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IN SEARCH OF A NEW IMPERIAL HISTORY*

The semantics of the term “empire” is overloaded with superlatives and loud epithets. The concept of empire is so universal and all-encompassing that it appears to have no *particular* meaning at all. Indeed, empire embodies the grim totality of unlimited domination and coercion; at the same time, it turns out to be a synonym for the clumsy neologism of “world-system” (or “world civilization”) and evokes a unifying principle for a universe surrounded by the destructive elements of chaos and barbarism. Empire is simultaneously associated with the bygone splendor of upper classes in metropolises and with exploitation and domination in the colonies. An empire is at once a tireless and undefeatable aggressor and expansionist, and a colossus standing on clay feet, unable to keep in check the centrifugal forces that lead to its downfall, and always ready to collapse from a minor disturbance. Empire is the “the prison of peoples,” but it is also the guarantor of the preservation of local originality and difference in the face of standardizing projects. What, then, is the purpose of using the term empire (apart from the fact that for the two millennia of *Anno Domini* it had been employed to describe the legal status of the greatest polities of the Old World, and, retrospectively or by analogy, of the entire world)?

* Original Russian version of this article first appeared as an Introduction in I. Gerasimov, S. Glebov, A. Kaplunovski, M. Mogilner, A. Semyonov (Eds.). *Novaia imperskaia istoriia postsovetskogo prostranstva*. Kazan, 2004. Pp. 7-29 (for more information on the book please visit www.abimperio.net).

The Post-National Situation

The nation-state, which only recently appeared to be the “natural primary element” of the world political order and of national self-realization, is currently facing a crisis. It would seem that the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of the newly independent states in Eastern Europe and Eurasia have reconfirmed traditional assumptions about the unavoidable disintegration of multinational polities. However, this disintegration was followed by studies of “new nationalism” and of crises in the post-World War II balance in international relations, which questioned both the unconditional legitimacy and the self-evident nature of the nation-state principle. The nation-state became an object for reconsideration in the context of discussions of historical and contemporary processes in the world.¹ On the other hand, the European Union, with its principle of voluntary partial renunciation of sovereignty by the participating states, has led many observers to again question the nation-state as the basic unit of international political space. Ongoing discussions of the relevance of intervention in the affairs of sovereign states in the name of humanitarianism have underscored doubts about nation-states and their legitimacy.²

¹ Political processes of national self-determination and nation-building coincided with the active phase in the development of nationalism theories. Within this theorizing, the nation was seen not as an ontological entity and a political and social reality, but as a system of practices determining its perception (R. Brubaker. *Nationalism Reframed*. Cambridge, 1996; J. Hutchinson and A. Smith (Eds.). *Nationalism. Critical Concepts in Political Science*. Vols. 1-5. Routledge, 2000). At the same time, one cannot tie constructivist approaches to the phenomenon of nationhood with the politically inspired doubts in the irresistible force of the principle of nationality and nation-state for the discursive nature of modern nationalist practices does not necessarily mean that nations lack “real” influence on the world of social and political relations. (The classic summary of this thesis was offered by Benedict Anderson in B. Anderson. *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London, 1983; A. Semyonov. Interview with Benedict Anderson: “We Study Empires as We Do Dinosaurs,” *Nations, Nationalism, and Empire in a Critical Perspective // Ab Imperio*. 2003. No. 3. Pp. 57-73). This is why a radically oriented and politically relevant research into the possibility of the nation-state’s adjustment to the realities of the “post-national” world appears perfectly compatible with a constructivist approach to theories of nationalism: Will Kymlicka. *Multicultural Citizenship. A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights*. Oxford, 1995.

² See, for example, Mabel Berezin and Martin Schain (Eds.). *Europe without Borders. Remapping Territory, Citizenship, and Identity in a Transnational Age*. Baltimore, 2003; T. V. Paul, G. John Ikenberry, and John A. Hall (Eds.). *The Nation-state in Question*. Princeton, NJ, 2003. On humanitarian intervention and national sovereignty, see works by the British philosopher Mary Kaldor. *New and Old Wars. Organised Violence in a Global Era*. Cambridge, 1999.

Against the background of globalization and the unprecedented intensification of contacts between different cultures, the category “empire” all too often appears as a semi-conscious attempt to employ a *pre-national category* to designate the realities of an emerging post-national situation, characterized by a hierarchically consolidated system of sovereign polities, specific economic regimes, and ethno-confessional areas and subcultures within the framework of a given political space.³ It is not accidental that empire has become a fashionable topic of scholarly debate and of political writing, provoking ambiguous attempts to turn empire into a category of analysis.⁴ A short excursion into the history of the conceptual evolution of empire should guide us better through the causes and the character of today’s boom in “empire studies.”

