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Construction of Russian exceptionalism: first Orientologists in Russian academia

Melih Demirtaş [1,*]

[1] PhD Candidate, Area Studies Department, Middle East Technical University (METU), Ankara, Turkey; ORCID: 0000-0002-6206-1349.
* Correspondence: melih.demirtas@metu.edu.tr

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Abstract: Since the exact positioning of the Russian state and society between "the East" and "the West" has long been a contested topic, the term "Russian Orientalism" has emerged as a frequent keyword in Russia and Eurasia-related area studies. This paper investigates one source of this "Orientalism" in the so-called "Russian exceptionalism" or "uniqueness". To this end, first supporting arguments are sought in Russian academia from the 19th century, through which the growing impact of Orientologists led to the promotion of ideas that followed the official tenets of Russian imperialism. It will be therefore argued that with the increasing support of academic works, the effect of "spatiality" that emerged as "in-between status" provided a more hegemonic and stronger Russian mentality that was nurtured by both the similarities and/or contrasts with the nation's Western and Eastern neighbors. One strong argument will remain, however, as an ongoing area of evaluation – suggesting that the "civilized" Russian central elites continue to search for their State's "Orient" within the conquered "eastern" territories, such as in the Caucasus, Idel/Volga or in Central Asia (Turkestan).

Keywords: Russian Orientalism, Russian academia, constructivism, dichotomies; Orientologists, Kazan, St. Petersburg

Rus istisnacılığının inşası: Rus akademisinde ilk Oryantologlar

Öz: Rus devletinin ve toplumunun "Doğu" ile "Batı" arasındaki yeri çağlar boyunca tartışmalı bir konu olduğundan, "Rus Oryantalizmi" de Rusya ve

Avrasya'yla ilgili bölge çalışmalarının anahtar kavramlarından biri haline gelmiştir. Bu makalede, bahsekonu "Oryantalizm"in bir kaynağı sözde "Rus istisnacılığı" veya "benzersizliği" olarak araştırılmaktadır. Bu çerçevede, Oryantologların Rus emperyal ajandasına uygun şekilde fikirlerini ortaya koyarak etkilerini arttırdığı 19. Yüzyıl süresince Rus Akademisinde bu konuya destek teşkil eden ilk ve önemli argümanlar bulunmaya çalışılacaktır. Bu itibarla, Rusya için bir "arada kalmışlık durumu"yla ortaya çıkan ve Akademi'nin çalışmalarından giderek daha fazla destek alan "mekânsallık" etkisinin, gerek Batılı gerek Doğulu komşularla meşru bir benzerlik ve/veya zıtlık durumundan beslenmek suretiyle daha hegemon ve güçlü bir Rus zihniyetine zemin hazırladığı ele alınacaktır. Öte yandan, bu süreçte günümüze de etki eden şu güçlü argüman geçerli kalmaya devam edecektir: "Medeni" Rus merkezi seçkinleri, Devletleri için "Şarkı" her zaman fethedilen Kafkasya, İdil/Ural veya Orta Asya (Türkistan) gibi "doğu" topraklarında aramaya devam etmişlerdir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Rus oryantalizmi, Rus akademisi, inşacılık; dikotomiler, oryantolog, Kazan, St.Petersburg

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> In Europe, we were hangers-on, but to Asia we will go as masters. In Europe we were Tatars, but in Asia we too are Europeans (Dostoevsky 1876)

Introduction

From the beginning of the 19th century, while the power of the Russian Empire was continuing to grow, a Russian school of Oriental Studies began to distinguish between, first, Academic Orientalists or "Orientologists" (in Russian – *vostokovedenie* – the academic discipline of "Oriental" study), which were in fact mostly from the "German tradition", coming from the Russian Baltics, and differing from the British/French colonial thinkers in their projection of an image of being less political and more combiner/moderate intellectuals; second, Christian missionaries, whose main motivations could not be separated from the "holy causes" of Orthodoxy; and third, government officials and advisers, who mostly pioneered the continuation of Russian imperialism in the 19th and 20th centuries (Naumkin 2004, vii-viii). It is not easy to deny the linkage between the peoples in these three categories, and the reality that Orientology turned out to be vehicle in the hands of official Russian imperial circles.

