are quick to violence, or as people who are irrational to a self-destructive degree.[91] In multiple respects *Hero of our Time* represents a more elaborate articulation of the same tropes and concepts that Pushkin deftly condensed into the space of multiple verses. Whereas Pushkin confined realism to his footnotes, Lermontov brings these textured descriptions of the Orient into the text itself, thereby seamlessly blending Romanticist tropes with realist rationality.[92]

Pushkin condemns them for their "amazing carelessness". See Pushkin, "Journey," 433; van der Oye, *Russian Orientalism,* 82.

[90] Lermontov was fourteen when Pushkin published *Captive of the Caucasus,* and in his early years was enamored with the Byronic overtures of Russia's Romanticist writers. In 1828, Lermontov published his own "Prisoner of the Caucasus", an eponymous poem that directly "borrowed" several of Pushkin's verses. See Dmitrii Mirskii, *Istoriia russkoi literatury: s drevnejshih vremen po 1925 god* (Novosibirsk: Izd-vo Svinin i synovja, 2005), 235–240; Mikhail Lermontov, *Kavkazkoi Plennik"* (Moscow: DA! Media, 2015), foreword; Mikhail Lermontov, *A Hero of our Time.* second ed. N.p.: Project Gutenberg, 12.

[91] Sergei Durylin, "The Caucasus and Caucasian Peoples in Lermontov's Novel," in *Lermontov's A Hero of Our Time: A Critical Companion,* ed. Lewis Bagby (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2002), 128–9.

[92] Lauren G. Leighton, "Russian Romanticism: Two Essays," in *Slavistic Printings and Reprintings,* ed. Cornelis H. van Schooneveld (The Hague: Mouton, 1975) 10.

As in *Prisoner of the Caucasus,* Lermontov's story is one of idealized Russian characters thrust into a violent and backwards land. Maksim Maksimich is a consummate old-fashioned military man, a veteran of the Ermolov era who has devoted his life to the Russian imperial mission. Pechorin is his melancholic and intellectually cultivated colleague, a Russian "Childe Harold" character belonging to a higher social rank.[93] The Caucasus as constructed by Lermontov in this novel is instrumentalized to serve as a vibrant violent background for the development of these two characters. To achieve this, Lermontov utilizes multiple established tropes pioneered by Pushkin including extensive descriptions of natural landscapes, the pure innocence of a young native girl, and depictions of the Caucasus' irrationality and inexorable tendency towards self-destruction. Given the instrumental nature of this constructed world, it is no surprise that the actions of Lermontov's protagonists against the native characters carry little moral weight. Indeed, as Layton notes, protagonists themselves seem to be slipping into the self-destructive tendencies engendered by the Orient itself.[94]

One of the central conflicts of the story revolves around the abduction of Bela, a young daughter of a local Circassian prince. The novel depicts Bela as beautiful young Circassian girl whose childlike innocence makes her an object of desire for Pechorin, who tricks her family so that he may abduct and rape Bela.[95] As a representative of the moral good of the Russian civilizing mission, Maksym Maksymich raises objections towards Pechorin's actions, and this novel portrays this as indicative of Maksymich's fundamental virtue. The way Lermontov chooses to present this character requires the audience to suspend their disbelief and glaze over a

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[93] Layton, *Empire,* 215; Hokanson, *Writing,* 173; Norimatsu, "Falsehood," 413.
[94] In Susan Layton's words, Lermontov's narrative "place(s) the hate speech outside the author's voice" by not directly stating these opinions but rather implying them through the story. See Susan Layton, "Ironies of Ethnic Identity," in *Lermontov's A Hero of Our Time: A Critical Companion*, ed. Lewis Bagby (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2002), 74–6; Layton, *Empire,* 216–8.
[95] Bela, a minor, is smitten by Pechorin, and when he fails to requite her love, she speculates that he has fallen in love with a Chechen girl; Lermontov, *Hero,* 30.

great deal of complicating factors, namely that Maksymich never takes an active role in preventing Pechorin from carrying out his plan to abduct Bela. Maksymich does note multiple times over the course of the story that he does not approve of his colleague's decision to abduct and rape a young Circassian girl, although he makes no attempt to stop Pechorin nor rescue Bela. In the words of Katya Hokanson, Maksym Maksymich serves as an apologist in the narrative, mediating between Pechorin's colonialist excesses and the wiles of the "Asiatics".[96]

Taken together, Lermontov suggests that Pechorin's actions are aesthetically uncouth, but not so execrable as to require immediate intervention from the narrative's moral barometer. Lermontov's novel does not question Maksymich's inaction as the narrative casts Pechorin's actions as merely a romantic expression of his moral waywardness and search for meaning. This positionality allows for a form of moral "insulation" whereby contemptible acts become acceptable forms of agency on the part of the Russian colonizers.[97]

Although these actions destroy Bela's family and lead to her murder, Pechorin himself faces no moral or physical consequence for these crimes. Rather, the novel depicts his lack of direction as one of his central shortcomings, and he proceeds to decimate an Indigenous community as part of his destructive soul-searching quest without so much as a hint of condemnation from the narrative. Instead, the novel centers the trauma of its Byronic hero over that of his victims. Following the story's tragic climax, Pechorin experiences further depression and leaves on a military expedition to Persia from which he never returns. Even as he leaves the stage, the Pechorin continues to perpetuate the cycle of colonial violence elsewhere in Russia's imperial realm. Ultimately, his emotional tailspin is the greater tragedy that the audience must empathize with. The narrative instrumentalizes the death of a young "tribal" girl and the

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[96] Hokanson, *Writing,* 174–5
[97] Thompson, *Literature,* 72–4

destruction of her family to emphasize the sadness of the Russian protagonist but abstains from centering the ramifications for the Indigenous community itself.[98]

The casual exploitation of Bela betrays the implication that natives – and Indigenous women in particular – are only valuable to the extent that they are useful to the Russian colonizer. The male natives of *Hero of our Time* receive similar treatment. The only true dimension of characters such as Azamat, Bela's brother, or Kazbich, the dexterous thief on horseback, resides in their capacity for violence, greed, and thievish trickery. Like Bela, the story centers on the "wild" aspects of these characters, in this case meaning their aggressiveness and excitability, and makes little provision for any other character features. The decimation of this small Circassian community is implicitly a predictable consequence of the poor choices of the natives themselves.[99] Likewise, Lermontov attributes the general chaos that reigns throughout the Caucasus as a byproduct of the attitudes of the natives.

Because the Ossetians are tricksters, the Chechens murderers, and Circassians thieves, the Caucasus is a divided land desperately in need of order that only Russian might can furnish. Naturally, there is no mention whatsoever of the destabilizing effect Russian intervention had on the Caucasus in the first place. As in Pushkin's poem, Lermontov presents these ideas as those of educated Europeans who possess superior faculties to the natives they are colonizing. The clearest example of this articulation of hierarchy is Lermontov's decision to depict Pechorin as the Russian equivalent of a gifted Ivy League educated military officer with meticulous

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[98] Take, for example, Soviet literary critic Vissarion Belinsky's review of Hero of our Time, and in particular his writings on the death of Bela, which largely centers the feelings of the Russian reader (ergo the reading public of the imperial core) in reaction to this event, and makes no attempt to analyze this moment from a post-colonial perspective (either for its rhetorical value to the Russian colonial enterprise or as a microcosm of Russian settler-colonialism's violence perpetuated against the Indigenous, and Indigenous women specifically); Vissarion Belinsky, "Geroi nashevo vremeni – sochinenie M. Lermontova,*" Sobranie sochinenii,* vol 1 (Moscow: Gosudarstvenoe Izdatelstvo Khudozhestvennoi Literatury, 1948); Thompson, *Literature,* 70–2.
[99] Thompson, *Literature,* 69.

organizational skills and a cultivated intellectual predisposition. Lermontov chose to depict Pechorin thusly as a way of making clear his position of superiority over the natives, as Pechorin's "right" to exploit the Caucasus and its human material derives from his intellectual primacy over the natives.[100]

Russian Identity and Uncertainty

For all of this fanfaronade of Russian imperial pomp, there are also revealing truths in the silences of these works. The principle distinguishing quality of Russians as compared to subaltern groups of the periphery, that which makes one Russian, is the only quality that comes through in these works with any significant clarity. Herein lies a fundamental uncertainty in this early manifestation of Russian Orientalist rhetoric, namely an amorphous identity for the Russian imperial core. Pushkin and Lermontov intertwined Russianness with Europeanness in their works such that these two identities were effectively the same. There is, however, a fundamental uncertainty in such an absolutist ideal, one so evident that its foremost proponents often betrayed it in their own stories. *Hero of Our Time* depicts Maxim Maksymich, for instance, as a Russian who has begun to adopt "native" mannerisms, namely in that he is more of a "feminine" character lacking in assertion and prone to indolence.[101]

In effect, even this stalwart homage to Russian discipline "succumbs" to the Caucasus. This suggests that these characteristics can "rub off" onto Russians who stay in this Oriental space for too long. Moreover, Russian Romanticist literature not only contains examples of

[100]Where Pechorin falters morally Lermontov and later Russian literary critics attributed this to him sliding into "Asiatic" mores. Layton, *Empire,* 218–9; Thompson, *Literature,* 69–70.
[101] He is also broadly described as a Russian who has "gone native", a fact conveyed by his sun-tanned appearance and his native dress. We are also told that Maksymich does not have a wife; See Lermontov, *Hero,* 9, 39, 44; Hokanson, *Writing,* 189–193.

Russian emulation of "native" sensibilities, but even indulges in adulation of certain "tribal" qualities. Druzhinin's *A Russian Circassian* demonstrate this phenomenon through the story's protagonist Matvei Kuzmich Makhmetov, a retired ethnic Russian civil servant who grows quite bored on his Caucasus plantation and briefly deludes himself into believing that he is the descendant of a race of Circassian warriors.[102] This happens after a Circassian, Aslan Makhmetov, visits Kuzmich and presents himself as a *dzhigit*, a brave equestrian warrior who is the ideal embodiment of the "Oriental" man, conversant with Russian Romanticist tropes and replete with stories of marshal glory.[103] According to this fabricated backstory, Aslan is a "good" Circassian dzhigit in that he retains his proud "tribal" identity but fights for the Russian Imperium and against rebels such as Imam Shamil.[104]

Convinced by this Circassian shyster that his inexplicably Muslim surname (Makhmetov) is proof of his mountaineer heritage, Kuzmich endeavors on a wild goose chase to find his "roots".[105] As part of this journey Kuzmich dons Circassian clothing and actively tries to embody what he considers to be Circassian mores. This narrative envisages a conceptualization of the North Caucasus as a realm of adventure for Russian masculinity, a place that allows Russian men to extricate themselves from the staleness of Russian domestic life and "play the Circassian". By purchasing a traditional *burka* and *cherkeska* and procuring Indigenously produced weapons as does the protagonist of *A Russian Circassian,* they too could engage in this colonial flight of

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[102] Note the stereotypically Muslim name despite the story introducing Kuzmich as ethnically Russian, a deliberate choice by the author.

[103] Alexandr Druzhinin, ""Russkii Cherkes"". Derevenskii Rasskaz"," in *Sobranie Sochineniia. v. Druzhinina,* ed. Nikolai Gerbel (Saint Petersburg: Tipografii Imperatorskoi Akademii Nauk, 1865); Layton, "Colonial Mimicry", 61–2.

[104] Shamil was an Avar spiritual leader who led a 25-year guerrilla campaign against the Russians in the North Caucasus beginning in the 1830s. He was captured in 1859, and after spending time in exile in Russia was relocated to Kyiv in 1868 where he spent most of his final years. Sergei Durylin, "The Caucasus", 126.

[105] The narrator describes Kuzmich as a retired collegiate assessor (*kollezhskii assessor),* a middling civilian rank established as part of the table of ranks by Peter the Great in 1722; Geoffrey Hosking, *Russia and the Russians: A History* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), 204.

fancy.[106] Implicit in this narrative is a veneration for North Caucasian masculinity, or more precisely, Russian ideas of what constituted "Circassian" masculinity.[107] This is a defining feature of Russian Orientalism's ambivalent nature, namely that it expresses a mix of admiration and excoriation for the people of the Orient. Russian Orientalism seeks to stigmatize the people of the Orient yet retain those qualities the Russian metropole deems as positive.

This idea of masculinity renders the North Caucasus into an object of aesthetic consumption in the Russian imaginary. It is a place that Russia must physically conquer, meaning the land and people, but also culturally conquer, whereby Indigenous cultural properties are commodified to suit Russian needs. The Russian state must subsume these Indigenous cultural stereotypes into the Russian metropolitan cultural zeitgeist. In the process, the metropole transforms these properties into an avenue for expressions of unbridled Russian masculinity outside of the constraining boundaries of Russia's marshal society. However, these definitions also act to contain the North Caucasus male himself, defining the narrow set of qualities he can emulate or identify with. This narrative directs the Russian reading public to admire the Circassian for his dexterity with knives and his cunning tricks, but also to regard this caricature as something Russians can emulate as part of their domination of this region.

This sentiment shows up repeatedly throughout the corpus of Russian Romanticist literature. Aside from Druzhinin and Lermontov, Pushkin's *Prisoner of The Caucasus*, and Bestuzhev-Marlinskii's *Ammalat-Bek* alike feature Russian characters that engage in this form of colonial mimicry. Whilst some of these works sought to ridicule this trend, their romanticist

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[106] In this context *burka* refers to a felt cape, and a *cherkeska* refers to a long coat with cartridge pockets across the chest, both items of clothing stereotypically associated with the mountaineer equestrians of the North Caucasus; Druzhinin, "Russkii Cherkes"."

[107] The veneration of the unbridled masculinity of the North Caucasus brave is a common theme in Russian Orientalist literature throughout the nineteenth century. Layton, *Empire,* 136; Layton, "Marlinsky's 'Ammalat-Bek'," 34–54; Susan Layton, "Eros and Empire in Russian Literature About Georgia," *Slavic Review* 51, no.2 (1992): 195–213.

language also imbues this act with aesthetic value, thereby naturalizing an inherently colonial act of cultural appropriation as something that is merely another instrument in a collection of literary tropes meant for Russian Romanticist writers. In Druzhinin's case, there is little to suggest that the somewhat comedic storyline of *Russian Circassian* is meant to satirize Orientalism or problematize its hierarchies of hegemony. On the contrary, Druzhinin's often-fanciful story only works to reify the boundaries between the colonizer and the colonized, and its catharsis clearly reinforces that stark boundary.[108]

Upon first seeing the colonial redoubts of Georgievsk and Piatigorsk, the Russian Circassian is dismayed to see that these cities are merely extensions of the "European" empire Pushkin heralds as a force for modernity. In other words, there is not enough "Asiatic" poverty and barbarity in the North Caucasus for the pretend Circassian's liking.[109] Even as Kuzmich is engaged in a pointless journey to reconnect with his fictitious heritage, his character still serves to naturalize the act of the Russian gaze defining what it means to be of the North Caucasus, and by extension reinforces the hierarchy between a European Russia and the "Asiatic" Caucasus.