Ab Imperio

In the political rhetoric of recent times the empire label has often been used as an important element in discrediting a political regime and as a symbol of repressive and undemocratic political organization. It suffices to invoke Ronald Reagan’s

³ Such a view of empire was offered in Dominic Lieven. *Empire. The Russian Empire and Its Rivals*. London, 2000. In a similar vein, researchers address the category of empire when working on histories of multiethnic and spatial polities or when contemporizing “global” or “world” history as a “historical precedent” of contemporary globalization. William McNeill. *A Defense of World History* // *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*. 1982. Vol. 5. No. 32. Pp. 75-89; Michael Geyer and Charles Bright. *World History in a Global Age* // *American Historical Review*. 1995. Vol. 100. No. 4. Pp. 1034-1060; Anthony Pagden. *Peoples and Empires. A Short History of European Migration, Exploration, and Conquest, from Greece to the Present*. London, 2001; J. Muldoon. *Empire and Order. The Concept of Empire. 800-1800*. New York, 1999. A separate place in the literature belongs to the work of Michael Doyle, who offered the first post-Cold War version of a sociologically comparative theory of empire, thus furthering the intellectual tradition of Samuel Eisenstadt. M. Doyle. *Empires*. Ithaca, London, 1986; S. M. Eisenstadt. *The Political Systems of Empires*. London, 1992.

⁴ More and more often we see attempts to conceptualize the contemporary United States or European Union as empires: Niall Ferguson. *Empire. The Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power*. New York, 2003; N. Ferguson. *Colossus. The Price of America’s Empire*. New York, 2004; Jim Garrison. *America as Empire. Global Leader or Rogue Power?* San Francisco, 2004; Andrew J. Bacevich (Ed.). *The Imperial Tense. Prospects and Problems of American Empire*. Chicago, 2003; A. Bacevich. *American Empire. The Realities and Consequences of US Diplomacy*. Cambridge, 2003; Paul A. Passavant and Jodi Dean (Eds.). *Empire’s New Clothes*. Reading Hardt and Negri. New York, London, 2004; Michael Mann. *Incoherent Empire*. London, New York, 2003; József Böröcz and Melinda Kovács (Eds.). *Empire’s New Clothes: Unveiling EU Enlargement*. *Central European Review (Electronic Book)*. Budapest, 2001.

“evil empire” speech to demonstrate the entire cargo of negative connotations associated in mass consciousness with the historical or metaphorical phenomenon of empire.⁵ However, the image of empire as one overloaded by negative associations is not only endemic to rhetorical and popular myths: for the most part, empire is also presented in modern political language as a despotic (and therefore illegitimate) political regime, incompatible with human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. A normative judgment of empire easily transcends the boundary between foreign and domestic policy. In international relations discourse, empire is represented as an aggressive state aimed at conquest of and control over vast spaces and numerous peoples (see the critique of imperialism).⁶ If from the point of view of contemporary political culture the internal structure of empire is illegitimate because of the regime’s appropriation of legitimacy rightfully belonging to the civic nation, then empire’s external expansion is assessed negatively for infringing upon yet another fundamental political principle of the modern era – the principle of nation-state sovereignty. The political language of modernity is pregnant with particular assumptions about empires’ historically predetermined doom, at least since the classic works by Edward Gibbon and Charles Montesquieu.⁷

⁵ It is possible that the American president was referring to the popular film series *Star Wars*, the imperial semantics of which has been reflected upon in scholarly works focusing on empires: R. Suny. *The Empire Strikes Out. Imperial Russia, “National” Identity, and Theories of Empire* // T. Martin, R. Suny (Eds.). *Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin*. Oxford, 2002; Dominic Lieven pointed out that the movie reflected the popular myth of empire as opposed to the free world. D. Lieven. *Empire. The Russian Empire and its Rivals*. Pp. 6-7.

⁶ Imperialism as a phenomenon has provoked significant scholarly output. At the source of this literature is the work: J. A. Hobson. *Imperialism. A Study*. London, 1902. The field of imperialism studies underwent essential evolution under the impact of the work of Lenin and the Marxist branch of social sciences in general. Due to these works, the initial focus on the expansion of European states outside the boundaries of the national state has been expanded. Imperialist expansion came to be viewed as a factor in determining the transformation of the social and economic regime of capitalist societies themselves. At the same time, scholars of imperialism did not reflect upon the problem of boundaries between the subject of imperialism and the subjugated space. As Antonio Negri points out, the contemporary relevance of the category of empire is related to the fact that it fixes the type of political and social space in which not only one imperialist hegemon replaces the other, but also the very key foundation of modern imperialism, sovereignty, is transformed. Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri. *Empire*. Harvard, 2000. Pp. vii, 31, 232.

⁷ R. McKitterick and R. Quinault (Eds.). *Edward Gibbon and Empire*. Cambridge, 1997. The metaphor of decline, downfall, and disintegration was attached to empire to a large extent due to efforts by Enlightenment thinkers. Despite the fact that Voltaire, who believed in absolutism as an instrument for the rational ordering of the world, wrote a celebratory history of Peter the Great, and the ideologues of Napoleonic France saw in the First Empire a means to spread Enlightenment, it was the nation-state, which combined rationalism and

Obviously, contemporary political discourse describes empire as an archaic object alien to modern man. This description is based upon philosophical assumptions about the “norm” of modernity (including the concept of “normal” political organization). Evidently, the norm of modernity incorporated the right of nation-states to exercise colonial domination throughout the world. Hence, the British and French empires were perceived as justified and morally defensible introductions of civilization to “backward” and unenlightened corners of the planet. At the same time, from the point of view of the symbolic positioning of the norm, it is quite revealing that the concept of empire served to describe the extra-European political experiences of Europeans (as was the case with the coronation of Queen Victoria as the “Empress of India”), or was employed to overcome crises of modern political forms (as was the case with the Napoleonic empire, which put an end to attempts to realize the republican ideal in the course of the French Revolution). The 20th century completed the process of the de-modernization of empire, which became an archaic term, partly against the background of the results of World War I and partly in the course of the disintegration of colonial systems. Even as early as the 19th century, though, the idea of imperial legitimacy and benevolence did not preclude a harsh critique of the empires that incorporated more or less “European” peoples, and which were understood as composite multiethnic polities. The emergence and accumulation of these negative connotations of empire continued gradually and irregularly as the political, international, and socio-cultural order of modernity was being born.