In this paper, while delving deeper into the contested historical concept of "Russian Orientalism", the main point of focus will be the Russian academia of

the 19th century, with the aim being to understand the growing spirit of the Orientologists who started to produce ideas that were in line with the official tenets of Russian imperialism. As Knight argues, one of the main ideas that appeared was that Russian Orientalism "left ample room for idiosyncrasy", and cleared a path for politicians and decision-makers to look after the "objective interests of the state" (Knight 2000, 99). In the following periods in history, this Russian continuity in its civilizer and/or "combiner mission" between "Orient-Occident" would be felt, and the famous Soviet Oriental studies in the 20th century would serve as a kind of heir to Imperial Russian Orientology. Accordingly, for some scholars Soviet Oriental studies could be seen "as a state-organized discipline with a clear political agenda" (Bustanov 2015, xi-xii). As Bustanov argues in this respect, "the complexity of the Orient has been the issue at hand. This complexity may be understood not only geographically, but also in terms of the historical and cultural approaches that must be adopted. In Russia, however, the old connection between Oriental scholarship and state policies has gone largely unnoticed, though it is still very much alive" (Bustanov 2015, xii).

The main argument in this sense when investigating the Russian Orientologists will not contradict Knight, as one of the leading scholars of Russian Orientalism, who claims that "like its Western analogues, Russian discourse on Asia was predicated on an assumption of cultural superiority, and interwoven with an array of tropes denoting the indolence, despotism, deviousness, and depravity of the Asiatic 'other'" (Knight 2000/Fall, 709-710; Demirtaş 2020, 38-39). My primary emphasis here is in line with the Russian "otherization" process, being a special case study on Russian Imperial Academia of primarily the 19th century, when the first Orientologists started to voice their ideas in the related faculties.

Methodological/theoretical background: Orientalism and the constructed power of Russian Orientology

For the methodology, some of the main principles of the Constructivist and Critical approaches, and related to that, Orientalist discourse (primarily that of Edward Said), will serve as better approaches to the main issues related to the emergence and ongoing service of the Russian Orientologists. As Khalid argues: "It is true that Said shows little concern for the historical trajectory of the rise of Orientalism, but it is also indisputable that the dichotomization of the (Old) World into Europe/the West versus Asia/the Orient dates back to the Greeks, and that the Orient has always functioned as the 'Other', against which Europe has defined its own identity. The manner in which this dichotomy has been deployed

has varied enormously over the centuries, while the Orient's otherness has not" (Khalid 2000, 694).

Accordingly, it is necessary for us to emphasize some important arguments as "Western orientalism, as Said depicts, being founded on an essentialized and unified conception of the orient and its inhabitants. Orientalism sweeps away the need for distinctions, and focuses on the production of a core of knowledge comprised of factual statements that are universally applicable to the orient as a whole" (Knight 2000/Spring, 99). Historically orientalism, thus, is also linked to the issue of "civilizing the Orient" or the Eastern geographies that have long had considerable economic potential, and must be ruled in accordance with a strategic agenda. This may clarify the general project of "domination and/or imperialism" (Said 2003, 3) through Orientalism that might be linked also to the famous theories on discourse and the power of such influential thinkers as Michel Foucault (Foucault 1980).

In connection with such discussions, Nicholas Onuf – the great defender of "speech acts", and thus discourses, and the primary modern constructivist in political science – opens a useful theoretical dimension that we can attribute to the Orientalist discourse in terms of the supremacy of some groups over others. Onuf makes a significant critique of world-relations, stating that with their status quo-based natures, people are seen to be captive of the "four pathologies", which are described as "stasis", signifying that "traditional societies are static–they resist change"; "machismo" suggesting that "traditional societies give undue emphasis to honor or respect"; "paternalism" which can be linked to the problematic of "authoritarianism"; and lastly, "infantilization", which one may believe results from out-of-proportion paternalism, as in the case of the colonial legacy between the "West-Rest" – "treat the natives like children, and they will act like children, and will be unable to take care of their basic needs, being properly dependent on their colonial masters, [and also like] the contemporary practice of treating African states as 'quasi-sovereign', which tells us that infantilization persists in postcolonial settings" (Onuf 2016, 12-14). Accordingly, it is possible to say, "Russia's so called Orient" was (and for some, actually continues to be) a kind of Infant under the paternal and static rule of Russia.