Kuzmich delineates in simplistic terms what it means to be a *dzhigit*, a man who has no time for civility and who must always be ready for a fight. In effect, the Russian center appropriates the ability of the colonized to define themselves and their lands, assimilating these identities into Russianness as merely just another expression of it. In this work, the Russian metropole appropriates these identity markers and strictly dictates how the colonized may express them. Druzhinin's story specifically describes "Circassian" traits in the context of pro-

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[108] Additionally, Druzhinin has no compunction with employing more overt Orientalist binaries in his other works such as *The Legend of Sulfur Springs.* See Norimatsu, "Falsehood," 412–3.

[109] "Obo vsem etom ne mog dumat Matvei Kuzmich. Emu bylo gorko vidyi Kavkaz, ego osobennyj, sobstvennyj, iz razdiraushhih dushu knig pocherpnutyi Kavkaz -- v takom ulybajushhemsiia, chinnom, spokoynom, obrazovannom vid [Matvey Kuzmich could not think of all this. It was bitter for him to see the Caucasus, his special, his own, from the soul-rending books of the Caucasus with such a smiling, dignified, calm, educated appearance.]"; Druzhinin, "Russkii Cherkes"."

Russian *dzhigits* who both retain their "traditional" ways and willingly assimilate into the Russian metropole. It is this unbridled "tribal" aspect of Circassian identity that the work seeks to domesticate and preserve, a conceptualization of Indigenous identity that is entirely the construct of the Russian metropole. Aslan's tales also speak of Circassian princes who fight for Russia, participate in St. Petersburg's high society, own Russian lands, and even take Russian wives.

This Romanticist Orientalist ideal also hints at the reciprocal effect of Russian hegemony over Indigenous ways of being, namely that colonized groups of the Russian periphery actively adopt these Russian definitions of the mountaineer as a means of navigating this new colonial landscape. By doing so, these "ideal" Indigenous mimickers both reinforce Russian preconceptions of Indigenous realities and lend credibility to the notion that these fictionalized identities are inherent and inalienable components of the "real" Caucasus.[110] Aslan Makhmetov is of course a perfect example of this phenomenon. Although he is no more than an impoverished Circassian metal worker from Piatigorsk he chooses to present as a battle-hardened tribal warrior because the Russian Oriental gaze dictates specific terms for Indigenous ways of being via its cultural constructs.[111] This in turn compels Aslan to cultivate an image as a fierce warrior on horseback for his own profit.

Aslan Makhmetov's self-presentation is entirely in line with Russian Orientalist literary depictions of North Caucasus masculinity. Much like Lermontov's *Izmail Bey* or Bestuzhev-Marlinskii's *Ammalat-Bek*, Makhmetov attempts to embody the Romanticist persona of the

[110] This in turn has much connection with the idea of colonial mimicry as described by Homi K. Bhabha. See Eleanor Byrne, "Said, Bhabha, and the Colonized," 155–7; Bhabha, *Culture,* 103, 134; Norimatsu, "Falsehood," 414.
[111] Druzhinin, "Russkii Cherkes"."

alluring native who is popular with Russian women, although his looks fail him in this regard.[112] In this fashion *Russian Circassian* further undergirds ethnic stereotypes regarding the ingrained duplicitousness of the Caucasian native. These braves play the warrior, but they are also devoted tricksters and scammers willing to do anything to get ahead and fool gullible Russians. Aslan was far from the only character in North Caucasus literature to adopt this cynical tactic.

As noted in an 1868 essay by Petr Uslar, a Russian ethnographer and one of the leading Caucasologists of the nineteenth century, Caucasian youths in Russian settings – such as those cadets sent to the Russian metropole for schooling – regularly presented as embodiments of Russian Romanticist tropes. By mimicking famous characters such as Ammalat-Bek or Kazbich, these students hoped to make themselves appear compelling to the Russian gaze according to Uslar. Uslar spared no condescension in describing this observed trend, suggesting that this rudimentary masquerade is the only tactic "semi-educated" Caucasian cadets could invent to make themselves interesting. [113]

Uslar's essay demonstrates a clear example of how imperialist cultural structures create the conditions for negotiated subaltern identities, specifically in the Russian imperial context. What his letter describes is a manifestation of Indigenous agency, the type of phenomenon Bhabha described in his critique of *Orientalism* regarding colonial mimicry. Much like Dr. Aziz, these Caucasian students hope to "mimic" those tropes constructed by the metropole for their advancement within an imperial society. Uslar's condescension likewise reveals the multi-faceted complexity of this expression, namely that while this mimicry is an expression of

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[112] Norimatsu, "Falsehood," 412.
[113] Petr K. Uslar, "Narodnyia skazaniia kavkazskikh gortsev: Koe-chto o slovesnykh proizvedeniiakh gortsev," in *Sbornik svedenii o kavkazskikh gortsakh, vyp. 1* (Tiflis: Glavnokomanduiushhii kavkazskoiu armieiu pri kavkazskom gorskom upravlenii, 1868), 5.

Indigenous agency it is also an act that represents the sum of powerful cultural influences in the writings of the Imperial core and specifically in the scholarship of Uslar's own discipline. Uslar was apparently threatened by the agency demonstrated by these crafty acts of colonial mimicry. Once again, Russian Orientalists remained weary at the notion that their constructs of hegemony could be instrumentalized to subvert those hierarchies of imperial domination.[114]

Romanticism and Reality: Discourses on Transcaucasian Administration

Alexander Griboedov's 1828 proposal for a Russian-Transcaucasian trading company represents a clear expression of the ideas contained within Romanticist Russian Orientalist literature. The proposal is, according to Susan Layton, "an exemplary expression of benevolent imperialism" because it advocated for the modernization of Caucasus via Russian technical expertise and investment.[115] Beyond this, Griboedov's proposal and his arguments in support of it along with those of his partner in the project Petr Zaveleiskii paint a clear Orientalist picture of how the Russian center regarded its newly acquired Imperial periphery. This picture drew heavily from Romanticist nationalist conceptualizations of Russia's empire and of the peoples that it conquered.

According to Griboedov's rationale, the Caucasus was a land graced with bountiful natural wealth, but its people possessed neither the skills nor the will to exploit these resources. Referencing the innate "indolence" of Russia's Caucasian subjects, Griboedov and Zaveleiskii were convinced that Russia could make far better use of the land than the natives themselves,

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[114] This phenomenon as observed by Uslar can also be interpreted as a counter discourse, since it involves colonized peoples appropriating Orientalist archetypes and thereby instrumentalizing these "Russian" (meaning of the Russian metropole) cultural markers for their own advancement. This also provokes questions of "culture or mimicry?", a discourse first elaborated upon by Derek Walcott. See Derek Walcott, "The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs,* 16 (February 1974): 3–13; Layton, "Colonial Mimicry," 59;
[115] Layton, "Eros and Empire," 197.

thereby rendering this periphery into a profitable site of extraction for an empire that had spent so much treasure to seize it. The Transcaucasian venture would be an operation to harvest cash crops such as cotton from the Caucasus and then transport them to Russia's industrialized core for value-added production.[116]

According to Griboedov, this would be the ideal way for Russia to extricate itself from a costly military administration that had little time to govern owing to its constant fighting with the various Indigenous peoples of the region.[117] By developing formalized systems of civilian administration, the proposal argued for the economic development of the Transcaucasus under Russian colonial guidance and with the participation of the moneyed elites of the Caucasus. In effect, the Russian-Transcaucasian Company would be to the Caucasus what the British East India Company was to the East Indies, with similar privileges of monopoly.[118]

Such humanist principles regarding the native's "need" for imperial guidance but also the denouncement of military coercion in the name of imperialism was not unlike those expressed by contemporaries including Decembrists such as Pavel Pestel as well as Western European intellectuals such as Denis Diderot and Guillaume Raynal. As with these Enlighteners, Griboedov's proposal expressed abhorrence for imperialism's most violent manifestations, but nonetheless believed that a more benevolent form of imperial exploitation was both possible and desirable. Raynal specifically also agreed with the notion that chartered companies with a state monopoly could be beneficial for imperial economic development. Likewise, neither Griboedov

[116] Alexandr Griboedov, Petr Zaveleiskii, "Zapiska ob Uchrezhdenii Rossiskoi Zakavkazkoi Kompanii," in *Pisma.* (Tiflis: 1828), 328–9; In these passages Griboedov talks specifically about the potential of Georgian viticulture and argues that with Russian investment Georgian winemakers could replace foreign competitors in the Russian market.
[117] Griboedov was mainly referring to the North Caucasus although some conflicts also erupted in the South.
[118] Indeed, Griboedov made this comparison himself; Aydinyan, *Formalists,* 20–3.

nor Zaveleiskii ever questioned Russia's prerogative to dominate its Orient but thought Imperial Russia could govern its periphery in a more humanist fashion.[119]

The central concern for the two Russian colonial administrators was therefore representative of the concern of the imperial center, namely that Russia was not optimally exploiting its colonial domains. Much in the vein of Diderot and Raynal, the Transcaucasian proposal expressed the hope of using industrialization and capitalism rather than war and conquest and in so doing improve the material conditions of the colonized peoples of the Transcaucasus.[120] Most importantly, Griboedov's commentary on the state of the Transcaucasus economy and the (un)productivity of the peoples of the Caucasus also lined up quite neatly with the ideas expressed in the writings of Russia's Orientalists.

The manner in which Griboedov and Zaveleiskii regard the Caucasus – an instrument for Russian enrichment and exploitation – draws from the constructs that authors such as Pushkin, Bestuzhev-Marlinskii, and Lermontov articulated. This is particularly evident in how the authors of the Transcaucasus proposal sought to characterize their Caucasian subjects. In the words of Griboedov, "Unenlightenment robs him [the Caucasus native] of all foresight, and his greed for quick and easy pleasures makes him grasp at, in a manner of speaking, what is directly at hand. In addition, greed and selfishness exceeding all prudent calculation drive, as we see, the local merchants."[121]

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[119] Aydinyan, *Formalists,* 16–8. Although quite negative in his assessment of state monopolies, Raynal similarly advocated for the establishment of large imperial companies in the French Empire. Much like Griboedov with the Russian Empire, Raynal's hope was that this form of state protectionism could help the French compete with the British. Raynal also denounced military conquest as "ruinous" for both the colonizer and the colonized. See Abbé Guillaume-Thomas-François Raynal, *A Philosophical and Political History of the Settlements and Trade of the Europeans in the East and West Indies,* trans. John O. Justamond (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2019), esp. 39, 125, 192, 304; Raynal, *A History of the Two Indies,* trans. and ed. Peter Jimack (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2016), 112, 267–8, 274–5.

[120] Compare Raynal's and Diderots writings in the previous footnote with Griboedov's passage on the plight of Caucasian peoples during the constant state of war. See Griboedov, and Zaveleiskii, "Zapiska" 326–7.

[121] Griboedov, and Zaveleiskii, "Zapiska," 329.

As noted by Yuri Tynianov in *The Death of Vazir-Mukhtar*, a fictionalized novel on the last year of Griboedov's life, the soon-to-be Russian ambassador to Persia was a clear proponent of Eurocentric colonial ideas.[122] Having noted that the Transcaucasian provinces of the Russian Empire had been acquired at great expense and continued to be a financial burden, Griboedov attributed their unprofitability largely to the ignorance of the Caucasus' inhabitants. Griboedov argued that the Caucasus was ideal for the cultivation of various cash crops and its plentiful viticulture could help Russia to supplant imported wines with their own imperial stock, but the natives of the Caucasus had never sought to exploit this natural wealth owing to their own laziness and short-sightedness.

The same essentialization of "innate" native behaviors and Caucasian shortcomings thereby makes its way from Orientalist fiction into the writings of colonial administrators. The fact that these penniless Georgian and Armenian merchants and farmers were unwilling to engage in risky speculative endeavors to maximize productivity when they had little incentive to do so Griboedov interprets as a "natural state" of the Caucasus that requires correcting. This is remarkably similar to the logic of Russian Romanticist fiction, as it too assumes that the general instability and dissoluteness of the Caucasus are both timeless features of the region's "nature", and not a consequence of Russian imperialism. This is patently ironic given that one of their main arguments is that the region's constant state of warfare prevented economic development of the Caucasus. Despite this the proposal does not seem to take that observation to its natural

[122] *The Death of Vazir-Mukhtar* is a rather unique work in multiple respects. Authored by Soviet literary critic Yuri Tynianov, the novel is a fictionalized synthesis of the writing of various Russian Romantic Orientalists including Pushkin and Griboyedov. By embodying a false sense of "indifferent" neutrality, Tynianov's work functions as a parody and critique of Russian imperialism, expansionism, and romantic nationalism. It highlights the Othering that is intrinsic to the writings of Russia's foremost Orientalist authors and serves as a rich example of how early twentieth century Russian anti-colonial discourse anticipated contemporary discourses on post-colonial studies, particularly with regards to Russian Orientalism. For a more in-depth analysis of the Tynianov's novel, see Aydinyan, *Formalists,* esp. 39–60

conclusion, namely that Russia's invasion is the primary cause of the Caucasus' economic and demographic chaos.[123] Instead, the Transcaucasus proposal utilizes Oriental stereotypes of "laziness" and "ignorance" to explicate the various problems of the Caucasus as they saw them. This further makes it unsurprising that Russian settler colonialism – meaning further destabilization and ethnic cleansing – is among their proposed "solutions" to these issues.[124]

In this regard, Griboedov and Zaveleiskii inhabit the roles of the "supremely educated Europeans" of the Russian imperial narrative. Their role is to use their superior education to more efficiently instrumentalize the Caucasus for Russian imperial gain, and they hope to achieve that with technocratic "rational" solutions. The countless Indigenous peoples of the Caucasus, their traditions, and their complex histories are just a background to this wider narrative of imperial consolidation. Whether they are lazy merchants, hapless farmers, or hostile raiding parties likened to "predatory animals" Russian Orientalism casts the natives of the Caucasus as an obstacle to this project, a hindrance that effective civilian administration, economic dominance, and settler colonialism must overcome. There is nothing within this proposal that takes stock of what the Indigenous peoples of the Caucasus may actually need.

The Transcaucasus proposal roots all its arguments within the idea that these newly captured provinces must be profitable to the imperial center. There is little reason besides profitability for why Georgian or Armenian farmers – most of whom engaged in subsistence farming – would ever want or need to grow large cotton crops or produce industrial quantities of wine for Russian metropolitan markets. This naturally is an insignificant detail that would hardly

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[123] Pushkin's writings express the same general idea, particularly in his remarks on the Caucasus' poverty. Upon visiting Tiflis in 1828, Pushkin cannot help but include lurid descriptions of the many beggars that walk its streets; Thompson. *Literature,* 58.