Summa imperii: Empire as a Political Category

Initially, empire (*imperium*) designated supreme authority built upon military prowess and success. Subsequently, the specific semantics of empire was determined by the political thought of each given epoch. During the Renaissance and the beginning of the fragmentation of the single West European cultural space, the tradition of classical republicanism, especially in Niccolò Machiavelli’s version, formulated a thorough critique of empire. This tradition preserved its influence on the emergence of early modern European political language, during the formation of the first British Empire,

universalism of the Enlightenment with the Romantic belief in the people’s spirit, that became the main “proto-element” of our perceptions of the teleological and normative social and political order of the world.

and upon the Enlightenment up until the American Revolution.⁸ Classical republicanism criticized empire as the opposite of its republican political ideal. For classical republicanism, empire was an illegitimate political construct prone to crises and decline.⁹ Later, British publicists saw the development of colonial commerce as a possible threat leading to the moral decomposition of the domestic political regime, even as they celebrated the grandeur, might, and expanse of their empire.¹⁰ American revolutionaries viewed empire as an obstacle on the way toward a new political regime (the mixed constitution) in the colonies, which moreover created opportunities for abuse by the crown administration and for the moral degradation of civic virtues.¹¹ European adepts of the Enlightenment perceived empire through the magic lantern of Orientalism, as they attempted to prove the fundamental

⁸ In the peculiar world of classical republican political discourse, the key problem of political theory consisted of the stability of the political regime and its relation to the system of moral relations within a given political community. Many believed that stability could be guaranteed by the preservation of civic virtues through participation in the political life of the community based on a mixed constitution. Such a community would contain mutually balancing elements of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy. Machiavelli's image of empire acquired two opposed meanings, both drawn from the Roman Empire, the archetypal empire experience for Western Europe. On the one hand, empire emerges as a field for the exercise of civic virtues. It is created by the citizen-warrior and thus secures participation of citizens in the administration of the republic, preventing civic apathy. On the other hand, the expansion of the republic leads to moral degradation due to the replacement of civic virtues by the emperors' desire to enrich themselves through conquest and usurpation of political action. (J. G. A. Pocock. *The Machiavellian Moment*. Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition. Princeton, 1975, See also Q. Skinner. *Liberty Before Liberalism*. Cambridge, 1997; G. Bock, Q. Skinner, M. Viroli (Eds.). *Machiavelli and Republicanism*. Cambridge, 1990). In order to understand the methodological foundations for such an interpretation of Machiavelli, one has to take into account the turn towards the historicization of political philosophy under the impact of works by Pocock and Skinner, and the so-called Cambridge School of intellectual history. J. Tully and Q. Skinner. (Eds.). *Meanings and Context*. Quentin Skinner and his Critics. Princeton, 1988; Q. Skinner. *Visions of Politics*. Vol. 1. Cambridge, 2002; M. Richter. *The History of Social and Political Concepts: A Critical Introduction*. Oxford, 1995.

⁹ J. G. A. Pocock. *Virtue, Commerce, and History*. Cambridge, 1985; Idem. *Civic Humanism and Its Role In Anglo-American Thought* // Idem. *Politics, Language, and Time*. New York, 1971; R. Tuck. *Philosophy and Government, 1572-1651*. Cambridge, 1993.

¹⁰ J. G. A. Pocock. *Virtue, Commerce, and History*; St. Pincus. *Neither Machiavellian Moment nor Possessive Individualism*. *Commercial Society and the Defenders of the English Republic* // *American Historical Review*. 1998. Vol. 103. No. 3. Pp. 705-736.

¹¹ J. G. A. Pocock. *Empire, Revolution, and an End of Early Modernity* // Pocock (Ed.). *The Varieties of British Political Thought*. Cambridge, 1994; T. Ball, J. G. A. Pocock (Eds.). *Conceptual Change and the Constitution*. Lawrence, KS, 1988.

difference between European monarchies and Oriental despotic kingdoms, which lacked a proper balance between the power of the sovereign and the rights of the noble estate.¹² We can still see echoes of this political delegitimization of empire in the public discussions of our own day. It reverberates in a critique of globalization as a process leading to corporations becoming more concerned about overseas markets than their own domestic economies, or in warnings that human rights abuses in international military conflicts will undermine rights domestically in the participating democracies.