Knight makes an essential point, claiming that "for Russians, however, it was not quite so easy to dispense with the particular. As is often pointed out, in Russia the oriental "other" was not necessarily an unknown creature, set apart by thousands of miles and vast oceans. In Russia, the "other" was all around-in ethnic enclaves penetrating deep into the heartland of the Russian settlements, in scattered settlements and over vast stretches of borderland in which ethnic groups met and interacted over the course of centuries" (Knight, 2000/Spring, 99-

100). We must emphasize one vital issue here, however, stating that the evolution of Russian self-esteem started mainly with the "Russian imperial initial setup" of the era of Peter the Great at the beginning of the 18th century, when a definite "us/them categorization" appeared with the support of academia in the leading Institutes of Oriental Studies, primarily in St. Petersburg, but also in Kazan and Moscow (Demirtas 2020, 42).

As Morrison claims, in the following periods, when harsher and bloodier plans and imperial ambitions persisted, as in the 19th century, the effects of "applied Orientalism" may have been felt more intensively. Consequently, it was in those times when "the direct employment of Orientalists and the knowledge they produce in the colonial states, together with the actual impact of 'Orientalist' attitudes on colonial governance and law" (Morrison 2009, 621) turned into weapons in the hands of both academia and government officials in support of imperial agendas, like those of Russia.

Russian Orientologists with their first presence: Kazan and St. Petersburg schools

"In 1881, when Dostoevsky asked, 'What is Asia to us?' as the Russians were completing their conquest of Central Asia, he not only had a ready-made answer to his question, he also knew exactly what he meant by 'Asia' – the Russian empire," says Sunderland (2011, 832). Hence, while approaching its Orient, in Russia there was heavy Orientalist literature too, detailing the heritage of the Mongol and post-Mongol states (Golden Horde etc.) as "barbaric medieval/nomadic civilizations", whose suppressive rulers were actually seen as successful, as while also creating a union between Christian Russians and Muslim Volga Bulghars. The historical works of V.V.Barthold, including "Turkestan: Down to the Mongol Invasion" (St Petersburg: 1900), must be analyzed therefore in a critical manner.

The strong "nationalization of Russification in the imperial space through the use of the West European colonial methods of rule" – as the successfully constructed "cohesion" – would be tested many times by large scale "revolutions", conflicts and even by the two World Wars of contemporary times (Tolz 2011, 3). To support the colonial supreme rule, following Russian expansions in the 16th Century and afterwards, some opinions started to be spread among official circles, Bureaucracy or in Academia whether Kazan Tatars [or Bashkirs, or any related communities differs from Russians], "infidels-pagan-dirty-warrior-bad, whereas Russians are, good Christians-naïve-peaceful-devout or religious?" (Rorlich 2000, 88). In another example, folklorist Levshin, who is

known as "Herodotus of the Kazakh people" as a result of some of his leading works, makes following comments about some of the "steppe people":

> The way of life of the Kirgiz [i.e., the Kazakh] people is a living Picture of ancient times. One can call them nomadic people who live exclusively for their stock; their settlements suddenly disappear and emerge again in other places; their simplicity and closeness to nature are very attractive in the eyes of novelists or poets. Seeing a Kirgiz-Kazak, someone with an ardent imagination might envision them to be light-hearted [*bespechnye*] shepherds of happy Arcadia or peaceful contemporaries of Abraham; while someone may dream of the imaginary bliss of people that are free of the vices of big cities; someone may search for the ecology and ideal there. However, a cool-blooded traveler will see only semi-barbarian people, and will compare them with the Scythes of Herodotus, the Mongols of Chingiz Khan, the present day Bedouins, Kurds, the inhabitants of the banks of the Yenisei River, Hottentots, and the other barbarian peoples of Asia and Africa (Bustanov 2015, 37).

Under this tradition, Schimmelpenninck in his noted book on "Russian Orientalism", introduces Russian Orientology as an academic discipline that was initiated under the reign of Tsar Peter the Great at the turn of the 18th century. He adds that some basic motivations were due to some "commercial and political ambitions in Asia, and to a genuine desire to learn about the world around him"; thus "the tsar laid the foundations for the systematic and scientific study of the Orient among his subjects" (Schimmelpenninck 2010, 44). Schimmelpenninck reminds us, on the other hand, that Peter the Great was inspired greatly by German philosopher and mathematician Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz with whom he was in personal touch. Leibniz, who regarded "Russia as the ideal intellectual intermediary between the East and West" also motivated Russian cadres to study more on Asia (primarily China) (Schimmelpenninck 2011, 30).