[124] Griboedov makes a direct reference to genocidal settler-colonialism's success in the United States, arguing via metaphor that extermination and forced assimilation of hostile tribes in the US made "predatory animals disappear and give way to gentle and domestic animals that feed people," providing an instructive model for the Transcaucasian provinces to follow; Griboedov, and Zavaleiskii, "Zapiska," 336.

have merited mentioning to the authors of the proposal. Griboedov's proposal failed to come to fruition for multiple reasons, not least of which being his brutal sudden death at the hands of a mob in Tehran in 1829, an explosion of anger caused in part by Russia's gradual encroachment into historically Persian-dominated regions of the Caucasus.[125] However, Griboedov's proposal was also questioned for its economic and ethical merits. Chartered imperial companies with total monopolies had already outlived their golden age by the 1800s, but Griboedov's plan seemed to ignore this historical reality. His proposal sought privileges for his company that the British East India Company had already been forced to surrender as part of its transition from a trading company into a "sovereign" administrator over twenty years earlier.[126] In effect, Griboedov lobbied for a company that would represent an anachronistic mélange of different periods of the East India Company's history as his company would both be an administrator for the crown but also a business monopoly.

For this and other reasons Russia's Tsarist elements were decidedly unenthusiastic about the Transcaucasus proposal. Most notably, Lt. General Mikhail Zhukovskii was both a Tsarist and a vocal critic of the plan.[127] A quartermaster general on the staff of Viceroy Fedor Paskevich, then the commander-in-chief of Russian forces in the Caucasus, Zhukovskii rejected the notion that Russia's role was to develop or civilize the Caucasus. Rather, he argued that Russia's principal aim was to create a more secure frontier for the Russian imperial core and expressed

[125] Specifically, the 1828 Treaty of Turkmenchay which had Qajar Persia surrender all remaining Transcaucasian imperial provinces to the Russian Empire, exacerbating anti-Russian sentiment in Persia. In February of 1829, three slaves of Armenian origin escaped the Shah's son-in-law's harem and took refuge in the Russian Embassy. As the newly appointed Russian ambassador to Persia, Griboedov refused to return these slaves to the Shah. Upon hearing of this, a mob of thousands surrounded the embassy, assaulted it, overwhelmed its Cossack defenders, and killed most of those inside including Griboedov. See Kelly, *Diplomacy,* 189–92.
[126] In other words, the British East India Company no longer enjoyed its trading privileges when it became the "sovereign" of India, effectively a proxy colonial administration for the British crown. The company itself was ultimately nationalized by the crown in 1874, making the British Empire's de facto rule over India a de jure reality; Aydinyan, *Formalists,* 23.
[127] Kelly, *Diplomacy,* 275.

divergent views on the utility of state monopolies and protectionism.[128] Zhukovskii expressed disdain for the idea that Russian imperial policy should be directed according to the principles of profit and economic exploitation, and believed that the "reforms" advocated by Griboedov would create a capitalist tyranny of labor exploitation.[129] He also questioned the intentions of Griboedov and Zaveleiskii and believed that their request for a commercial monopoly would have a deleterious effect on the local economy rather than a positive one. The people of the Caucasus, Zhukovskii asserted, already had everything they needed to be prosperous and did not require the guidance of Russia in this regard. He further argued that the main goal of Russia's annexation of the Caucasus was and should remain to secure Russia's borders and absorb weak states that risked falling into the hands of rival empires. Additionally, Zhukovskii already considered the South Caucasus an integrated part of the Russian Empire, and therefore did not see the need for a company with special monopoly privileges in this "pacified" region.[130]

Zhukovskii argued for the Smithian values of free trade and enterprise – Adam Smith's ideas of free trade had become increasingly popular in the early nineteenth century – by asserting that the monopoly sought by Griboedov's proposal would be harmful to the Transcaucasus by stifling competition and disincentivizing economic development.[131] Zhukovskii further argued

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[128] Aydinyan, *Formalists,* 19; Natan Ia. Eidelman, *Byt mozhet za khrebtom Kavkaza* (Moscow: Nauka, 1990), 129–49.

[129] Interestingly, Griboedov's proposal was also divisive amongst academics in the early Soviet period, with some echoing Zhukovskii's concerns of the "tyranny of the latifundio". See Nikolai K. Piksanov, *Griboedov, Issledovaniia i kharakteristiki* (Leningrad: Izdatelstvo pisatelei v Leningrade, 1934), esp. 148; Maria K. Rozhkova, *Ekonomicheskaia politia tsarkogo pravitelstva na srednem vostoke vo vtoroi chetverti XIX veka i russkaia burzhuaziia* (Moscow: Izdatelstvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1949), esp. 55. By contrast, others such as Militsa Nechkina, a historian in the Soviet Academy of Sciences argued that Griboedov's project was "progressive" since it would have replaced serf labor and other feudal relationships in the societies of the Caucasus. See Militsa V. Nechkina, *A.S. Griboedov i dekabristy* (Moscow: Izdatelstvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1951), 537–45.

[130] Aydinyan, *Formalists,* 20; Mikhail Zhukovskii, "Zamechaniia na zapisku ob ustroistve zemledelcheskoi, manufakturnoi i torgovoi kompanii," edited by I.K. Enikolopov, *Griboedov v Gruzii* (Tbilisi: Zaria Vostoka, 1954), 131.

[131] Adam Smith and Arthur H. Jenkins, *An Inquiry Into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (Port Washington: Kennikat Press, 1969), 507–8.

that whereas an imperial trading company may have been useful in the restive North Caucasus, such an operation would be harmful to Russian imperial influence in the South Caucasus as it would engender socio-economic inequalities that could prove alienating. Zhukovskii's detailed criticism of the plan was likely also an expression of the Russian military's general reluctance towards the prospect of handing over responsibilities of rule to civilian administrators. Such a move would inevitably require the Russian Caucasus Viceroyalty to surrender some political and economic control over the region. Since Zhukovskii was thoroughly committed to securing centralized imperial power throughout Transcaucasia, devolving power to a "government of merchants" as he put it would only detract from that objective.[132]

This discourse reveals the depth of Russian Orientalism's permeation into actual imperial policy, particularly with regards to the policies of the empire's periphery. Although military and civilian elements of the Russian imperial machine clearly disagreed in their ideas of what constituted good administration, both sides of this debate operated from similar intellectual positions. Despite his sincere disagreements with the proposal, Zhukovskii still advocated in his response for a position that is functionally quite similar to that of Griboedov and Zaveleiskii. For one, neither side of this discourse chose to question the legitimacy of Russia's claim to power over colonized groups. Rather, the primary difference between these two positions is that Zhukovskii viewed the Transcaucasus as either part of Russia or soon to be part of Russia. Griboedov and Zaveleiskii instead treat the Transcaucasus as a colony of Russia that requires special colonial policies. Even so, both sides frame their arguments from an Orientalist perspective, meaning that the visions they set forth implicitly reinforce the dichotomies ensconced in Orientalist literature.

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[132] Zhukovskii, "Zamechaniia," 136; Aydinyan, *Formalists,* 31.

Although it is arguable that Zhukovskii was more humanitarian in his imperialist positions given that he denounced the inequality and despotism he considered inherent to Griboedov's proposal, such a conclusion merits extensive scrutiny. A cursory overview of the history of Georgia – one of the main subjects of the proposal – reveals the deleterious effects of the Russian presence in the region. Russian expansion gradually subsumed Georgia into the Russian imperium beginning in the late eighteenth century when several of its leaders turned to Russia for protection in the face of repeated attacks from the North Caucasus and multiple encroachments of the Persian and Ottoman Empires into Georgian lands. By 1828 most of Georgia was firmly under Russian control after a series of major wars between Russia and the Persian and Ottoman Empires, as well as multiple Georgian uprisings. To say that the Russian colonization of Georgia was not peaceful is to understate matters significantly.[133]

Following the capture of Eastern Georgia in the early nineteenth century, Russia abolished the Bagrationi dynasty which had ruled Georgia since the Middle Ages and revoked the autonomy of the Georgian Orthodox church. In the wake of these seismic changes the Russian Empire undertook major reformations of Georgian society with little regard for local customs or sensibilities. As in much of the rest of the Russian Caucasus, Russification guided by the brute force of a strongly authoritarian military government came to supplant Indigenous forms of self-governance.

These developments provoked general political and economic instability and elicited widespread resentment towards Russian rule in every part of Georgian society, resentment that subsequently evolved into armed resistance. Alexander Chavchavadze, a Georgian aristocrat, poet, and father-in-law to Griboedov was arrested in 1832 for his involvement in a conspiracy to

[133] Thompson, *Literature*, 58–60.

overthrow Russia's military administration in Georgia and restore the Bagrationi dynasty. This transpired just four years after Griboedov published the Transcaucasian Company proposal. [134] Thus, it is evident that the administration of Zhukovskii's superior Paskevich had accrued a reputation for despotism amongst Georgians. Given this, interrogating the true meaning of Zhukovskii's use of the word "despotic" is crucial to elucidating his positionality. Since he did not characterize the viceroyalty as tyrannical – and indeed argued the opposite – Zhukovskii's position does in fact support a form of centralized authority that is not unlike the tyranny of latifundio that Griboedov's plan would instantiate. In effect, Zhukovskii's specific retort to the Transcaucasus plan is that a "benevolent" imperialist administration already exists, and it is the one that he works for.

Conclusion

The nineteenth century proved a definitive period for the development of Russian literature. Rising literacy rates and the emergence of countless publishing houses, journals, poems, and novels created the perfect conditions for several tendencies in literature to flourish. For the urban literate elite of Russia's metropole, this period was also crucial for the formation of Russian identity. Russian literature, and more specifically Russian Romanticist literature became a type of national literature for the Russian Empire. In their works, Russian Romanticists such as Pushkin and Bestuzhev-Marlinskii reified Russia's sense of self as a powerful European empire

[134] Chavchavadze's plan involved assassinating top members of Georgia's military administration. He also participated in 1804 Mtiuleti uprising against Russian rule. Although initially sentenced to exile for his role in the 1832 conspiracy Nicholas I pardoned Chavchavadze as the Tsar required someone of his military experience to suppress a concurrent uprising in the North Caucasus; Stephen F. Jones, "Russian Imperial Administration and the Georgian Nobility: The Georgian Conspiracy of 1832," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 65, no. 1 (January 1987): 72–6, https://www.jstor.org/stable/4209431. Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 70–2.

ruling over an Asiatic periphery. These authors fulfilled the role of modern mass media, providing the reading public with aesthetic and ideological instruction on what it meant to be "Russian" and how this identity differed and was superior to that of the empire's subaltern groups.

This literature had a direct impact on discourses of Russian imperialism within the empire's halls of power. There is a clear connection between the Romanticist Orientalist themes of writers such as Pushkin and the later more formalized ideological positionalities of Russian colonial administrators such as Zhukovskii and Griboedov. Russian Orientalist literature in its early stages was dominated by a distinct brand of Romanticist literature that presented idealized descriptions of the majesty of Russia's new territories, but also enforced disparaging racialist dichotomies between a European Russia and the "Oriental" periphery. Likewise, Russian colonial authorities similarly adopted perspectives of the territories they administrated that reflected these Romanticist Orientalist tropes.

As demonstrated by the debate between Griboedov and Zhukovskii, there was also a clear divide in Russia's nineteenth century discourses on imperialism between liberal-minded civilian elites and the Tsarist military ruling class. The liberal side articulated a benevolent vision for the Russian Empire that called for the development and "cultivation" of colonized peoples. Rather than merely using captured territories as a buffer zone to secure Russia's heartland, this plan hoped to convert the Russian imperial periphery into industrialized and productive territorial units much in line with European ideas of colonial development.

These ideas garnered support from Russia's reading public, particularly amongst Decembrists and other liberally minded Russian intelligentsia, but faced staunch resistance from Russia's militarists. These more Tsarist elements of Russia's colonial administration viewed

these ideas as ultimately detrimental to Russian imperial hegemony, and they successfully blocked any such proposed reforms. Ultimately, the more liberal Orientalist concept of rationalized colonial administration never gained significant influence in Russia until the fall of the Tsarist regime, although political disputes between these two factions of Russian Orientalism persisted until 1917. Given this context, the Griboedov-Zhukovskii debate is very instructive for understanding the contradictory duality at the core of Russian Orientalism that made it "deviant" from Western European forms of Orientalism.

Chapter Three
Old Ideologies Meet Modern Challenges

Introduction

Debates within the Russian metropole on the best ways to administrate the Russian Empire involved two divergent visions; one of a privileged liberal minority and the other of the entrenched Tsarist status quo. Although both sides of this division agreed upon the principle of Russia's "right" to an empire and the importance of its civilizing mission, their ideas for how to "civilize" Russian possessions, or indeed what "civilizing" meant, were markedly different. The debate between Griboedov and Zhukovskii exemplified this divide. The two sides disagreed on the utility of colonized peoples—in this case Georgians—to the Russian Empire. According to Zhukovskii, Georgia was to function as a buffer state for the Russian imperial core, whereas Griboedov asserted a more "Western" notion of Georgia as an economic resource to be capitalized upon by Russia's imperial core. This fundamental conflict, between European-inspired liberalism and Tsarist conservatism resurfaced repeatedly throughout Russian imperial discourse. Russia's liberal urban intelligentsia proved far more sympathetic to Griboedov's more "modern" industrialized civilian colonial administration, seeing it as a more humane alternative to the starker militarist vision of the Tsarist colonial viceroyalties and *guberniia*.

Colonized liberal elites found common ground with their Russian counterparts as both espoused similar ideas of national rejuvenation for their respective countries through a "modernization", a byword for the adoption of "European" modes of social organization. This vision included the reification of concrete ethnonationalist narratives as founding myths of the national community, secularization, industrialization, and the promotion of liberal concepts such as lettered intelligentsia, and an independent "scientific" academia. Abovian, Gabriel Sundukyan, and their Azeri contemporary Mirze Feteli Akhundov all believed cooperation with

the Russian Empire was the sole viable path towards achieving this political vision for their respective nations.[135]

Most importantly, these liberal visions centered heavily on ethnonationalist conceptualizations of identity. Europeanization would not just be better from a humanist standpoint but would give space for the articulation of a distinct ethnonationalist narrative for each of these various peoples in a larger imperialist framework.[136] Such a narrative begs an obvious question, namely how would the relationship between these competing nationalisms be negotiated? Abovian and his contemporaries believed such nationalisms could coexist in an imperialist framework, but Soviet history demonstrated that the ethnonationalist position of one colonized elite would inevitably clash with those of other colonized elites, who in turn would all clash with the ethnonationalist inclinations of a Russian-dominated imperial structure. Because the relationships between these various nationalisms were left ill-defined, there remained multiple sources of potential friction and conflict even as Soviet authorities attempted to achieve some form of internecine parity.[137]

Although these questions never fully played out before the Tsarist era ended, they found new life and relevance in the Soviet period with national delimitation. By creating Indigenized power structures and semi-autonomous nation states during the 1920s, the Bolsheviks sought to reach a "middle ground" that allowed some autonomy for Indigenously controlled power structures without compromising the power of the Soviet center. To achieve this complex reality,

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[135] Abovian and other liberal Armenian nationalists viewed Russia as Armenia's "salvation", freeing it from Persian rule and bestowing upon it the gifts of secular enlightenment. These liberal nationalist ideas of national rejuvenation were broadly shared by nationalists throughout the South Caucasus including Mirze Feteli Akhundov of Azerbaijan, and Ilia Chavchavadze of Georgia. In turn, these ideologies were deeply influenced by the Russian intelligentsia; Aydinyan, *Formalists,* 30–8; Tolz, *Russia: Inventing the Nation* (London: Edward Arnold, 2001), 95–7; Piona Akopian, "Khachatur Abovian i ego 'Rany Armenii'," in Khachatur Abovian, *Rany Armenii* (Yerevan: Sovetakan grogh, 1977), 5–8; Suny, *Georgian Nation,* 126–8.
[136] Aydinyan, *Formalists,* 13.
[137] Walter Kolarz, *Russia and Her Colonies* (Hamden: Archon Books, 1953), 8–18.

the Bolsheviks employed ideas and expertise that they inherited directly from Russian Orientalism of the late Russian Imperial era. The Western European ideas of secular, rationalized, "scientific" nation-states therefore came into practice during the Soviet era under the supervision of Bolshevik bureaucrats and functionaries.