It was the classic Roman Empire of antiquity that played the role of the archetypal empire for the republican thinkers who outlined early modern theories of constitutionalism and democracy. The second key tradition of modern political language was rooted in the historical experiences of the Holy Roman Empire. The disintegration of the Holy Roman Empire, accompanied by the disintegration of the pre-modern worldview, gave rise to contemporary conceptions of sovereignty. The Holy Roman Empire, which, according to Voltaire's sarcastic remark, was "neither holy, nor Roman, nor an empire," formed perceptions of an imperial political and cultural regime among thinkers of the modern period. *Das Heilige Römische Reich Deutscher Nation* carried a certain contradiction in its very name, between the legacy of the Christian tradition of political authority, on the one hand, and the crisis of Europe's religious unity, on the other. The Christian tradition presupposed a transcendental vision of authority, in which empire functioned as a worldly form of God's Kingdom. The crisis of Europe's religious unity clashed with that vision as it related to the abundance in Germanies of local, popular, and Protestant principles.¹³

¹² Ch. L. Montesquieu. *De l'Esprit des lois*. Paris, 1962; Idem. *The Persian Letters*. London, 1897; Judith Shklar. *Montesquieu*. Oxford, 1987. On the "orientalist" view of non-European periphery by the Enlightenment, see L. Wolff. *Inventing Eastern Europe. The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*. Stanford, CA, 1994.

¹³ On the special relationship between the transcendental conception of imperial sovereignty and the pre-modern perception of historical time flow see R. Koselleck. *Modernity and the Planes of Historicity // Idem. Future's Past. On the Semantics of Historical Time*. Cambridge, 1985. Some scholars view the Holy Roman Empire as a forerunner of German federalism: Joachim Whaley. *Federal Habits. The Holy Roman Empire and the Continuity of German Federalism // Maiken Umbach (Ed.). German Federalism: Past, Present, Future*. New York, 2002. Pp. 15-41; see also the work that connects the crisis of the Empire with the crisis of the Church: C. Scott Dixon. *The Reformation in Germany*. Oxford, 2002. On constitutional history of the Holy Roman Empire in early modern Europe see John G. Gagliardo. *Reich and Nation. The Holy Roman Empire as Idea and Reality, 1763-1806*. Bloomington, In., 1980; Bernd Roeck. *Reichssystem und Reichsherkommen. Die Diskussion über die Staatlichkeit des Reiches in der politischen Publizistik des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts*. Wiesbaden, 1984.

The recognition of empire as an illegitimate political form incapable of securing religious order or promoting true religiosity coincided with the growing secularization of the language with which political reality was described. The possibility to condition political legitimacy on existing social and cultural realities – including national categories – emerged. Thus were modern politics and political conceptions born, among them the concept of sovereignty. The “first death” of the Holy Roman Empire was legally inscribed in the Peace of Westphalia signed in 1648. The conditions of the peace, which together with the UN Human Rights Charter and the decisions of the Nuremberg tribunal, constitute the foundations of the international order up to our day, began the process of “sovereignization” of perceptions of political reality. These processes fundamentally altered the very bases of legitimacy in domestic and foreign affairs.¹⁴ The French Revolution triumphantly completed the process: the nation took the place of the territorial dynasty as the carrier of sovereignty. It was this new sovereign that Renan famously defined as an “everyday plebiscite.”¹⁵

The principle of national sovereignty acquired broad support with the spread of Romanticism in Europe. The people as the subject of sovereignty defined through the exercise of civic rights and duties now received a spiritual and mystic body, inspired by a national spirit particular to a specific

¹⁴ One of the results of the crisis of the Holy Roman Empire was the redefining of the concept of “sovereignty” through national and territorial principles. If the power of the emperor was conditioned by the Christian tradition in the Holy Roman Empire, in post-Westphalian Europe religious principles became subject to political ones as reflected in the formula *cuius regio ius religio*. Heinz Duchhardt (Hrsg.). *Der Westfälische Friede. Diplomatie, politische Zäsur, kulturelles Umfeld, Rezeptionsgeschichte*. München, 1998; see also the *long duree* history of sovereignty from the peace of Westphalia to the end of the British empire in Daniel Philpott. *Revolutions in Sovereignty. How Ideas Shaped Modern International Relations*. Princeton, NJ, 2001. On the birth of the modern concept of the political, see Quentin Skinner. *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*. 2 Vols. Cambridge, 1975. An attempt at a “frontal” description of the evolution of basic political concepts of modernity in accordance, to a greater or lesser degree, with R. Koselleck’s vision of intellectual history and conception of modern semantic transformation can be found in: *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*. Stuttgart, 1972-1997.

¹⁵ See, in particular, Renée Waldinger, Philip Dawson, and Isser Woloch (Eds.). *The French Revolution and the Meaning of Citizenship*. Westport, CT, 1984. See also the study of the evolution of the regime of citizenship and naturalization in pre- and post-revolutionary France in Peter Sahlins. *Unnaturally French. Foreign Citizens in the Old Regime and After*. Ithaca, NY, 2004. Sahlins critically treats the thesis of the civic character of French nation-building based on his research into policies towards foreigners.

people.¹⁶ This sovereignty – even when it remained a potential sovereignty as with the movements headed by Mazzini, Garibaldi, Ypsilanti, Kossuth, or Kosciusko – throughout the modern history of Europe pitted itself against empire, be it that of the Habsburgs, the Romanovs, the Hohenzollerns, or the Ottomans. European Romanticism helped to bring about a state of mind according to which the multinational, single-state societies of the 19th century were viewed as atavisms of the imperial past, as obstacles on the path of progress, civilization, and freedom. Such polities were perceived as doomed for collapse and disintegration.