Nevertheless, the beginning of the 19th century was crucial for the launch of "institutionalized" Oriental Studies in Russian universities (Tolz 2008). Rather than St. Petersburg, the first important Russian Orientology works started to appear out of Kazan University, the cradle of the Tatars, but which was also an important economic center at the time. Persian-born scholar Mirza Aleksandr Kasimovich Kazem-Bek – or Mirza Mohammed – lived between 1802 and 1870, and was one of the first lecturers of Russian Orientalism. Seen as a "charismatic teacher" in the field of Oriental cultures, he brought fame to Kazan through his studies, and inspired similar trainings in Saint Petersburg and Moscow (Schimmelpenninck 2008, 443–458).

Glebov reminds us of the variety in "Russian studies of the 'Orient', with the latter term covering a spectrum of peoples and cultures – from the Christian

communities in the Caucasus to the Turkic and Muslim populations of the Volga region and Central Asia and the Turkic- and Mongolian-speaking (and sometimes Buddhist) Siberians". As such, the Centers of those studies were not limited to the St. Petersburg school. Despite "its distinctly academic origins in the bureaucratic capital, the St. Petersburg school may have stood in a very special position in comparison to some other Centers of learning" (Glebov 2011, 391). The Lazarev Institute for Oriental Languages in Moscow, for instance, was headed by the famous Iranist Vsevolod Miller and was supported by Armenian sources, "performing from its origins the double task of integrating Caucasian elites into the imperial milieu, and providing the cadres of specialists in Eastern languages and cultures to the imperial institutions" (Glebov 2011, 391).

Schimmelpenninck underlines that "Kazan's primacy came to a sudden end in 1854, when Tsar Nicholas I ordered the dispatch of most of its relevant faculties, students and libraries to the University of St. Petersburg, where the new Faculty of Oriental Languages would centralize all of the teachings of the Eastern languages in the empire". This act could be construed as an attempt to force Kazan University – an institution based in an "erstwhile Tatar stronghold" – into a merging of the "Oriental 'other' with the Occidental 'self', more than any other school in Europe" (Schimmelpenninck 2011, 33-34).

From the time of its establishment in 1855 until the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, St. Petersburg University's Oriental Faculty was considered the leading center in its field, both in Russia and abroad, overshadowing such significant universities in the "West" with Oriental Departments, including Cambridge, Leiden and Yale. To assess the academic importance attributed to Oriental studies, Schimmelpenninck compared the number of professors and students in different faculties of St. Petersburg University, reporting 2,000 students in the Law Department, but only 182 (or 5% of the total student body) in the Oriental Faculty, where the main specialization was in Asian languages. On the other hand, of the 58 professors in the University, 18 were affiliated with Law, whereas there were 9 professors in the Oriental Faculty. This gives us 18 professors for 2000 students in Law whereas 9 professors for 182 students in Orientology and shows the importance given to Oriental Faculties in Imperial Russia. This is evaluated also as a reflection of "the field's importance as a source of specialists for the Autocracy's Asian ambitions, and for academic respectability in the world" (Schimmelpenninck 2011, 39).

Taking some leading figures as exemplary to Russian Orientologists: Rozen and Barthold and their "Europeanized mastership"

In the last decade of the 19th century, the St. Petersburg Orientologists started to consider themselves more as "part of the European scholarly community", due in no small part to the appointment in 1893 of Arabist Baron Victor Romanovich Rozen – a Baltic German from Russia – as the new Dean of the Faculty, who had trained a number of other important names in the school of Orientology, such as Vasily V. Barthold, Sergey Oldenburg and Nikolay Marr. It is said that once he became Dean of the Faculty, he "insisted that everyone preparing for a teaching post at his faculty must complete their training in the West" (Schimmelpenninck 2011, 40). It is known that under the influence of his teacher Grigoryev, "Rozen turned into a statist Russian nationalist who accepted that scholarship should serve the interests of the nation" (Tolz 2008, 59).