However, for political reasons Russian Orientology and its liberal proponents required Sovietization so that the ideological underpinnings of this academic tendency were in line with Soviet visions of a new society. Additionally, Indigenous power structures in this context were ones created in the Soviet image, organized by Soviet Russian bureaucrats, and supervised by the Soviet center who kept close tabs on the administrative activities of these structures.[138]

Despite their stated intentions to include Indigenous peoples in the government of their own territories, the Soviet Union in practice proved reticent to delegate "too much" power to native non-Russian elites of the imperial periphery.[139] Additionally, the unavoidable power differentials of this relationship played a role in engendering conflict. Since Russian cultural hegemony—in the form of Russification, the Orientalization of minority identities, the promotion of Russian high art, etc.—was never fully unseated during the Soviet period, the empire of nationalities remained top-heavy in that Russian art, representations of Russian ethnonationalism, as well as Russian Orientalized representations of other nationalities remained

[138] A potent example of this being the Muslim Bureau (Musburo) in the Turkestan Regional Party Committee. Staffed by Turkestanis, the bureau came into friction with Russian Communists when it branded itself 'the highest Muslim party organization in Turkestan'. These Indigenous party structures were founded by ethnic Russian communists who exclusively occupied key positions in these new party structures, and any Indigenous power structures that emphasized a separatist identity came under intense Soviet scrutiny; S. F. Naida and V. Ia. Nepomnin, eds, *Ocherki istorii Kommunisticheskoi Partii Turkestana—III. Kommunisticheskaia partiia Turkestana v period inostrannoi voennoi interventsii i grazhdanskoi voiny* (Tashkent: Gosudarstvennoe izdatelstvo Uzbekskoi SSR, 1964), 70–71; Shoshana Keller, "The Central Asian Bureau, an essential tool in governing Soviet Turkestan," *Central Asian Survey* 22, no. 2/3, (June/September 2003): 281–3, https://doi.org/10.1080/0263493032000157771.

[139] In the words of Terry Martin, Soviet nationalities policy was "…a strategy to prevent the emergence of a potentially dangerous obstacle, non-Russian nationalism, to the accomplishment of other core Bolshevik goals…" See Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union 1923–1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 20–1.

entrenched. It is this mixture of competing and contradictory ideologies—the emergent nationalisms of Russia's colonized groups, the emergent nationalism of Russia's urban elite, and the more conservative positions of Russia's imperial center—that came to define in turn the contradictory state of contemporary Russian society's views on race and empire.[140] Debates on the purpose of empire and by extension those within Russia's imperial periphery did not cease following the rise of the Bolsheviks but rather intensified.

The Origins of the Alliance between Russian Orientalists and the Bolsheviks

Although Russian Orientalism had existed for nearly a century by the 1890s, it had largely been a Russian interpretation of Western Orientalist tendencies. Russian Romanticist writers, Russian academics, and Russian colonial administrators alike took direct ques from Orientalist trends that had originated in Western imperialist contexts and attempted to adapt these ideas to support the Russian imperial enterprise. To this end, Russia's elite since the 1800s had developed an identity as the bearers of Europeanization to the Asian reaches of the Russian Empire. The concept of the civilizing mission therefore permeated many facets of Russian ideological justifications for colonization and imperial expansion. Russian intellectuals began to articulate a distinctly Russified form of Orientalism—meaning one that explicitly diverged from some Western trends—beginning in the 1890s thanks chiefly to the work of "new" Orientalists such as Baron Viktor Rozen.

As a professor in the Faculty of Oriental Languages at St. Petersburg University and one of the founding fathers of Russian Orientology, Rozen hoped to reverse Russia's role as merely a

[140] It should also be noted that the Bolshevik party, along with state entities both within the Soviet center and the Soviet Republics were generally majority ethnic Russian in their ethnic makeup, and Slavs were generally overrepresented. See Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 103–129, 180–2; Keller, "Central Asian Bureau," 281–3.

receiver of external Orientalist ideas and instead make the Russian Empire a new authority on the subject that other empires could follow. While challenging the assumptions of Western European colonialism, Rozen also adopted the idea that Russia had a unique role to play in the development of Asia. Rather than a civilizing mission in the European colonial sense however, this mission would be one of preserving and cataloging Indigenous cultures and promoting national consciousness within these cultures.

Rozen's vision for Orientology challenged constructs that Western Orientalism mostly took for granted as natural. This critical stance was rooted in an understanding of the hegemonic relationships between power and the creation of knowledge, in this case referring to the power of the colonizer to define the colonized and constrain the latter to those definitions. This new form of Orientology was less overtly colonialist but also assimilationist, arguing that the Russian Empire was a composed of a large family of ethnicities with a common stake in forging the Russian "Empire of Nations." Furthermore, Rozen adopted some intellectual positions that are unmistakably post-colonial. His Russified Orientology questioned the "self-evident" nature of categories such as East and West and therefore blurred the fine distinctions between Europe and the East, or Russia and its Orient.[141] Additionally, Rozen's efforts to impart national consciousness also endowed the Russian Empire's colonized cultures with intrinsic value within an ethnonationalist framework, whereas earlier Orientalist discourse in Russia and Western Europe tended to denigrate these cultures of the periphery.[142]

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[141] The Rozen school of Orientology was also very much responding to the spirit of the times, namely the emergence of nationalist movements amongst colonized peoples, many of whom did initially seek accommodation within imperial structures. See Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 22, 171–3.

[142] Because they were conversant with Romantic nationalism, these ethnonationalist ideas gave value to colonized cultures from a Eurocentric perspective. See Austin Jersild, Neil Melkadze, "The Dilemmas of Enlightenment in the Eastern Borderlands: The Theater and Library in Tbilisi," *Kritika* 3, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 41–9, https://doi.org/10.1353/kri.2002.0012.

Instead, Rozen's methodology stressed the common cultural and societal influences amongst the people of the Russian Empire, deconstructing the Romantic Orientalist ideas of a "European" Russia ruling over an "Asiatic" frontier. In contradiction of Romantic Orientalists and Tsarist Russification policies, Rozen and his contemporaries emphasized that the Russian nation was the creation of all ethnicities within the Russian realm. Rozen's ideas explicitly rejected mandatory Russification as a solution for assimilating the Russian Empire's many ethnicities.[143] Rozen's disciples, including noted Russian Orientalists such as Sergei Oldenburg, and Vasilii Bartold were deeply influenced by these ideas.[144] They continued to develop these concepts even into the Soviet era, and this scholarship came to define Russian and then Soviet Orientology, thereby establishing a continuity between the two eras. Following the rise of the Bolsheviks, Russian Orientology only became more critical of Western Orientalism's reductive constructs, adopting an anti-colonialist stance that it maintained throughout the 1920s.[145]

Moreover, this scholarship also functioned as cultural instruction on how these minority groups—and more specifically the ruling elites of these subaltern strata—defined themselves as a nation in statist terms and with relation to the imperial center. In seeking to define these cultures of the periphery in precise academic terms, Rozen and those colonized subjects that collaborated with him developed the foundations of "national consciousness" amongst a plethora of ethnic groups. This concept, in effect an ethno-cultural awareness, was seen as central to Rozen and his disciples for strengthening the Russian Empire and better administrating its diverse subjects. Rozen's new Orientological direction presented the nucleus of several future tendencies in

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[143] Andreas Kappeler, "The Ambiguities of Russification" in *Orientalism and Empire in Russia,* ed. Michael David-Fox, Peter Holquist, and Alexander Martin (Bloomington: Slavica, 2006), 227–33.
[144] Vasilii V. Bartold, "Rech pered zaschitoi dissertatsii," *Sochineniia,* T. 1, ed. Iurii E. Bregel et al. (Moscow: Izdatelstvo Vostochnoi literatury, 1963): 610.
[145] Tolz, *Orient,* 23–9.

academia including the family of nationalities concept that came to define Soviet ethnology.[146] In the 1920s, Rozen's successors further developed a critical post-colonial approach for Orientology, now with the political approval of an outwardly anti-colonialist and anti-Russian chauvinist regime.[147]

Double Integration and the Creation of Soviet Narodnosti

The Bolsheviks initially advocated a policy of suppressing Russian chauvinism in favor of empowering periphery nationalisms and thereby disassembling Russian Imperial social constructs. From the 1920s onwards, the Soviet state experimented with various forms of nationalistic expression, at times limiting the ethnonationalist tendencies of either the USSR's minorities or of the Russian majority.

Throughout this period however, Russian culture and Russian conceptualizations of other national cultures enjoyed unrivaled promulgation in the Soviet sphere. This is evinced not only by the dominant presence of Russians in key positions throughout the Soviet state structure and in the semi-autonomous constituent republics, but also by the hegemony of Russian ideas. Namely, Russian Orientological conceptualizations of ethnicity, of nation states, and Russian ideas of rationalized government—that is Russified versions of the Western European colonial concept of rationalized government—enjoyed the favor of the state's most powerful functionaries. These ideas were foundational to the Soviet Union's ethno-territorial and

[146] Rozen was certainly not the first to espouse this idea of "imperial tolerance", but he was one of the first to formalize these ideas in academic scholarship. Before Rozen, academics such as Vasilii Grigorev and some conservative Tsarists such as the Russian Orthodox missionary Nikolai Ilminskii advocated tolerance of Indigenous cultures and spiritual practices in the first half of the nineteenth century. See Alexei Miller, "The Testament of the All-Russian Idea," in *The Romanov Empire and Nationalism: Essays in the Methodology of Historical Research,* trans. Sergei Dobrynin (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2008), esp. 180–7; Cooper, *Colonialism in Question,* 22–9. See also S. V. Kuleshov, D. A. Amanzholova, *Natsionalnaia politika Rosii: Istoriia i sovremennost,* ed. V. A. Mikhailov (Moscow: Russkii mir, 1997),

[147] Tolz, *Orient,* 22–3.

economic stratification and consolidation. In addition, this hegemony also manifested in the choreographed performance of "ethnic" identities permitted by the Soviet authorities, as any excessively separatist ethnonationalist identity was an implicit threat to the Russian status quo.

Soviet power thereby confined Ethnic expression to a set of permitted aesthetic and cultural markers, whereas any expression that could challenge the status quo was censored. By extension, any attempt by one nominally autonomous Soviet Republic to gain too much territory or political autonomy was curtailed by the Soviet center. Soviet power did however make allowance for nominal expression of Indigenous identities by establishing "autonomous" ethnic republics and recognizing minority languages. Soviet authorities further reified these identities through the continuation of the Orientological tradition established in the Russian Imperial Era, thereby constructing a concrete space for these forms of acceptable expression.[148]

In articulating his vision for the nationalities of the nascent Soviet state, Vladimir Lenin argued that national consciousness and its development was necessary for a society to reach an advanced stage of capitalism from which they could then proceed towards revolution and socialism. He dubbed this form of nationalism "progressive" as it was emancipatory in that it liberated oppressed groups from colonial overlords, overthrew feudalism, and created modern nation states. The established Western European nations, by contrast, espoused reactionary nationalism according to Lenin because they were already modern capitalist states and were now oppressing others as part of perpetuating nationalist fervor.[149]

In Lenin's view, reactionary nationalism was an identity founded on chauvinism that must be overthrown. To this end, less developed nationalisms such as those of the peoples of Central

[148] Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 103–129, 181.
[149] Hirsch, *Empire of Nations*, 25–40, 48–53.

Asia were to be developed and supported, whereas the more established nationalisms such as Ukrainian nationalism would require suppression and supervision to prevent reactionary ideas from taking root. Therefore, Lenin argued that those advanced groups meaning with well-developed national consciousness should provide generous aid to the "backwards" societies so that they may enjoy the fruits of progressive nationalism in the safety of a socialist union from which they had the option to secede.[150]

Lenin's position implicitly rejected the idea of a state without boundaries as his vision required that the Soviet state recognize, preserve, and develop ethnic nationalism amongst the various peoples of the nascent USSR. To achieve this meant defining what a nation was, and that required an "objective" scientific criteria. The USSR rejected religion as a marker of identity, and so language, ways of life (referred to as *byt*), cultural markers such as dress, and even physical characteristics became those identity markers instead. These positions were shared by fellow Bolsheviks such as Stalin.[151] Indeed, they were rooted in Marxist theory since stages of development in the Marxian sense referred to the various stages of development Western European nations had progressed through according to Marx. Lenin's position was merely a modification of this idea in that Lenin applied specific definitions to what counted as a nation-state—whereas Marx did not—and advocated for an accelerationist version of this process.

National consciousness and the formation of nation states would, according to Lenin, guarantee more rights and better representations to the ethnic minorities of the former Russian Empire. The better these rights and representation, the greater would the confidence of these

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[150] Hirsch, *Empire of Nations,* 51–4; Terry, *Affirmative Action,* 23; Lenin, "Sotsialisticheskaia revoliutsiia i pravo natsii na samoopredelenie," in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii: Tom 27* (Moscow: Izdatelstvo politicheskoi literatury, 1969), 256–8.

[151] Joseph V. Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question", *Prosveshcheniye*, Nos. 3–5, (March–May 1913), Accessed via Marxists Internet Archive, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1913/03.htm; See also Vladimir I. Lenin, *National Liberation, Socialism, and Imperialism* (New York: International Publishers, 1968), 38.

peoples be in a union of the proletariat with their "former" oppressor, i.e., Russia.[152] Stalin further expounded on this position, arguing that self-determination was an "essential solution of the national question" for places such as Poland, Ukraine, and the Caucasus. Therefore, regional autonomy for precisely defined ethno-territorial units was the solution to the so-called national questions.[153] Despite this, Lenin's ideas faced opposition from some of his Bolshevik contemporaries who viewed this pro-nationalist position as a deviation from the Marxist principle of internationalism.