Since modern nationalism provided the main framework through which political, social, and cultural reality were interpreted in the overwhelming majority of the economically and socially most developed countries of Europe that constituted what Ernest Gellner has called “the Atlantic belt,”¹⁷ the mainstream development of humanities and social sciences took place within the framework of the national paradigm.¹⁸ This explains why empire

¹⁶ Obviously, it is hard to speak of Romanticism as a single and homogeneous movement in European thought. Some scholars prefer to use the term in the plural. Arthur Lovejoy. *On the Discrimination of Romanticisms* // A. Lovejoy. *Essays in the History of Ideas*. Westport, CT, 1948. Pp. 228-253. In application to the study of nationalism, see the classic H. Kohn. *The Idea of Nationalism*. New York, 1944. Studies of Russian and East European branches of Romanticism are presented in Nicholas Riasanovsky. *Russia and the West in the Teaching of the Slavophiles. A Study of Romantic Ideology*. Cambridge, MA, 1952; A. Walicki. *Philosophy of Romantic Nationalism, The Case of Poland*. Oxford, 1982; Idem. *The Slavophile Controversy: History of a Conservative Utopia in Nineteenth-Century Russian Thought*. Oxford, 1975.

¹⁷ Ernest Gellner. *Nationalism*. New York, 1997.

¹⁸ To John Stuart Mill, a patriarch of liberalism and founder of the modern theory of society, a multinational state appeared as nonsense, despite the fact that in his time, as well as throughout much of human history, the overwhelming majority of human beings lived in such polities. J. S. Mill. *On Representative Government* // Idem. *On Liberty and Other Essays*. Oxford, 1998. G. W. F. Hegel further discredited empire. Hegel appeared to take philosophical and political positions diametrically opposed to that of Mill. He saw Napoleon’s empire as the end of history, for it was the first empire that most fully realized the civic and universal ideal, thus transcending modernity understood as the specific perception of the unstoppable flow of historical time from the past to the future. In that sense, empire and the end of history brought about by it remained anti-modern categories, even when moved from the archaic past to the utopian future. The quick defeat of the Napoleonic empire and its disintegration led to a modification of the Hegelian tradition, with its dialectics and teleology of the historical process coupled with the Romantic national spirit, which became one of the foundations of the modern national discourse.

never became one of the basic concepts of modernity, on a par with state, society, or even nation.¹⁹

We cannot claim that empire disappeared altogether from the conceptual horizon. It appears that it has been incorporated in modern political and cultural discourse as the “other” of modern politics, international order, and progress. What else can explain the fact that in today’s world no states exist (with the exception of the now passed Bokassa’s “empire”) that openly identify themselves with hypothetical or historical empires in order to legitimate their domestic or foreign policies? One cannot fail to note, though, that the status of the concept of empire in contemporary political discourse is being altered under the impact of stormy changes brought about by the era of globalization and the struggle against international terrorism. We can only guess whether empire will become a basic political category of the “new world order” in the form of a synthesis of revisionist attempts to put forward empire as a real political alternative to the inefficient regime of nation-state sovereignty and the body of international law founded on that regime. It is quite possible that future scholars of political semantics will fail to understand the rhetorical device of the American diplomat John Brady Kiesling, who in 2003 compared the US invasion of Iraq to “the Russia of the late Romanovs... a selfish, superstitious empire thrashing toward self destruction”. It is also possible that future scholars will not understand the archaic and Orientalist connotations that Kiesling ascribed to empire.²⁰

¹⁹ On the connection between the conceptual apparatus of modern social sciences and humanities with the historical experiences of modern Europe, see R. Koselleck. *Future’s Past. On the Semantics of Historical Time*; especially in R. Koselleck. *Concepts of Historical Time and Social History* // Idem. *The Practice of Conceptual History. Timing History, Spacing Concepts*. Stanford, 2002; P. Ricoeur. *History and Narrative*. Vol. 1 // Idem. *Time and Narrative*. 3 Vols. Chicago, 1984. An example of a study more focused on the problem of influences exercised by the discursive regime of nationalism on the social sciences and humanities, see C. Crossley. *French Historians and Romanticism: Thierry, Guizot, the Saint-Simonians, Quinet, Michelet*. London, 1993; I. Wallerstein. *Does India Exist?* // Idem. *Unthinking Social Science. The Limits of Nineteenth-Century Paradigms*. Cambridge, 1991. See also works by Pierre Bourdieu, which question the categorical apparatus of social sciences in relation to mental cartography and historiography: Pierre Bourdieu. *L’identité et la représentation. Éléments pour une réflexion critique sur l’idée de région* // *Actes de la Recherche en sciences sociales*. 1980. T. 35. P. 64-72; Idem. *Ce que parler veut dire*. Paris, 1982.

²⁰ See Kiesling’s Open Letter to the US State Secretary Colin Powell published in *The New York Times*. 2003. February 27 (<http://www.alternatives.ca/article447.html>. Last visit 10 November 2003).