In fact Rozen's adherence to "European" or "Western" academic ideals in the name of being more "scientific" was a key issue that would affect also his disciples, who would come up with some of the leading works in Russian Orientology, such as Barthold's "Turkestan" and "Central Asia". According to Tolz: "In December 1887, while Oldenburg was working abroad preparing for his master's degree, Rozen wrote to him: 'A. O. Ivanovsky defended his dissertation, in my view, not very successfully. It is simply a tragedy that our young Sinologists hardly ever go abroad and remain isolated [*samobytnye*]. I cannot speak to him about it, because [Academician V. P.] Vasil′ev's authority undermines my arguments. A friend would be a different matter. I hope that when you come back you will have some impact on Ivanovskii in terms of the Europeanization of his scientific approach' (Tolz 2008, 64)." The following comment from Rozen given in Tolz's work allow the motives behind his Deanship of the Faculty to be understood:

> Priority should be given to those branches of Orientalism where (…) for historical and geographical reasons Russian scholars can and should be ahead of all others. I have in mind such areas of Oriental Studies as the languages of Russia's natives (*inorodtsy*), Oriental numismatics, Russia's relations with the Orient in different periods of its history, and so on (Tolz 2008, 60).

In fact, Tolz provides detailed accounts of Rozen in several books/articles, summarizing skillfully the six principles behind Rozen's scholarship: (1) to study Russia's own Orient, particularly the Muslim communities within Russia; (2) to study the areas (*uzly*) of cultural, politics and economic interaction among peoples of different ethnic origins, languages and religions – his own specific

interests were the Arabic influence on Byzantium and "Eastern elements" in Christianity. Within these areas, his research sought (3) to establish a community of scholars sharing the same vision; (4) to create a "national communication space" in Oriental Studies in Russia; (5) to achieve greater recognition of Russian Oriental Studies in Europe; and (6) to ensure the acceptance of Russian as one of the languages of international communication among Orientalists (Tolz 2008, 61).

At the beginning of the 20th century, some leading figures of non-Russian origin and from "Russia's Orient" were recruited as research assistants to imperial Orientologists. In Tolz evaluation, "in this regard, the Russian Empire was no different from other European empires, where national movements in colonial domains widely utilized the findings of European scholarship on the 'Orient'" (Tolz 2011, 169). Such a policy would be also congruent with the rational approach of a "superior" power that reigns over the vast lands of "nomadic" and "backward people". So, for instance, "if the nomadic way of life could not be changed by force, how could the Kazakhs to be drawn to Russian civilization?" – through "education" argues Knight (2000/Spring, 94).

Similarly, according to Werth, there was an internal social cohesion that was attributable to the Russian style of rule: "On the Kazakh steppe, Volga-Tatar mullahs were enlisted to serve as agents of Russian imperial rule in the late 18th and early 19th centuries by "civilizing" the supposedly restless nomads of the borderlands, and adopted the notion that they were bringing "religion" (*din*) to the uncultured Inner Asian peoples. There are many such examples, but the point is that in many regions beyond the core Russian provinces – the middle-Volga, the lower-Volga, parts of Ukraine, Central Asia, the North Caucasus and Transcaucasia – one sees not simply a dominant Russian population and a colonized indigenous population, but three, four or even more ethnic and confessional groups, occupying various levels of social prominence, in close proximity to one another" (Werth 2000, 21-43).

Vasiliy Vladimirovich Barthold, known also as Wilhelm Barthold (1869–1930), was born in St. Petersburg, and would become another crucial figure in the second half of the 19th century in the field of Russian Orientalism and Orientology. He was of German origin, and in his works in European languages he did not hesitate to use his baptismal name "Wilhelm", probably due to his German-Russian origins. Based on several of his works, which have been translated into many languages, including Persian, Turkic and Arabic, even today he is one of the important scholars to understand Russian Orientalism and Orientology in the last decades of 19th and first decades of the 20th century, throwing light also on the continuities in in the first periods of the Soviet Union.

Barthold may be considered also a defender of "the clearance to the position of Russian Academia in the East-West dichotomy" (Bregel 1980, 388). In Bregel's work some of Barthold's influential thoughts are given as follows from his own writings: "The establishing of the Russian power in the regions with the century-old cultural past, though for the last centuries isolated from the world progress, put before Russia quite definite tasks, which cannot be fulfilled by the local cultural forces. Whatever the progress of the eastern peoples under the Russian rule may be, till they acquire completely the European scientific methods, especially the methods of humanities, a work of several generations is needed. [...] In Asia [i.e., in Asiatic Russia], where there are no Europeans besides Russians only Russian scholarly thought can originate scholarly constructions free from the influence of one-sided nationalism and religious dogmatics" (Bregel 1980, 388).