In the early years of the Soviet state there was a lack of consensus with regards to how to organize this new country. Different state agencies fostered competing visions of the best territorial-administrative divisions the Soviet state should adopt. The two main competing models for the territorial organization came from the People's Commissariat for the Nationalities (Narkomnats) and the State Planning Committee (Gosplan). Founded in 1921, Gosplan became the main champion of economic regionalization, ergo the division of the Soviet Union into different regions based on common economic activities.[154] This model would facilitate resource extraction and industrial activities, allowing for efficient economic development in the new Soviet state.

For example, Ivan Aleksandrov, an economics professor appointed head of Gosplan's regionalization committee in 1921, championed the idea of sub-dividing the Soviet Union into various economic oblasts. In a proposal presented to Gosplan in 1920, Aleksandrov's plan

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[152] Lenin, *National Liberation*, 86; Yuri Slezkine, "The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism", *Slavic Review* 53, no. 2 (Summer 1994): 416–9; Vladimir Lenin, "Itogi discussii o samoopredelenii", *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii Tom 30,* (Moscow: Izdatelstvo politicheskoi literatury, 1916), 17–58.
[153] Bill Bowring, "Burial and Resurrection: Karl Renner's Controversial Influence on the 'National Question' in Russia," in *National-Cultural Autonomy and its Contemporary Critics,* ed. Ephraim Nimni (London: Routledge, 2005), 194–5.
[154] Ironically, Gosplan was established by the Council of People's Commissars and directed by the Narkomnats to create a unified central economic plan for Soviet Russia.

entailed the establishment of a Ural industrial oblast centered on Ekaterinburg, a logging oblast in the Arkhangelsk region, an oil and minerals oblast in the Caucasus, and a cotton plantation oblast in Turkestan.[155] This proposal was quite similar to the European colonial idea of creating territorial units that are optimized for economic extraction and exploitation, and this fact was immediately noted multiple times by those critical of Gosplan's economic rationalization.[156]

Nevertheless, this strand of thought stemmed from a similar concept of scientific rationalized government as did the ethnographic paradigm defended by those at the Academy of Sciences. Much like the academy, Gosplan also aimed to organize the USSR in the most "logical" manner, only from an economic perspective rather than an ethnic one.[157] By contrast, the Narkomnats opted for an ethnographic solution that prioritized the creation of ethnographically accurate territorial-administrative divisions. These ethno-territorial units would grant ethnic minorities state recognition and a measure of regional autonomy from the Soviet center. The Narkomnats and its proponents were therefore more predisposed to support Lenin's ideas.[158]

Russian Imperial Orientalists Meet Bolsheviks

There was significant overlap between this ideological vision and the sizable body of ethnographic Russian Orientalist scholarship that already existed. Rozen's protégés including Sergei Oldenburg, permanent secretary of the Russian Academy of Sciences from 1903 to 1929,

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[155] For a visual example of how these economic territorial boundaries could have looked, consider this map from the Gosplan Regionalization Commission's September 1921 proposal. See A. F. Belavin, *Atlas Soiuza Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh Respublik: Primenitelno k raionam ekonomicheskogo raionirovaniia Gosplana SSSR* (Moscow–Leningrad, Gosplan, 1928), 13.

[156] Hirsch, *Empire of Nations,* 70–9, 95–6; I. G. Aleksandrov, *Ekonomicheskoe raionirovanie Rossii* (Moscow: Gosplan, 1921), 11–15. For more on economic oblasts see S. V. Bernshtein-Kogan, "K voprosu o programme i metode sostavleniia poraionnykh obzorov i khoziaistvennykh planov," in *Ekonomicheskoe raionirovanie Rossii*, (Moscow: Materialy podkomissii po rajonirovaniiu pri Gosudarstvennoi obshheplanovoi komissii STO, 1921), 25–26.

[157] Hirsch, *Empire of Nations,* 94–7.

[158] Martin, *Affirmative Action,* 2–10

and his colleague and fellow Orientalist Vasilii Bartold (1869–1930) had similarly advocated for the rationalization of the Russian Empire along ethnographic lines. These and other imperial-era ethnographers proved instrumental in carrying over the work of late Russian Imperial Orientalist scholarship into the Soviet period, thereby creating the Soviet ethnographic tradition on Imperial foundations. In this manner, the ideas rooted in a more objective, rational, and scientific "Orientology" came together with the Bolshevik vision for a nation of nationalities. In function, the Bolsheviks necessarily appropriated much of these ideas from Russian Imperial sources.[159]

In the wake of the February 1917 revolution and unprecedented mass resistance and political activism amongst the Russian Empire's many colonized peoples, Oldenburg attempted to obtain support from the newly established Provisional Government for his Commission for the Study of the Tribal Composition of the Population of Russia (KIPS).[160] He argued that KIPS could provide the new government with "scientific data about Russia's ethnographic composition" that would prove instrumental in guaranteeing all non-Russian peoples fair representation in the constituent assembly. Although the Provisional Government was supportive of his "scientific" ideas, Oldenburg was unable to obtain government support owing to the economic tumult and political instability in Russia at this time. The First World War was ongoing, and massive civil disobedience racked the crumbling empire in September and October. Although the Provisional Government abolished all restrictions on the expression of non-Russian nationalities, it lacked the political will to introduce any systemic reforms to the administrative-territorial organization of the Russian Empire.[161]

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[159] Hirsch, *Empire of Nations,* 53–65.
[160] Pipes, *Formation of the Soviet Union: Communism and Nationalism, 1917–1923* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 50–3.
[161] Hirsch, *Empire of Nations,* 29, 54, 129. I take this opportunity to direct the reader towards some very instructive resources pointed out by Hirsch that make more explicit the connections between the scholarship of late Imperial Russian Orientalists and the Soviet statecraft project. For a description of the formations of each of the Soviet socialist nations see I. Maiatnikov, ed., *Formirovanie sotsialisticheskikh natsii v SSSR* (Moscow: Gospolitizdat, 1962). This scholarship built on

The Bolsheviks however voiced unreserved support for the concept of regional autonomy and released a policy report stating as much in 1917, itself a re-release of an earlier policy report.[162] Oldenburg, a supporter of the centrist liberal Kadet party, ardently opposed the Bolshevik seizure of power in October but nevertheless worked to cultivate close relationships with higher ups in the party.[163] After a meeting with Lenin in November of 1917 at the Smolny Institute, he succeeded in securing state funding for the now Soviet Academy of Sciences.[164] Soviet leaders quickly understood the value of the Orientological discipline Oldenburg represented to their own statecraft challenges. The new regime reached an understanding with the mostly liberal-leaning members of the Academy of Sciences, namely that it would support them financially and politically without scrutinizing their political leanings, at least for the time being.[165]

In return, the Academy of Sciences availed the regime of their expertise in ethnography, cartography, and other related research for facilitating their state-building enterprise. The Bolsheviks encouraged the academy to undertake additional research by sponsoring fieldwork throughout the new Soviet state so that the regime could obtain a better understanding of the ethnic composition of the populace. This alliance between former imperial experts and Soviet

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the research of Vasilii Bartold and other ethnographers. On the concept of the friendship of peoples see Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union 1923–1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001); K. F. Fazylkhodzhaev, ed., *V druzhbe—nasha sila, nashe schast'e* (Tashkent: Uzbekistan, 1974); See also L. V. Metelitsa, *Rastsvet i sblizhenie sotsialisticheskikh natsii: Posobie dlia uchitelei* (Moscow, 1978), and A. I. Golovnei and A. P. Melnikov, eds., *Sblizhenie natsionalnyh kultur v processe kommunisticheskogo stroitelstva* (Minsk: Izdatelstvo BGU, 1979).

[162] Hirsch, *Empire of Nations*, 77; Joseph V. Stalin, "Doklad po natsionalnomu voprosu na VII (aprelskoi) Vserossiiskoi konferencii RSDRP, 29 apreliia (12 maiia) 1917 g.," in Stalin, *Marksizm i natsionalno-kolonialnyi vopros*, (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatelstvo politicheskoi literatury,1917), 49-54.

[163] Oldenburg also privately hoped that the Bolshevik government would become less radical as they seized power. Hirsch, *Empire of Nations*, 58.

[164] Hirsch, *Empire of Nations*, 22; Oldenburg and Lenin had a long history. They met for the first time in 1891, and both men belonged to similar social and professional circles in Russian academia owing to their political activities. Robert Service, *Lenin, A Biography* (Cambridge: Macmillan, 2000), 83–4.

[165] Ashot P. Baziiants, "Dve vstrechi S. F. Oldenburga s V. I. Leninym i razvitie sovetskogo vostokovedeniia," *Nauka*, ed. G. K. Skriabin, and E. M. Primakov (1986): 21–28.

leaders proved instrumental to the USSR's territorial delimitation. The maps, censuses, inventories, and other ethnographic materials including the crucial 1926 All-Union Census gave the Soviets the data to realize their ideological goals via "rational" scientific government.[166]

The two sides—Bolsheviks and liberal Imperial scholars—shared a common orientation toward Western European models of governmental organization. In the words of Francine Hirsch, the author of *Empire of Nations,* a seminal work on ethnography and the Soviet State: "Both groups drew inspiration from the Enlightenment idea that modern governments could use expert knowledge to revolutionize economic production, social structures, and human consciousness."[167] The Bolsheviks and Orientalists alike hoped that by establishing a rational administrative structure that fairly represented all the ethnic groups of this new state that the former empire and its "underdeveloped expanses" could be transformed and reformed towards socialism. By instilling Russia's minority groups with a sense of national consciousness, this unlikely alliance planned to supplant traditional institutions, "modernize" these societies, and thereby "speed up" the evolution of these groups towards more advanced stages of society. The Indigenous peoples of Siberia, the nomads of Turkestan, and various ethnicities of the Caucasus would be transformed overnight into the educated citizens of newfound nation states in a family of socialist nationalisms.[168]

The alliance between Soviet bureaucrats and Russian Orientalists proved more lasting than Oldenburg's ideological compromise with the Bolsheviks. As the Bolsheviks gradually solidified their hold on power in the 1920s, they found it unnecessary to overlook the ideological incompatibility of the academics recruited to their state building project. On the contrary, the

[166] Hirsch, *Empire of Nations,* 60, 81.
[167] Hirsch, *Empire of Nations,* 62.
[168] Hirsch, *Empire of Nations,* 84.

party grew increasingly suspicious of the latent threat ideologically non-conforming academics could pose to Soviet power.[169] The Bolsheviks endeavored to "reign in" those liberal institutions by eliminating any potential ideological opposition. In other words, the party sought to restructure the Academy of Sciences and other Soviet academic institutions so as to remove any "sanctuary for counterrevolutionary work against Soviet power."[170]

To this end, pursuant to a direct order from the Politburo, the Leningrad Regional Committee established the Figatner Commission. Headed by Yuri Figatner, who had served as a Soviet leader in the Caucasus and other non-Russian regions, the commission's task was to investigate the Academy of Sciences, enforcing ideological orthodoxy, and purging the academy of anti-Soviet elements. Soviet authorities also interfered in Academy elections with the goal of installing pro-Bolshevik administrators in the Academy of Sciences and in various Russian universities.[171] By 1928 Oldenburg and his colleagues were under increasing pressure from the Figatner Commission to adopt more Marxist-Leninist frameworks within their scholarship. Although Oldenburg initially tried to comply with these demands, Soviet authorities removed him as administrative head of the Academy of Sciences and KIPS in 1929 due to a perceived lack of cooperation. Unlike some of his contemporaries however, Oldenburg was not arrested and retained his other academic positions.[172] The Bolsheviks continued to investigate scholars of

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[169] Hirsch, *Empire of Nations,* 134–7.
[170] Yurii Figatner, "Proverka apparata Akademii nauk," *VARNITSO* (February 1930): 75. Quoted in Loren R. Graham, *The Soviet Academy of Sciences and the Communist Party, 1927–1932* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 120.
[171] Loren R. Graham, *Science in Russia and the Soviet Union: A Short History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 93–5; Alexander Vucinich, *Empire of Knowledge: The Academy of Sciences of the USSR (1917–1970)* (Berkeley; University of California Press, 1984), 123–7. See also V. P. Leonov et al., eds., Akademicheskoe delo *Vyp. 9 Obvinenie. Prigovor. Reabilitaciua Chast 1* (St. Petersburg: Biblioteka Rossiiskoi akademii nauk, 2015).
[172] Graham, *Soviet Academy,* 122.

the Academy of Science, KIPS and other spheres of academia in a bid to ensure that scientific knowledge did not contradict the premises of "scientific socialist thought".[173]

Predictably, this state crackdown caused major disruptions in Soviet ethnography that prompted many Soviet academics to believe ethnography's influence on Soviet statecraft would soon end.[174] However, this was not the case. Oldenburg's contemporaries including Marr, Vladimir Bogoraz, Mikhail Khudiakov, and Sergei Rudenko survived the purges and continued to support the regime with their scholarship. Marr replaced Oldenburg as the head of KIPS in 1929. As a Russian of Georgian origin, Marr was exemplary of the rising generation of Russian/Soviet academics who, influenced by Rozen's Orientalist ideas, adapted these paradigms to describe their own societies in the same precise "scientific" and ethnonationalist terms. Marr was also deeply committed to Soviet ideological goals and argued that KIPS should focus more explicitly on research related to the Soviet statecraft project, rather than function as merely an institute for ethnographic research.[175] Marr also proved quite influential in Soviet language policies particularly during the Stalin era. Most notably, Marr's *New Theory of Language* gained the full endorsement of the Soviet state in the late 1920s and directly shaped Soviet language polices. Marr's theory proposed a novel model for language formation that was rooted in Marxist dialectical materialism and theories of class struggle.[176]

Marr was vocally critical of academics who did not conform to the party's ideological dictates and advocated for a more aggressive effort to purge the academy of Great Russian

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[173] Vucinich, *Empire of Knowledge,* 128–9; Graham, *Soviet Academy,* 121–3.
[174] Slezkine, "The Fall of Soviet Ethnography, 1928–1938," *Current Anthropology* 32, no. 4 (1991): 476–85.
[175] Vucinich, *Empire of Knowledge,* 184–6. Marr also advocated moving away from categorizing Soviet peoples by tribe or clan, and instead considering them within the framework of nations, signaling the evolution of Soviet Orientological modes of categorization. See Hirsch, *Empire of Nations,* 126–8, 140–2.
[176] Although this theory was more compatible with Marxist-Leninist ideas of society evolving through struggle and opposition, it was widely rejected by linguistic scientists but nevertheless continued to enjoy Soviet state endorsement until 1950 when it was denounced by Stalin in a 1950 article published in *Pravda*. Grenoble, *Language,* 55–7; Joseph V. Stalin, "Marxism and Problems of Linguistics," *Pravda,* June 20, 1950.