Pro Imperio: Empire as a Cultural Category

The growth of interest in empire and the imperial over the past decade is to a large extent the result of the obvious exhaustion of resources at the disposal of the conceptual apparatus of modernity, which is supposed to describe processes of the “post-modern” era. Curiously, this interest emerged at the very dawn of an era that witnessed the disintegration of the great colonial empires of the West. As it turned out, the colonial empire disappeared, but left its inefaceable mark on the world. The need to conceptualize the development of nationalism in the post-colonial states and struggles against remnants of the colonial order forced theorists in the former colonies, and later in the former imperial capitals, to address the history of Western overseas empires. However, post-colonialism did not create its own conceptual frameworks and methodologies for the systematic analysis of the imperial phenomenon.²¹ Partly, this can be explained by the fact that post-colonial studies treat empire (equated with colonial power) as an essential characteristic of Western society as such, thus making no distinction between the imperial center and the colonies.²² Post-colonial critique focuses exclusively on the cultural practices through which empire as a form of power was realized, while ignoring the problem of the relations between structures, such as nations, states, and collective identities.²³ Accordingly, no “post-colonial” history of the British Empire provides a narrative of the direct interaction (not mediated by London) or mutual influences between the groups, peoples, and territories included in the empire has been written. Post-colonial studies, despite their significant achievements in the study of cultural practices in situations of predetermined unequal cultural or social contact, were not interested in empire as a special form for organizing multi-confessional and multi-ethnic polities. They tended to overlook

²¹ See the collection of relevant articles by Antoinette Burton (Ed.). *After the Imperial Turn. Thinking With and Through the Nation*. Durham, 2003, which essentially proclaims a return to the nation due to the inadequacy of the conceptual apparatus of post-colonial studies.

²² Empire penetrates every locus of social life as a non-institutional function of Western modernity. Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (Eds.). *Tensions of Empire. Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*. Berkeley, 1997.

²³ Partly it can be explained by the fact that post-colonial studies attempt to deconstruct dominant narratives of the past that were imposed upon the colonized by the colonizers. Hence, the main thrust of post-colonial studies is aimed at deciphering cultural meanings and at revealing the in-built mechanisms of power. See, for example, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. *Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography* // Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Eds.). *Selected Subaltern Studies*. Dehli, 1988. Pp. 3-34.

empire as a situation of undetermined boundaries and mutually open channels of influence that emanate not only from the culturally and technologically dominant center, but also from the imperial periphery. These mutual influences, a factor overlooked by post-colonial studies, would have allowed for a reconsideration of the phenomenon of “imperial context”, which often promoted the realization of a classic scenario of Western nation-building in situations best described as imperial (e.g., the emergence of a British identity on the Isles).²⁴ On the other hand, increased attention paid by colonial studies to cultural practices and power in the context of modern Western society led to the reification of the discursive boundary between the “East” and the “West”,

²⁴ Pondering the problem of the post-structuralist paradigm of social sciences and humanities, some authors have noted the dialectical phenomenon when the conceptual framework of the dominant discourse is reproduced despite the fact that it was against this very discourse that the conceptual change and deconstruction was directed. (H. A. Veeseer. *The New Historicism // Idem. (Ed.). The New Historicism Reader*. New York, London, 1994). The leading theorists of post-colonial studies partly admitted to this: Partha Chatterjee. *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World. A Derivative Discourse*. Minneapolis, 1986. Thus, post-colonial studies have clearly reproduced demarcations (including racial ones) between the center and the periphery. This boundary certainly prevents proper reflection upon the empire as a zone of interaction. The need to overcome this impasse is well postulated in A. Stoler, F. Cooper. *Between Metropolis and Colony. Rethinking a Research Agenda // Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (Eds.). Tensions of Empire. Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*. Berkeley, 1997. See also research into this problem in Linda Colley. *Britons. Forging a Nation, 1707-1837*. New Haven, 1992. A different approach to the problem of imperial contexts in Western Europe was offered by J. G. A. Pocock (Pocock was born in New Zealand and his attempt to alter the national format of writing British history is a result of both intellectual propositions and personal biography). J. G. A. Pocock. *British History. A Plea for a New Subject // Journal of Modern History*. 1975. Vol. 47. No. 4. Pp. 601-621. Instead of a post-colonial vision of the metropolis as a homogeneous subject of colonialism, Pocock puts forward an idea of a complex and composite nucleus of the British empire, which allows him to include into this de-centralized space of the imperial center “white” colonies. These colonies, according to Pocock, cannot be written into the exclusionist narrative of English history due to the presence of the Scottish, Irish, and English elements and a new culture formed by the immigrants in their contacts with each other. See a discussion of this approach in the special issue on “Britishness and Europeaness” of the *Journal of British Studies*. 1992. Vol. 31. No. 4. See also Kathleen Wilson (Ed.). *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660-1840*. Cambridge, 2004.

despite the *a priori* proclaimed intention by theorists of post-colonialism to deconstruct this line of separation.²⁵

Thus, the reluctance of post-colonial studies to pay attention to the problem of horizontal interactions between different elements and their obsession with the opposition East and West in the concept of Orientalism forces us to search for new models to rethink the uneven space circumscribed by indefinite and porous boundaries.²⁶ It appears to us that studies of continental European empires provide rich material for analyses of the processes we are witnessing on the global scene today. Correspondingly, the very concept of empire should move from the category of a historical term empirically fixating the reality of the past (multinational dynastic empires) to a category of a modern