"Perhaps more than in any other European country, nineteenth-century Russian Orientology was closely linked to the autocracy's needs," says Schimmelpenninck (2011, 42). To support this claim, Tolz gives Barthold's ideas too as "[m]aybe modest works by Russian Orientalists more than other achievements of Russian culture will contribute to the peaceful unification of the peoples of the East with Russia" (Tolz 2008, 54). Behind this mission of orientalist discourse in Imperial Russian Academia, the same Barthold, in his 1914-dated paper "The Tasks of Russian Orientalism in Turkestan", clarifies one of the main aims of Russian colonial power in its colonies (Turkestan and others); the ideas in this work is quoted by Bregel as;

> It is the duty of a great country to lead all its population, irrespective of nationality, forward, and not backward; but thorough study of the culture of previous times and careful protection of the monuments of this culture remain among basic characteristics of a cultured state (Bregel 1980, 388).

Hence, Bregel gives a good account of Barthold in his article (1980) by emphasizing that "on graduating from the university he [Barthold] perceived that nobody before him had tried to study the history of Central Asia "applying the same laws of historical evolution which had been established for the history of Europe; it was only Barthold who accomplished for the first time the task of putting the study of the history of Central Asia on a firm scholarly basis" (Bregel 1980, 385). This separates Barthold also from being a pure constructionist theoretician on an imagined "Eastern" or "Muslim land". On the other hand, as Evans suggests, Barthold goes deeper into the East, lives with "Easterners" as a "European" and as a "rationalist Scientist", and so exceeds the simple logic of the "West's constructed view of the East" that is explained in Saidian works (Evans

1999, 25-26). In my opinion, understanding Barthold will lead to the comprehension of a successful Russian Orientologist who is neither European nor Asian, but who never ceases to struggle to be a part (and maybe a master) of both.

Russian Orientology "between East and West"

In the 19th century in particular, when Russia's imperial ambitions were seen to be increasing more than ever, "the [consideration of the] pervasive and denigrating Russian 'Orientalist' stereotype of all Muslims, and Sufi groups in particular, as 'fanatical'" (Morrison 2009, 646) became common in the works of the Russian Empire's academic circles. Furthermore, some political events "originally produced by the experience of war in the North Caucasus, and subsequently exacerbated by the Andijan uprising" (Morrison 2009, 646) played considerable roles, therefore, in shaping intellectual thought in the Empire. In this regard, Russia's "Europeanized" mastership turned to be the key of Petersburg (and then, Moscow) administration over their mostly Muslim and Turkic populations coming from the East of the Empire with their Oriental and communitarian ideologies.

As a consequence, "Russia's historical role in Eurasia – as oppressive hegemon or bringer of 'enlightenment' or, depending on the angle of vision, both at the same time – has proved intellectually fruitful, as have discussions generated by Said's and other models of imperial domination" (David-Fox, Holquist, and Martin 2006, intro). In comprehending this, it may be useful to go deeper into the understanding of identification of "the other" in relation to some Foucaltian "power" discourse. Hence, while understanding Orientalism in this paper, in the same basket as the issue of "civilizing the Orient", we must also emphasize that, here in the Russian case, and throughout the historical period under the effect of the main wars and conflicts with their European counterparts, a response to the continuing European Orientalism was discernible. Orientalism applied by traditional European powers like France or England had in fact already placed Russia within the same club of "backward/inferior" or "Asian" societies. Because these traditional Europeans did not see Russia in their own cultural unity, it was not surprising to see Russia in some cases as an actor behaving against the "West". In this regard, the idea that a fundamental difference existed between Russia and the West became observable also among some Russian intellectuals still today.

As a key outcome, in Sahni's words, "the Russian elite became mentally colonized [by Europe] without having ever been a colonial subject. This was the uniqueness of Russian history and created the inherent contradictions of Russian

Orientalism, whereby the Oriental attitude directed at them was accepted by the Russians and subsequently employed to downgrade the conquered people" (Kalpana 1997, 15). In connection with that, rather than being close to the West, it would be fair to say that an "understanding and appreciation of the East" was preferred by many leading figures in Russia, and also in the academia. Thus, "the orientalist rhetoric in Russia was somehow "complicated, and in some cases tempered by an uncomfortable sensation that 'we too are Asiatics'" (Knight 2002, 300).