Chauvinist and anti-Soviet elements.[177] He recommended that KIPS appoint both Russian and non-Russian experts conversant in Marxist-Leninist philosophy as well as committed to the USSR's ethnographic vision. The purge of the Academy's old guard therefore marked the full Sovietization of Russian Orientalism. Ethnography in the USSR became increasingly constrained by ideological demands after this point, and members of the Soviet Academy of Sciences now had to either integrate Marxist-Leninism into their scholarship or face suspension and prosecution. The Figatner commission continued to purge academics from the Academy of Sciences it deemed insufficiently pro-Soviet. The commission also endeavored to micromanage KIPS and the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (MAE) by establishing a number of smaller commissions to investigate and restructure these organizations.[178]

These smaller commissions in turn subjected KIPS and MAE to socialist criticism, excoriating academics they deemed were sympathetic either to separatist nationalist tendencies or Russian chauvinism.[179] Nevertheless, the Academy of Sciences' ethnographic research essential to the ethno-territorial stratification of the USSR continued unabated. The Academy reorganized KIPS in February of 1930 and renamed it the Institute for the Study of the *Narodnosti* of the USSR (IPIN). Much like its predecessor, IPIN was central to facilitating collectivization, organizing multiple ethnographic expeditions, and resolving a myriad of border disputes throughout the Soviet Union.[180]

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[177] Hirsch, *Empire of Nations,* 129, 141, 161.
[178] Hirsch, *Empire of Nations,* 141. For more on Marr from a Soviet perspective, see Vera A. Mikhankova, *Nikolai Iakovlevich Marr. Ocherk ego zhizni i nauchnoi deiatelnosti,* ed. Ivan I. Meshchaninov (Leningrad: Izdatelstvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1949).
[179] Sergei Rudenko, for instance, was accused at times of fostering both of these anti-Soviet tendencies. See Hirsch, *Empire of Nations,* 140–1; Sergei N. Bykovskii, "Etnografiia na sluzhbe klassovogo vraga," *Sovetskaia etnografiia,* no 3–4 (1931): 3–13.
[180] Hirsch, *Empire of Nations,* 142.

This change marked the complete Sovietization of former imperial ethnographic institutions, but also reflected a decade of evolution in the ethnic landscape of the Soviet Union. Proponents of KIPS' reorganization such as Marr found it unnecessary, for instance, to include the word "tribe" in IPIN's name as this identifier was an increasingly marginal and irrelevant one to Soviet ethnographers. Soviet administrators had created multiple new nations and nationalities, effacing, and amalgamating old tribal identities into a national coagulate. For Marr and his Marxist-Leninist allies in the Academy, the mission of IPIN was no longer to initiate, but to further the ethnohistorical development of the *narodnosti* of the USSR and study this process. Comprised of former KIPS ethnographers as well as younger scholars with training in both Marxist-Leninist theory and ethnography, the new institute would trace how collectivization, industrialization, and other programs to revolutionize the Soviet economy and society were furthering the ethnohistorical development of the population. By this point, Lenin's philosophy of accelerated state-sponsored nationalism was firmly entrenched in Soviet policy.[181]

Delimitation's Challenges in Central Asia

Soviet Orientalist nation-building was not limited to one region but rather affected a diverse array of different nationalities from Belarus to Yakutia. Such was the case throughout Central Asia from 1922 to 1934 as the Central Asian Bureau (CAB) of the Central Committee—Moscow's plenipotentiary in the region—worked to create modern nation states with concrete boundaries and ethnic identities while negotiating the complex realities on the ground.[182] Central Asia's new union-level republics are a perfect case study for how this state building process

[181] Hirsch, *Empire of Nations,* 164.

[182] Founded in 1922, the CAB replaced the Turkestan Bureau which key Soviet functionaries including Stalin and Kuibyshev had come to see as ineffective. The CAB was envisioned as a more powerful agency with greater authority tasked with the specific mission of coordinating economic and governmental matters throughout Central Asia. See Keller, "The Central Asian Bureau," 281–4. For a general overview of national delimitation, see Smith, *The Bolsheviks,* 29–107.

functioned. and aptly demonstrate the Soviet center's ability to hegemonize definitions of ethnicity, narodnost, and territoriality. Moreover, the evolution of political discourse amongst the subject groups of Central Asia also sheds light on the Soviet center's ability to recast how said subject groups defined themselves. In a relatively short time span, the Bolsheviks created concrete ethno-territorial units even where national consciousness was in its infancy or largely non-existent. Soviet policy therefore reshaped this large and ethnically diverse region into a collection of modern nation-states.

Additionally, Soviet ethnographers assigned each of these states concrete ethno-nationalist identities that amalgamated distinct tribes via common *byt*, religion, appearance, and other markers. To facilitate these major changes, the Bolsheviks readily collaborated with ethnonationalists throughout the former Russian Empire who were willing to give their loyalty to the Bolsheviks, even if said nationalists were not staunch communists. In Central Asia, Russian communists sent to the region viewed empowering secular activists as essential for unseating local religious elites. With the aid of the Orientalist ethnographers at the Academy, Soviet authorities also employed cultural technologies of rule such as the censuses and expeditions to better understand the ethnic composition of the region. Furthermore, this strategy enabled Indigenous elites to effectuate these nation-building policies by providing the formalized legalistic framework for national categories tied to land, local resources, autonomous Indigenous political structures, and indigenized Soviet policy (*korenizatsiia)*.[183]

These policies also included the creation of *korenizatsiia* literacy programs, ergo programs based on the Indigenous languages of the respective nationality, which would allow for the creation of a reading public, and therefore another medium through which to engender national

[183] Hirsch, *Empire of Nations*, 145–6; Martin, *Affirmative Action*, 10–3. Smith, *The Bolsheviks*, 125–136.

consciousness. *Korenizatsiia* was abandoned as Soviet policy in the late 1920s and instead Soviet authorities began fashioning Russian culture and language as stand-ins for a "Soviet" culture, thereby further entrenching the Russocentric foundations of modern Soviet identity.[184]

Rather than engage in direct Russification as during the Tsarist era, the USSR employed a practice described by Hirsch as "Double Assimilation," meaning that subject peoples of the USSR were assimilated into the Soviet system but encouraged to develop a choreographed form of ethnonationalist expression that would render them into an "advanced nationality" ready for socialism. By creating vocabularies and institutional structures designed to promote this strategy, Soviet authorities ensured that nationalist discourse amongst the nationalities of the USSR was confined to those paradigms that were useful to Soviet power. Various regional and national arms of the Soviet state positioned themselves as the main mediators for the negotiation of national identity. Such was the permeation of these new structures and vocabularies that even those ethnic activists who disagreed with Soviet policy nevertheless adopted the language of the Soviet state and addressed Soviet institutions in their protests.[185]

The process of dividing land in this manner in an ethnically diverse region where different communities often lived interspersed led to many territorial conflicts.[186] Countless villages and

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[184] In the pursuit of unseating elements of Russian cultural hegemony, the Peoples Commissariat for Education promoted literacy programs throughout the Soviet Union; Teaching Russian was initially criminalized as this was seen as a manifestation of Great Russian Chauvinism. This policy was reversed in the late 1920s as the state began to adopt Russian as an imperial *lingua franca*. Grenoble, *Language*, 44–6.

[185] Hirsch, *Empire of Nations*, 147, 186–7, 247. By monopolizing all facets of everyday life and subsuming them into its own conceptual categories and institutions, the Soviet regime created a self-reinforcing status quo. Even as Soviet citizens protested the state's decisions, their dissent was confined to the language and concepts of the state and addressed directly to entities of the state. This fact is an indicator of the success of Soviet double assimilation policies but also a sign that Soviet institutions became more entrenched even as they deviated from the stated goals of regional autonomy policies. For an example of this phenomenon in the context of Soviet family courts, see Douglas Northrop, "Subaltern Dialogues: Subversion and Resistance in Soviet Uzbek Family Law," *Slavic Review* 60, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 115–139, https://doi.org/10.2307/2697646.

[186] Protests against national delimitation were not always peaceful nor confined to formal channels. On occasion, resistance to these policies became violent as in the 1930 February Uprising in the Fergana Valley. See Martin, *Affirmative Action*, 294–5; Baymirza Hayit, *"Basmatschi": Nationaler Kampf Turkestans In Den Jahren 1917 Bis 1934* (Koln: Dreisam Verlag, 1992).

enclaves found themselves on the "wrong" side of this divide, separated from their ethno-territorial unit and assigned instead to a state where another ethnicity predominated. The intense internecine competition this spurred, namely for monopoly over lands, natural resources, and state allotments resulted in widespread discrimination and violence against minority ethnicities in the new Soviet Republics of the USSR. Aside from the practical issues associated with creating ethnically homogenous blocs in a region that was anything but, economic and geopolitical considerations often played a role in why some territories became ethnic enclaves in a "foreign" state whereas others did not.

The partition of the Fergana Valley in 1924 for instance was the source of enormous friction between the Soviet Republics of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, and between these states and the Soviet center. Due to its status as a cotton-growing region rich in natural resources and fertile soil deposits, the Fergana Valley was and remains highly valuable land. Its population during the 1920s was however far from ethnically homogenous, and the Central Asian Bureau had to contend with competing claims from the Uzbek and Kyrgyz governments for the major settlements of the area. Unlike the border between the Turkmen and Uzbek SSRs, the Fergana Valley question proved deeply problematic for the CAB to solve.[187] In making their respective cases to the Bureau, both the Uzbek and Kyrgyz governments presented demands far beyond what was realistic. In so doing, both sides used economic, geographical, and ethnographic data to support their claims. The Uzbek side focused on an ethnographic argument, asserting that the peoples of the valley were Uzbek in *byt* and culture.

Recognizing the low percentage of ethnic Kyrgyz in the valley, the Kyrgyz side focused more on the administrative and economic requirements of the nascent Kyrgyz state in their

[187] Hirsch, *Empire of Nations,* 189.

arguments. For instance, they argued that the town of Andijan should go to Kyrgyzstan so that it could serve as the urban administrative center of the Kyrgyz territories in the Fergana valley. The Kyrgyz side also employed a socioeconomic argument, positing that nomads and rural populations were more Kyrgyz as the Uzbeks were not nomads and more urbanized. According to this logic, small towns such as Andijan along with other rural areas were more Kyrgyz than Uzbek, even if ethnically the population was not Kyrgyz.[188]

The Bureau ultimately decided to allot the cities of Jalal-Abad and Osh to the Kyrgyz, whilst the remainder of the Fergana Valley's major municipalities—including Andijan—went to Uzbekistan.[189] Soon afterwards however, communities on both sides of this new divide began protesting this arrangement, and multiple agencies of the Soviet state were completely inundated with a plethora of petitions and complaints. Most notably, Soviet authorities received sixteen petitions from the self-identified Uzbek residents of Aim *volost* which fell on the Kyrgyz side of the new border.[190] The petitioners asserted that their majority Uzbek villages situated on the left bank of the Kara-Daria River were ethnically distinct from those on the right bank which were Kyrgyz. These Uzbeks therefore requested that their *volost* be united with the Uzbek SSR. To make their case these Uzbek villagers argued that they were connected to Uzbekistan by "language, culture, way of life (*byt*), and economic orientation". Such was this connection, the petitioners asserted, that even the minority of Kyrgyz who resided on the left bank were "culturally Uzbek" since they shared a common *byt* with their Uzbek neighbors.[191]

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[188] Arne Haugen, *The Establishment of National Republics in Soviet Central Asia* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 185–190.
[189] Haugen, *The Establishment*, 191.
[190] This refers to an administrative subdivision (essentially a parish) within either an *uezd* or *raion*, which in turn are equivalent to counties. Isabella Damiani, "Kyrgyzstan—Tajikistan—Uzbekistan: Ferghana Valley, in *Border Disputes—A Global Encyclopedia*, ed. Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly (2015): 322–334.
[191] The Uzbek SSR also lobbied extensively for these territories and ultimately won some concessions such as the town of Iskander. See Eduard M. Murzaev, *Sredniaia Aziia: Fiziko-geografischeskii ocherk* (Moscow: Gos. Izdatelstvo geograficheskoi literatury, 1957); Hirsch, *Empire of Nations,* 168–70.

The petitioners also emphasized the economic differences between their villages and the rest of the Kyrgyz ASSR. Whereas the petitioners' *volost* was economically focused on agriculture, the Kyrgyz ASSR prioritized cattle farming instead. These Uzbeks complained that they received no assistance from the Kyrgyz government in the form of equipment and agronomical expertise, assistance that they would have received in the Uzbek SSR. Lastly, the petitioners from Aim *volost* also argued that national delimitation had cut them off from the major town of Andijan, which the CAB gave to Uzbekistan. Andijan had been a major trading hub for Aim's economy, and so the post-1924 territorial divisions caused undue economic hardship for the volost's economy.[192]

The petitioners of Aim proved well organized, documenting all of their interactions with the state, and directing their complaints to the appropriate government authorities. From 1924 onwards, Uzbek representatives from Aim sent multiple letters to the Central Asian Bureau in Tashkent, the Central Asian Regionalization commission, and even to then-Commissar of Nationality Affairs Joseph Stalin. Moreover, the arguments these petitioners formulated closely modeled the language employed by the state in the national delimitation process.[193] The Uzbek petitioners appealed to their common cultural connection with the Uzbek nation, to their common *byt,* and to economic considerations, all of which would have resonated with Soviet ethnographers, economic planners, and territorial administrators.

The villagers of Aim grounded their assertions of their Uzbek identity in Soviet metrics and employed the language of the Soviet state with regards to nations and nationalities. Aim's effort to join Uzbekistan was nearly successful, but it met with severe resistance from the Kyrgyz

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[192] Hirsch, *Empire of Nations*, 169.
[193] This was a common rhetorical tactic employed by Soviet Republics in their appeals to Moscow. See Smith, *The Bolsheviks*, 57–62, 200–5.

ASSR which protested at the prospect of ceding territory to a neighbor that already controlled most of the Fergana Valley. In truth, Aim was just one of many countless communities and enclaves that inundated Soviet officials with a multitude of claims to territory, many of which represented competing claims to the same territory and proved intractable. Even as the USSR's various regional bureaus attempted to avert ethno-territorial conflicts, their myopic focus on creating ethnically homogenous territorial units in historically diverse regions made future ethnic discord unavoidable.[194]

Ukraine

Soviet *narodnost* was a mediated form of ethnonationalist identity, one that came with significant restrictions. While it is true that the Bolsheviks encouraged the development of national consciousness, in practice Soviet authorities enforced severe limits for nationalist expression amongst the USSR's nationalities. The party sought to curtail what it considered as reactionary nationalism, latent tension between nationalists seeking greater autonomy and the Soviet center were inevitable. This was particularly true in the case of states with well-established national identities. In Soviet Armenia, for instance, ethnonationalist expression was confined to limits determined by the Soviet center and reinforced by the Armenian Communist Party. Armenian nationalists could recognize, study, and even celebrate the country's 4,000-year history, for example, but could not openly extoll a prior "golden age" before Soviet rule, since

[194] Another potent example of this issues is the partition of Tashkent uezd which in 1925 was divided between the Uzbek SSR, Kyrgyz ASSR, and Kazakh ASSR. Following this, various ethnic minorities on all sides of the divide petitioned the government for a redrawing of the borders, citing discrimination by the majority ethnicity and identification with the culture of a neighboring state. Haugen, *Establishment*, 194–206; Hirsch, *Empire of Nations*, 165–172.

the Soviet era was officially the apex of Armenia's national story.[195] Soviet authorities also suppressed extra-territorial nationalist narratives such as the Artsakh movement in the late 1980s.[196] Since Ukrainian nationalism was also considered to be an "advanced" form of ethnonationalism, the party likewise perceived the Ukrainian SSR as requiring similar restrictions on its ethnonationalist expression.