²⁵ In particular, this is one reproach for Edward Said's concept of "orientalism", which opposes a homogenous "West" to a diverse "East". E. Said. *Orientalism*. New York, 1978. On the concept of "orientalism", see the forum "Orientalism: 20 Years On" // *American Historical Review*. 2000. Vol. 105. N. 4. Pp. 1204-1249. See also methodologically important work on the creation of the image of the "Balkans": Maria Todorova. *Imagining the Balkans*. New York, 1997; Milica Bakic-Hayden and Robert Hayden. *Orientalist Variations on the Theme "Balkans" in Symbolic Geography in Recent Yugoslav Cultural Politics* // *Slavic Review*. 1992. Vol. 51. Pp. 1-15. For a study of the symbolic geography of Central and Eastern Europe in an era of change, see in Sorin Antohi. *Habits of the Mind: Europe's Post-1989 Symbolic Geographies* // S. Antohi (Ed.). *Between Past and Future. The Revolutions of 1989 and Their Aftermath*. Budapest, 2000. Pp. 61-79. For a discussion of the applicability of "orientalism" to Russian history, see Adeeb Khalid. *Russian History and the Debate over Orientalism*; and Nathaniel Knight. *On Russian Orientalism: A Response to Adeeb Khalid* // *Kritika*. 2000. Vol. 1. No. 4. Pp. 701-715. There is a subsequent discussion that takes into account a problematic relationship between European modernity and the Russian historical experience (with the participation of D. Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, I. Gerasimov, A. Etkind, N. Knight, E. Vorobieva, S. Velychenko) in *Ab Imperio*. 2002. Vol. 3. N. 1. Pp. 239-367. An interesting perspective that does not deny Said's contribution to the study of the cultural mechanisms of domination and subjugation, and yet attempts to overcome the ontologized boundary between "East" and "West" on the example of Ottoman history U. Makdisi. *Ottoman Orientalism* // *American Historical Review*. 2002. Vol. 107. No. 3. Pp. 768-796.

²⁶ For example, the erosion of classical sovereignty and the boundaries of national and social cultures in Europe illustrated by the development of the European Union is paralleled by the emergence of new nationalism, which re-formatted the legacy of 19th century nationalism and put forward new priorities, such as issues of migration, distribution of social welfare, and intercultural/inter-confessional dialogue. See, for example, Rogers Brubaker. *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*. New York, 1996.

analytical model that helps to understand historical experiences in an era marked by a crisis of modern categories of analysis and politics. Following Negri's logic, empire is needed today not in order to reestablish it as a category of political practice, but as an analytical conception to explore various processes in a rapidly changing world, in which the problem of "managing diversity" has become a leading priority.²⁷

Empire in Russian Studies: Limits of the National Paradigm

Despite the fact that historians of Russia have had to deal with a state that proclaimed itself the "Russian Empire", the problem of the functioning of a heterogeneous political, social, and cultural space has not been at the heart of the discipline. Studies of Russia as a multinational empire were partly a result of the renewed interest in the nationalist perspective after the Revolution and of the temporary disintegration of the empire. For the most part, representatives of this renewed interest focused on the legal status of peoples incorporated into the empire.²⁸ Later, Richard Pipes offered his concept of the formation of the Soviet Union as an exclusively forced and repressive restoration of the Russian Empire by the Bolshevik Party, an idea that proved extremely influential during the Cold War. Many German scholars shared this concept.²⁹ The growing crisis of the USSR in the late 1980s again brought to the fore the question of the heterogeneity of the Russian and Soviet historical experiences, as a result of which the first studies of Russia as a multinational empire appeared. The most important of these was undoubtedly the work of Andreas Kappeler.³⁰ However, it focused more on the sum of national expe-

²⁷ Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri. *Empire*. P. XIV.

²⁸ For example, Georg von Rauch, the author of one of the first western studies of Russian imperial history, reiterated the specific views of the Baltic Germans. See G. von Rauch. *Rußland. Staatliche Einheit und nationale Vielfalt; föderalistische Kräfte und Ideen in der russischen Geschichte*. München, 1953; Idem. *Geschichte der baltischen Staaten*. Stuttgart, 1970; Idem. *Geschichte der Sowjetunion*. Stuttgart, 1990; Idem. *Zarenreich und Sowjetstaat im Spiegel der Geschichte. Aufsätze und Vorträge // M. Garleff (Hrsg.)*. Göttingen, 1980. Another pioneer of Russian imperial history, Leonid Strakhovsky, analyzed the status of non-Russian peoples of empire from the point of view of their legal status. Nevertheless, he perceived Russia as a national state, which, moreover, "tolerantly" handled its "minorities. Leonid Strakhovsky. *Constitutional Aspects of the Imperial Russian Government's Policy Toward National Minorities // The Journal of Modern History*. 1941. Vol. 4. No. 13. Pp. 467-492.

²⁹ G. Simon. *Nationalismus und Nationalitätenpolitik in der Sowjetunion*. Baden-Baden, 1986; Idem. *Verfall und Untergang des sowjetischen Imperiums*. München, 1993.