For many members of the Orientologists in academia, through education or some form of indoctrination, despite its negative connotations, one group's (Russian) continuing exceptionalist or Orientalist agenda may not hinder the possibility of a relatively successful amalgamation of "us and them" between the "master and conquered", most likely through with a help of heavy statist and central rule. Later, these "sentiments took formal shape in the theory of Eurasianism, a type of pan-Eurasian nationalism in which culturally distinct peoples would be bound together under Russian leadership" (Cronin 2015, 649). Hence, the understanding of Knight that "in such a setting, the knowledge that one 'other' differed from another was of fundamental significance. Settled Tatars were clearly different from nomadic Bashkirs and pagan Cheremis, and to refuse to acknowledge these differences was to invite potentially lethal misunderstandings. Russian ethnography, one of the fundamental components of Russian Orientalism, developed as a science of distinction devoted more to the 'making of difference' than to distilling the diversity of the Eurasian plain into aggregate 'representations' and easily digested maxims" (Knight 2000/Spring, 99-100) is shared.

That concurs with Onuf's "infantilization" discourse, given in our theoretical part. Nevertheless, all of this dialogue and communication between Russia and its East does little to change the reality that Russian Orientalism was based not only on "Russia's unique historical, political and geographic alterity", but also "its reverberation of European imperial culture and its appeal to the very fractured identity it hopes to sublimate" (Feldman 2012, 180). Consequently, Russian exceptionalism, which can be equated to "Russian uniqueness" or "Russian distinctiveness" (Cronin 2015, 649), opens the way for "Us" (Russians) to differ from "Them" based on a particular political/social/economic agenda, thus sometimes a state on the European continent, or sometimes an ethnic identity on the Kazakh or Bashkir steppe, may turn into the "Other" in this way thinking. Despite the fact that Russia has not been seen as a full member of the so-called "Occidental world", it has nevertheless not hesitated to approach its Orient with a moderate "modernizing" or "civilizing" role.

Conclusion

As felt from this paper, the strong sense of the "Orient/Occident dichotomy" was well used in the initial approaches of the members of Imperial Russian academia, who actually served the general outcome of "Russian exceptionalism" well across a vast geography that had interacted with the Russian expansionist and colonialist reality, both spatially and socially, through wars, invasions, upheavals, political support, etc. The case study of academia presented in this paper reveals just one part of that long story. As clarified by Knight:

> One should not assume, however, that disciplinary power in Russia was nonexistent, that scholars were reduced to mere passive instruments of the autocratic state. But it was precisely the circumscribed nature of disciplinary power, its inability to mobilize institutions both inside and out-side the state apparatus, around a set of hegemonic postulates that helped to engender a certain richness and polyphony within the disciplines them-selves (Knight 2000, 99).

Overall, the main outcome is that although Russia had been indebted to the Western world historically while creating its own civilization and its "own Orient", at the same time the phenomenon of "self-orientalization" – depending highly on the "dichotomies between Europe/the West and Asia/the Orient" – emerged also as a reality the for Russian state and its academicians (Khalid 2000, 689). As Knight suggests, "the stark dichotomy between Orient and Occident around which Said's analysis hinges transforms in the Russian context into an awkward triptych: the west, Russia, the east. Russia, after all, was not only the subject of orientalist discourse, but also its object" (Knight 2000/Spring, 77).

Tolz presents some compelling thoughts of European diplomats in the 19th century; for instance, "the French consul in Tiflis, Jacques-Francois Gamba, argued in 1826 that Georgia had changed little after two and a half decades of Russian rule, because in Russia itself one 'habitually finds the habits and tastes of nomads' […] It was convinced that even among educated Russians, beneath the thin veneer of Europeanness, 'a Tatar', 'an Oriental' was hidden" (Tolz p.140).

Despite supposedly borrowing a scientific methodology also for its academia, Russia did not choose to be considered together with the "West" ideologically. Thus, academia and first Orientologists since, following their emergence, prepared a fruitful background for the ongoing Russian hegemony in its "constructed" region. In such a region, for a Russian sometimes to be European was considered to indicate mastership over the "others" – but at the same time, being non-European with an "eastward-facing" identity brought a good reason to be considered among the "others" against outside threats to the

motherland Russia. In this way, Russia was to seen to be continuing to behave like a skillful statist leader that operates with an understanding and appreciation of its "East".

As a matter for further study on more contemporary times, we saw also socially – as a result of territorial expansions and the newly invaded territories – a natural amalgamation of Russian society with other communities, such as the Tatars, that brought added value to the national identity. As a result, once the strong Russian nation state becomes the reality, it is accepted by everyone with all of its nationalist features, economic successes, and social and political gains, and it becomes the main determinant also of the fluidity and sociality of the communities and individuals within its vast territory.

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