Furthermore, the Soviet center actively sought to avoid any situation where one such "advanced" Soviet Republic could gain significantly more political and economic power over other Soviet Republics. This was the Soviet state made decisions on the internal borders of the USSR with consideration of the possible economic, social, or political effects this could have on other states. As many Bolsheviks recognized, such inequalities could exacerbate political and economic instability, and therefore weaken Soviet imperialist power. Given these realities, the stated ideals of party leaders such as Lenin never found full expression in Soviet policy. The Bolshevik party in practice struggled or simply failed to achieve ethnic "parity" in a nation of nationalisms. Wherever the Soviet state put "scientific" ethno-territorial delimitations into practice, territorial disputes often emerged and quickly became persistent flashpoints for interethnic discord. Often, the Soviet center's (in)action during these disputes betrayed imperialist and chauvinist motives.

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[195] For instance, scientific or literary works on the era of *Metz Hayk,* or "Greater Armenia" were heavily censored by Soviet authorities. The glorification of a prior golden age in Armenian national history was condemned by Soviet authorities as bourgeois nationalism that could incite ethnic divisions with other nationalities in the Soviet Caucasus. Additionally, irredentist discourse regarding formerly Armenian lands was also the subject of strict censorship until the late twentieth century. See Kolarz, *Russia,* 222–3.

[196] Extra-territorial here meaning narratives that glorified an Armenian nation that existed beyond the borders of the Armenian SSR, which remain the *de jure* borders of the Republic of Armenia. The USSR also banned *Mer Hayrenik* (Our Fatherland), the anthem of the First Republic of Armenia, which subsequently became an anti-Soviet protest song. For more information on the Artsakh Movement, its origins, and Soviet attempts to suppress Armenian nationalism see Pierre Verluise, *Armenia in Crisis: The 1988 Earthquake* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995), esp. 90–9; Smith, *The Bolsheviks,* 60–2.

The allocation of ethnoterritorial units for the exclusive use of one ethnicity—and the monopoly over the land and all its natural resources this arrangement implied—introduced a material aspect to the competition between divergent ethnonationalisms. Furthermore, these negative effects were not limited to "backwards" nations with a limited conceptualization of national consciousness. Rather, these problems also afflicted "advanced" countries with well-developed nationalisms as well. The repeated clashes between the Ukrainian SSR, the Russian SFSR, and the party elite in Moscow over the national status of certain territories in present-day Eastern Ukraine – including the Donbass – are an especially illustrative example. This territorial dispute laid bare the contradiction between the stated ideals of Soviet nationalities policies and the political priorities that trumped self-determination and regional autonomy in said policies.

In 1924—the same year that the Central Asian Bureau attempted to address the Fergana Valley question—the status of multiple provinces in Eastern Ukraine and Western Russia also became a source of contention. Most of the disputed territories made up the former Don oblast, a large Russian Imperial administrative division that broadly encompassed today's Rostov-on-Don oblast in Southern Russia and parts of Eastern Ukraine.[197] In the face of calls for greater regional autonomy, the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) reorganized the administrative divisions of Southern Russia so that they were more decentralized. The result was the North Caucasus *krai*, a territorial division that enclosed multiple autonomous oblasts (AO) including the Chechen AO, the Circassian AO, and the North Ossetian AO.[198] This new arrangement allowed these autonomous oblasts some control over their own budgets, healthcare, education, and judiciary systems. This compromise completely overturned the original economic

[197] Hirsch, *Empire of Nations*, 176; *Vsesoiuznaia perepis naseleniia 1926 goda* (Moscow: Izdanie TsSU Soiuza SSR, 1928), vol. 9: 2–13; vol. 17: 2–3.
[198] Hirsch, *Empire of Nations*, 98.

territorial divisions for this region and was emblematic of the frequent clash between Gosplan's idealized visions and the ethno-territorial realities on the ground.

Almost immediately, the administrators of the North Caucasus *krai* set about expanding it by laying claim to valuable Ukrainian territories of the former Don oblast, arguing that these territories were economically North-Caucasus oriented.[199] This in turn revived competing claims from the Ukraine SSR. Although the Ukrainians eventually agreed to cede one of the districts in question—Taganrog okrug—to the RSFSR in response to pressure from Moscow, they also made further counterclaims for the sake of parity. The Ukrainian SSR claimed that portions of Briansk, Kursk, and Voronezh *guberniia* should be transferred to Ukraine since these were ethnically Ukrainian regions.[200] In response, the Soviet politburo called on the Central Executive Committee's (TsIK) Commission for the Regionalization of the USSR to the resolve this issue in late 1924.[201]

Led by Avel Enukidze, the TsIK regionalization commission also played a key role in the Fergana Valley dispute and the 1924 delimitation of Belarus. As in other territorial disputes the TsIK regionalization commission sought the combined input of ethnographers, economists, statisticians, representatives of the Ukrainian SSR and RSFSR, as well as local representatives from the *guberniia* in question. However, the TsIK proved unsympathetic towards the Ukrainian SSR's ethnographic argument. According to Enukidze, the presence of a majority-ethnic Ukrainian population in these *guberniia* was not sufficient to justify the transfer of these regions to the Ukrainian SSR. Interestingly, this argument was an apparent contradiction in terms. For

[199] Ukrainian here meaning that they were largely populated by Ukrainian-speaking peoples.
[200] Again, here meaning that these people spoke Ukrainian and exhibited a Ukrainian *byt,* or way of life. In other words, the representatives of the Ukrainian SSR made use of the vocabulary of Soviet nationalities policy to justify their claims.
[201] Hereafter called the TsIK regionalization commission. Hirsch, *Empire of Nations,* 177.

the TsIK regionalization commission, the same logic had been sufficient to ascribe entire regions as ethnically constituent parts of the Belarussian nation, even if the populace of those regions did not speak Belarussian nor self-identify as such. In defending his position on the Eastern Ukraine question, Enukidze also appealed to the notion of "advanced" and "backwards" nations, arguing that since Ukraine was a strong, well-established republic it was not necessary to accord it the same parity considerations as nations in Central Asia.

On the contrary, Enukidze argued the results of dividing these territories "on national principle alone" would have deleterious economic consequences for both the RSFSR and the Ukrainian SSR.[202] Despite this, Enukidze conceded that it was in the best interest of the economic stability of the RSFSR and Ukrainian SSR that the Soviets transfer some of the claimed territories to Ukraine. He justified this stance by arguing it would avert a protracted conflict between the republics that could cause significant economic disruption on both sides of the border. Enukidze's recommendations were honored by the TsIK and the party, and approximately half of the claimed territories in the affected oblasts were transferred to Ukraine.[203] However, this was far from the end of territorial disputes in this region, and Moscow repeatedly changed the border between Eastern Ukraine and Western Russia over the coming decades. Indeed, as with multiple regions throughout the former Soviet space, the dispute over

[202] Enukidze further argued that Russians and Ukrainians were quite similar owing to their cultural and linguistic commonalities, and that therefore it did not matter in principle if some Ukrainian-speaking peoples were assigned to the RSFSR since the peoples are "the same". This line of argument was likely meant to anger Ukrainian nationalists, and Enukidze could have easily made a similar chauvinist argument in the case of Belarus. The very same metric (namely that a population belongs to a certain nation by virtue of speaking a certain language, Belarussian in that case) sufficed to include several settlements and cities in the new Belarussian nation, even if the populations of those municipalities had not expressed any sort of national consciousness. But since Enukidze's Regionalization Commission played a vital role in the construction of the Belarussian state, he predictably made no such arguments. Hirsch, *Empire of Nations,* 152–65.

[203] Martin Terry, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union 1923–1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 278–9.

the status of the border between Eastern Ukraine and Russia outlasted the USSR.[204] As with territorial disputes in Central Asia and the Caucasus, the discourse between the Ukrainian SSR, the RSFSR, and the Soviet center on the limits of ethno-territoriality is crucial for understanding the long-term ramifications of Soviet Orientalism. The Soviet Orientalist process of reifying national identity in the Soviet Republics was an ongoing process of deliberation and negotiation between the Soviet center and the Soviet Republics, and also a source of constant tension between individual republics. Processes such as *korenizatsiia* and Double Integration laid the foundations for these identities, but the specifics of how competing ethnonationalisms would coexist in this "union of socialist nations" remained far from clear cut. The effort to concretize these boundaries and identities, that is, the project of Soviet statecraft, continued into the final years of the USSR, and the territorial disputes and ambiguities it engendered left profound ethnonationalist divisions that have persisted into present day.

Conclusion

In a bid to realize the goals of a new state organized along rational and scientific lines, the Bolsheviks opted to work with the liberal "new" Orientologists from Tsarist Russian academia. There were several reasons that the two sides opted for this pragmatic partnership. For academics such as Oldenburg and Marr, the new regime gave them the opportunity to bring their ideas for ethnographically reforming Russia into practice with full state support. For the Bolshevik party, these academics offered the technocratic knowledge and expertise required to rationalize the new Soviet state. To this end, the two sides collaborated extensively throughout the two ensuing decades to catalogue the peoples of the Soviet Union and create new modern nation states along "rational" ethnic lines. Because there were no straightforward ways of achieving this,

[204] See Tadeusz Andrzej Olszanski, *Ukraine and Russia: Mutual Relations and the Conditions That Determine Them* (Center for Eastern Studies, Warsaw, 2001), esp. 42–3.

particularly in those parts of the USSR where various nations lived interspersed and with little to no sense of national consciousness, Soviet ethnographers and economists devised intricate matrices in a bid to create ethno-territorial units that fairly divided lands based on their ethnic composition and economic productivity. This process only intensified as the party gradually Sovietized Russian Orientology through purges and various punitive investigations.

However, Soviet authorities severely restricted the utopian ideals of national delimitation in practice owing to the competing agendas of various parts of the Soviet state, and Moscow's overarching goal to maintain its hegemony throughout the USSR. Because the Narkomnats, Gosplan, and the state's other agencies involved in the national delimitation process operated from competing philosophies of rationalized government, national delimitation encountered several problems when put into practice. New borders left villages and entire ethnic groups "on the wrong side", and new Soviet Republics became entrenched in protracted territorial disputes with their neighbors as in the Fergana valley dispute. This in turn produced significant long-term inter-ethnic tensions that additional Soviet parity commissions attempted to resolve with limited success. Furthermore, the prospect of economically valuable farmlands and natural resources falling under the exclusive national remit of one Soviet Republic exacerbated existing ethnic tensions further by adding a major material incentive for Soviet Republics to compete with each other for valuable territories.

Additionally, because Moscow was reticent to relinquish too much power in the Soviet Republics, the party often curtailed and restricted requests for border changes and forced Soviet Republics to make territorial concessions for the sake of maintaining regional stability. Although Lenin's vision of a nation of nationalities gave Soviet Republics the option to secede from the USSR in theory, secession was unacceptable to the Soviet center in practice and was never on

the table in any territorial dispute. Instead, Soviet authorities imposed significant limitations on the development of national consciousness both in “advanced” and “backwards” Soviet Republics, especially those judged to display “separatist” tendencies. Because of this, the Soviet state sometimes ignored its own precedents in certain ethno-territorial disputes when these precedents led to politically undesirable results. Advocates of the ethnographic paradigm of Soviet development vocally asserted the notion that people of a common culture, ethnicity, and *byt* should be united in mostly homogenous nation states, regardless of whether they spoke the same language or had national consciousness. However, in the case of Ukraine this logic was disregarded and denounced in discussions on national delimitation.

Conclusion:
A Post-Soviet Epilogue

Between 1890 and 1930, Russian Orientalism underwent multiple dramatic changes in a relatively brief period. Through Russian Romanticist texts starring ultra-capable Russian protagonists in exotic frontier lands populated by various racialized natives, Russian Orientalism helped to define Russianness by distinguishing it from the other. Russian Orientalist literature portrayed the Orient—meaning the periphery of Russia's empire—as a place that was socially and economically backwards and thus required Russia's guidance in order to become more civilized. These definitions helped to define Russianness and also informed the Russian metropole's discourses on colonial administration. Russian Romanticist authors employed Orientalism to portray the expansion of the imperium as necessary and desirable, imbuing Russia's expansion with the ethos of a civilizing mission. However, differing opinions amongst Russia's military and civilian leaders with regards to which Orientalist paradigms were best for the purposes of Imperial Russia continued to define this often contradictory and polarizing debate.

It would not be until the arrival of the more scientific Orientology of Viktor Rozen in the 1890s that a distinctly Russified Orientalism solidified and gained influence, first in the Russian Academy of Sciences and then in Russian/Soviet government policy. Fully embracing a stance that was critical of the presuppositions of Western Orientalists, the "new" Orientology hoped to study, preserve, and reify the ethnic minority identities of the Russian Empire. Rather than reinforce hierarchies between Russians and a colonized other, this new Orientalism instead adopted an inclusive stance, proclaiming all ethnic groups within the empire to be part of one imperial family, and thereby entitled to civil rights and political representation. Although this

variant of Russian Orientalism proved a deviation from its Western counterpart, it nevertheless lent itself to Western European ideas of statecraft, particularly those related to rationalized government. Rozen's vision effectively advocated for reformed government policy on minorities policy made rational by "scientific" Orientological research.

Russian Orientalism then experienced another major change in the 1920s as Sovietization transformed this discipline into an arm of Soviet statecraft. The Bolsheviks identified closely with the concept that scientific policies based on precise statistical data could rationalize government, and therefore found much common ground in their approach with academics within the former Russian Academy of Sciences. After receiving full state support from the party, the now-Soviet Academy of Sciences, and its associated organizations such as KIPS (later IPIN) went on to play a fundamental role in the formation of the new Soviet state's nationality policies, in particular on national languages, national delimitation, literacy programs, and economic regions. Much of this new state was built on the foundations of Imperial Russian Orientalist scholarship, only now the evangelizing spirit of a "civilizing mission" had been replaced with a "Sovietizing mission," i.e., a dialectical Marxist adaptation of Rozen's assimilationist empire of nations concept.

Despite the cataclysmic socio-political shifts of the ensuing decades and the complete collapse of the Soviet system in 1991, the Soviet-era nation states in the form of union republics along with their respective Soviet national elites remain in place. However, unresolved ethnonationalist conflicts exacerbated by Soviet policy boiled over into multiple violent inter-ethnic conflicts that continue to rage throughout the post-Soviet space to the present day. In addition to the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine—itself a manifestation of Russian imperialism and ultra-nationalism—Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan have had multiple

violent clashes over the status of the Fergana Valley, Armenia and Azerbaijan have been at war for decades over the status of Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh), and Georgia's conflict with Russia-backed Abkhazia and South Ossetia is likewise ongoing. All of these conflicts are deeply rooted in the long-term consequences of the ethno-territorial delimitation of these territories by Russian Orientalists in cooperation with economists, administrators, and ethnographers in the 1920s and 1930s. Without these precisely demarcated cultural, territorial, and ethnographic borders, without the Russian Orientalist concepts of ethno-linguistic nationalities, of *byt,* or the Soviet idea of choreographed ethnonationalisms, none of these conflicts in their present form would be possible.

By constructing these modern nation states in a Soviet image—meaning an image that was deeply rooted in Russian conceptualizations of nationalism, culture, militarism, and the nation—the Soviets left a conflicted legacy that has imprinted itself throughout the post-1991 landscape. Furthermore, because the Soviets applied these ideas to regions that had been ethnically heterogenous for virtually all of their history, the construction of homogenous ethnic nations inevitably incited major conflicts that almost immediately proved intractable. Furthermore, because the national identities of the USSR's union republics were constrained identities, they were never allowed to fully develop during the Soviet period.

The latent tensions between the political priorities of the Soviet center and those of the Soviet Republics, ethnic tensions between republics, and the elimination of other outlets of political expression combined to create a 'vacuum of identities' within the USSR. The empire of nations was a supra-statal structure composed of a tapestry of various choreographed forms of ethnonationalism, and their relations to the center and towards each other were in a constant state of ambiguity. In this socio-political environment, there is a persistent ideological urge to fill

these holes in the nationalist identity, and in the Soviet state, the only viable route for achieving this was an increasingly radical—read separatist—form of nationalism that attempted to continue the process of Soviet Orientology by further reifying the ethnonationalist identity, history, and traditions of each Soviet Republic. To achieve this, the now "free" nationalisms of these republics tried to fill this vacuum with increasingly radical interpretations of the nation rooted in ethnonationalism, militarism, and other extremely reactionary tendencies. Indeed, this process was already underway at least a decade before the USSR's final collapse. In this manner, these nations attempt to use ethnonationalism to fill the gaps left behind by the slow collapse of Russia's Empire.[205] The very academic and political concepts that the metropole used to divide and rule the Soviet Republics was now adopted by those republics for their reimagination as separate "free" nation states.

It is no surprise then, that by the final years of the USSR, ethnic tensions had come to a boiling point in multiple Soviet Republics as their respective leaders employed the political instruments of the empire of nations so as to enforce policies designed to create homogenous ethnostates. There are multiple examples of nationalists throughout the USSR enacting such policies, including the Azeri SSR's ethnic cleansing policies towards Nagorno Karabakh in the 1980s, rising tensions between Georgian and Abkhazian nationalists during the same period, rising separatist sentiments in Chechnya, and ethnic discrimination punctuated by horrific

[205] I should note here that this paragraph is not referring to Ukraine, as there was no military ethno-territorial conflict between Russia and Ukraine before 2014. The fact that nearly all Soviet ethnic conflicts intensified at virtually the same time in the late 1980s and early 1990s has much to do with the policies of the respective Soviet Republics involved. In Georgia for instance, the Abkhazia crisis was greatly exacerbated by Georgian attempts to suppress Abkhazian ethnic identity and reduce Abkhazian autonomy in Abkhazia's ASSR government (both policies that were implicitly and at time explicitly supported by Moscow, which decades earlier downgraded Abkhazia from a fully independent republic to an autonomous republic within the Georgian SSR). See Stanislav Lakoba, "Abkhazia is Abkhazia," *Central Asian Survey* 14, no. 1 (1995): 99–100, https://doi.org/10.1080%2F02634939508400893.

massacres in Central Asia during 1989 and 1990.[206] After the fall of the USSR, nationalist leaders in these post-Soviet Republics – nearly all of whom were former Soviet functionaries – continued to develop more radical articulations of their respective nationalisms, a process that gained new urgency in the face of post-Soviet unrest. All throughout, this process has been fraught with many of the same problems inherent to post-colonial realities in Asia and Africa as noted by Said. By emphasizing exclusionary ideals of ethnically and morally pure nations, post-Soviet states continue to uphold preconceptions and orthodoxies that perpetuate colonial inequalities and injustices.[207]

In the post-1991 Russian Federation, this attempt to "fill in the blanks" of national identity has taken multiple forms and has involved the partial revival of old Soviet constructs. In its official discourse Russia today strives to embody the same "friendship of peoples" concept, albeit now within the borders of a significantly smaller trans-national empire and with Russia's many minority nationalities as its cast. The state's reassertion of its monopoly over virtually all Russian mass media in the Putin era has once more given it the tools to dominate social discourses with narratives that broadly serve to reinforce this idea and concretize the Russian nation as a concept.

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[206] Likewise, the pogroms against Armenians in Baku, Sumgait, Kirovabad, and Maraga in Soviet Azerbaijan and ethnic cleansing of Azeris and Kurds throughout Soviet Armenia worsened the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and these acts were either permitted or directly endorsed by these Soviet Republics. Indeed, the Caucasus Bureau's decision to give the Nagorno Karabakh AO to the Azerbaijan SSR in the 1920s guaranteed future conflict. See Svante E. Cornell, "The Nagorno Karabakh Conflict" Conflict Report. no. 46 (Uppsala: Department of East European Studies, Uppsala University, 1999), https://is.muni.cz/el/fss/jaro2019/POL587/um/Cornell_The_Nagorno-Karabakh_Conflict.pdf.

[207] Said, *Culture,* 210-8

Contemporary Russian Discourse

As one of the most ethno-culturally diverse countries on earth, the Russian Federation continues to navigate the challenges of forging a homogenous national identity in an ethnically diverse state. The process of creating a post-Soviet Russian identity remains the domain of the state and utilizes the foundations of Soviet nationality policy. In other words, the Russian state has sought to fashion itself in the image of the Soviet "empire of nations" as a diverse and harmonious state united with a common national journey. In the twenty-first century, the Romantic nationalist narratives of state television have supplanted the Romantic Orientalist narratives of 1800s literature. Thanks to the state's ability to communicate subliminal identity markers and reach a trans-national Russian-speaking audience throughout the post-Soviet space and the world, Russia's ecosystem of state television networks has proven very effective in shaping narratives of Russian-ness and Russian exceptionalism.[208] Because of television's audio-visual nature, it offers the ability to reproduce credible specters of reality, thereby conveying an idealized form of the Russian nation, and emphasizing its difference from "others". Much as with mass literature, these representations of Russian identity imply a mass public consensus and evoke a common national journey.

One particular example of this phenomenon at play was Russian coverage of France's expulsion of Roma migrants in late 2010, an incident which generated widespread outcry from human rights groups across the European continent. State broadcaster *Rossiia* covered this incident on their *Vesti* news program. *Vesti*'s report focused on the response of a Moscow-based

[208] The main Russian-language channels in this ecosystem are Channel 1 (the best-funded state channel with an international reach), *Rossiia* (a successor to the Soviet Channel 2 with a more domestic reach), and NTV (a Russian acronym for Independent Television, although the network is now owned by Gazprom, the Russian state petrochemical giant). Russia Today (RT) is primarily geared towards an international audience, and therefore meant to embellish Russia's image outside its borders. See Stephen Hutchings and Vera Tolz, *Nation, Ethnicity and Race on Russian Television: Mediating Post-Soviet Difference* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2015), 29–32.

Roma community that decided to respond by sending a letter of protest to President Nicolas Sarkozy of France. This news report emphasized that the Moscow-based Roma community is living harmoniously—and legally—within their district and maintain good relationships with their Russian neighbors. The report follows several "ordinary" Romas as they go about their daily routines, and demonstrates that unlike their cousins in Europe, these Moscow Romas live free of ethnic discrimination or strife, and have plenty of opportunities for economic advancement. Much as in Soviet representations of *narodnost,* ethnic strife is depicted by *Vesti* as a distinctly foreign problem that could infiltrate Russia but does not presently affect it.

Vesti's coverage also contains the same sort of assimilationist narrative as did Soviet representations of multi-nationality. The Romas in this story are welcome specifically because they do not destabilize Russian identity, but rather *comply* with it. The Roma in this report is living within Russian law, and the report is sure to present them as such. More precisely, these Roma comply to what the Russian state expects of "good" Roma. They work within the Russian system, and this combined with their exoticized culture contributes to the richness of the Russian national and cultural identity. There is no hint in this report of any problems within the Roma community with regards to their treatment by the state, even as anti-Roma racism and violent skinhead attacks on people of color reached a fever-pitch in Russia during this period.[209] In other words, the Russia that *Vesti* presents here is a construct, an "imagined community" to use the words of Nancy Condee from her analysis on Russian and Soviet filmography and television, in which she applies to Russia Benedict Anderson famous concept. Much as in the Soviet and

[209] Hutchins and Tolz, *Russian Television,* 5–8. Neo-Nazi hate crimes are a well-documented epidemic in Russia and perpetrators very seldomly face prosecution for these crimes. However, the rate of these crimes has reportedly experienced a significant decrease in recent years. See Simon Shuster, "Racist Violence Threatens Russia's World Cup Plans," *TIME,* 23 December 2010; Tom Parfitt, "The Rise of The Russian Racists," *The Guardian,* 26 June 2006, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/jun/26/worlddispatch.russia; Tom Balmforth, "Hate Crimes Said Down In Russia As Kremlin Cracks Down on Nationalist Critics," *Radio Free Europe,* 19 February 2016, https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-sova-hate-crimes-down-nationalist-crackdown/27562759.html.

Imperial era, Russia continues to reshape and solidify its collective identity around these constructed values, all while navigating the complications of its imperial legacy.[210]

The same can be said for the country's wildly popular talk shows, including Vladimir Solovev's *Vecher s Vladimirom Solovevym,* Evgenii Popov's *60 minut*, or Rossiia 1's *Vremia Pokazhet.* These shows host politicians, political scientists, journalists, and occasionally members of the official opposition such as Russian Communist Party members and *Iabloka* liberals.[211] Taken together, these shows create a carefully choreographed image of Russia as a state that allows different points of view within certain defined parameters. Although the diversity of political opinions on Russian talk shows has markedly shrunk in the wake of 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine and the ensuing media crackdown, these shows remain more popular than ever, and de facto act as the public forum of official political discourse in the Russian Federation. This discourse defines the boundaries of acceptable political discourse in Russia, but also defines Russianness itself with reference to the "other," today Ukraine and the "collective West".

Perpetual Conflict

All of these post-Soviet territorial conflicts exhibit tellingly similar consequences. Since the fall of the USSR in 1991, the post-Soviet space has remained stagnant with regards to its official borders and its ruling classes. As the Russian case plainly demonstrates, the continued development of ultra-nationalism poses a severe threat to the stability of the entire post-Soviet region. Even as Moscow played a leading role in the creation or exacerbation of ethno-territorial

[210] Hutchings and Tolz, *Russian Television,* 8–10. See also Nancy Condee, *The Imperial Trace: Recent Russian Cinema* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), esp. 3-49, 59-80, 85-115.
[211] *Iabloka* [Apple] is Russia's liberal party, a component of the official opposition that rubber stamps the decisions of *Edinaia Rossiia* [United Russia], Putin's party.

conflicts throughout the USSR, it now takes advantage of these conflicts in the post-Soviet space to preserve geopolitical influence in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Ukraine as well. All of this points to an endemic failure in the concept of ethnonationalist parity or a "friendship of peoples," but also the dire need for a fundamental change in the current geopolitical realities of the post-Soviet space.[212] This requires a prolonged period of transition, and Ukraine's systematic efforts to forge a national path outside the Russian sphere may mark the start of a painful but long overdue transformation for the entire post-Soviet world.[213]

In other words, it is imperative for the survival, prosperity, and liberation of all post-Soviet peoples that the confines of the post-Soviet world be superseded, and that these colonized nations construct, in the words of Said: "new and imaginative conceptualizations of society and culture…" that envision more inclusive solutions to deconstructing colonial legacies.[214] The various complex forces that perpetuate instability throughout the Soviet space—meaning these social and political forces spurred by the legacy of Russian/Soviet Orientology and associated imperialist policies—also enable Russian imperialism to survive. These narratives obscure historical realities and therefore make it harder for the various nationalities of the post-Soviet space to engage in a much-needed post-colonial discourse. Ultra-nationalism of the post-Soviet sort negates the possibility of trans-national solidarity between formerly colonized peoples because it ardently denies that these peoples can have anything in common, preferring instead a

[212] This is not to say that there is no merit in the concept of the "friendship of peoples" in principle. Any viable solution to the present problems of the post-Soviet space will require trans-national solidarity and unity.
[213] The Russo-Ukrainian war is unique when it comes to post-Soviet conflicts in that it did not become an armed conflict in the late 1980s or early 1990s unlike most other wars in the post-Soviet space. The pro-Russian separatist movements currently operating in the Donbass have little to no history prior to 2014 and were created with the direct support and coordination of the Putin regime. Indeed, by the late 1990s the issue of the Russo-Ukrainian border seemed largely settled as Russia had conceded to international pressure in 1997 and recognized Ukraine's present borders. All this is to say that while the Russo-Ukrainian war does have significant connections to the history of Russian and Soviet Orientology, it is not strictly accurate to characterize it as a complete analogue to other territorial wars in the post-Soviet space.
[214] Said, *Culture*, 218.

chauvinistic assertion of ethnic exceptionalism. Because ultra-nationalism worsens divisions, alienization, and a sense of ostracization between and within nationality groups, it precludes any form of reconciliation and indeed obscures the hand of Orientalism and other forms of neo-imperialism. These reactionary forces are expressions of the Russian imperial legacy, and namely the Russian conceptualization of the nation, the state, and society that Russian Orientalists imposed upon the Russian periphery.

The work of deconstructing these national and social constructs cannot begin until there is space in post-Soviet societies for post-colonial discourses to happen, and this will likely require a complete upheaval of the existing status quo of all post-Soviet states. Having said that, whatever "new way forward" the post-Soviet world devises must be a socio-political and economic vision that is produced by the peoples of that world and tailored to the common material realities and systemic problems that they face. It is doubtful that there is a ready-made "Western" solution to the post-Soviet problem. Rather, a hybrid resolution will be required to properly address the history of the post-Soviet world's current geopolitical situation. Much like its Russian counterpart, the West's Orientalizing gaze tends to oversimplify, and in some cases to obscure realities entirely. To the Western gaze, much of the former Soviet space is still regarded upon as "Russia", or "Russian" political and cultural space, and the veritable tapestry of ethnic minorities, religions, and nations of the Soviet space—and indeed of Russia itself—are largely obscured. The post-Soviet solution to these twenty-first-century realities could integrate "Western" ideas, but for the first time, the solution will come from the subaltern peoples themselves, and not from the academics of any imperial capital or settler-colonial redoubt.

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