³⁰ Andreas Kappeler. *Russland als Vielvölkerreich. Entstehung, Geschichte, Zerfall*. München, 1993.

riences of the peoples incorporated into the Russian empire rather than on the problem of imperial space. The work reduced the complex configurations of national, confessional, and estate relations to binary oppositions between the “Russifying center” and the national borderlands (with the possible exception of the Baltic provinces).³¹ Kappeler’s *Rußland als Vielvoelkerreich* undoubtedly opened a new stage in the historiography of the Russian Empire, but it could not set itself entirely free from the then dominant climate of the “renaissance of national history”, which proliferated in the post-Soviet period and which tended to use retrospectively ethnic research frameworks.³²

By that time, Western researchers had accumulated a certain amount of material on the history of particular peoples and ethnic, confessional, and cultural groups in the Russian Empire. Emigration by representatives of national intelligentsias facilitated this process. Among the most important works, one can point to studies of the histories of Siberia, Central Asia, the Caucasus, the Baltics, the Volga region, and Ukraine.³³ The sum of separate national histories did not in itself create an imperial perspective, but it was an important precondition for further syntheses. For example, crossing the boundaries of Russian history proper, the history of Russia’s Jews placed processes in Russia and the USSR into European and world contexts.³⁴ On the other hand, the powerful historiographic tradition of Ukrainian studies that emerged in the diaspora created the preconditions for further reflection upon the dynamic (and bound-

³¹ See A. Kapeller. *Mazepintsy, malorossy, khokhly. Ukraintsy v etnicheskoj ierarkhii Rossijskoj imperii // Rossiia – Ukraina: istoriia vzaimootnoshenii / Ed. by A. Miller, V. Reprintsev, B. Floria. Moscow, 1997. Pp. 125-144.*

³² See also Kapeller’s discussion of the reception of his work in the post-Soviet world: A. Kapeller. *Rossiia – mnogonatsional’naia imperiia. Nekotorye razmyshleniia vosem’ let spustia posle publikatsii // Ab Imperio. 2000. No. 1. Pp. 9-22.*

³³ See bibliographies in I. Gerasimov, S. Glebov, A. Kaplunovskii, M. Mogilner, A. Semyonov (Eds.). *Novaia imperskaia istoriia postsovetskogo prostranstva. Kazan, 2004. Pp. 575-628.*

³⁴ J. D. Klier. *Russia Gathers Her Jews. The Origins of the “Jewish Question” in Russia 1772-1825. DeKalb, 1985. Idem. Imperial Russia’s Jewish Question, 1855-1881. Cambridge, 1995; Idem and Shlomo Lambroza (Eds.). Pogroms. Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Jewish History. Cambridge, 1991; J. Frankel. *Prophesy and Politics. Socialism, Nationalism and the Russian Jews, 1862-1917. Cambridge, 1981; Eli Lederhendler. The Road to Modern Jewish Politics. Political Tradition and Political Reconstruction in the Jewish Community of Tsarist Russia. Oxford, 1989; S. J. Zipperstein. The Jews of Odessa. A Cultural History, 1794-1881. Stanford, 1985; Idem. *Ahad Ha’am and the Origins of Zionism. Halban, 1993; Michael Stanislawski. Zionism and the Fin de Siecle. Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism from Nordau to Jabotinsky. Berkeley, 2001 and others. A more detailed discussion is to be found in an issue of Ab Imperio dedicated to this topic. “The Limits of Marginality: Jews as Inorodtsy of Continental Empires.” Ab Imperio. 2003. No. 4.***

aries) between “us” and “them” within the empire.³⁵ If the history of the Russian Jews, who traditionally served as the archetypical “other,” has helped to clarify (or, to be more precise, to complicate) the external contours of the empire, the history of Ukrainians in the Russian Empire and the USSR has problematized the idea that some homogeneous/primordial/fundamental “nucleus” opposed to the periphery existed.

The disintegration of the Soviet Union – the last multinational empire in Europe – became one of the factors determining the renewed interest in empire in the late 20th century. In this way, the particular situation of Russian studies over the past decade was that the problem of “regional studies” was superimposed upon a new global research agenda in the study of Russia and the USSR. Historians of Russia and the USSR are today in search of a new narrative and new conceptual frameworks for researching and describing the past of a complex and composite imperial entity. As the dynamics of the development of this research have demonstrated, this geographic and temporal entity cannot in principle be reduced to any of the paradigms that has emerged over the past decade: neither the conception of a composite multinational empire³⁶ nor attribution of the social and political working of the empire to the distant past can be seen as optimal models capturing the heterogeneity of the Russian Empire and the USSR. The discussion of the limits and foundations of the application of the classic colonial empire model to the historical experiences of Russia and the Soviet Union has not ended in definite consensus. In particular, it remains to be seen whether the post-structuralist genealogy of the basic concept of this model – that of the modern subject and its power – can be successfully employed in the Russian and Soviet contexts.

The 1990s passed in the shadow of a radical deconstruction of traditional explanatory schemes and analytical models in Russian studies in the West and the emerging national historiographies.³⁷ Yet, no adequate integrating interpretative structure was found to match the traditional ones. Nevertheless, some general contours of a new methodology for analyzing Russia’s hetero-

³⁵ See a more detailed discussion in the Ukrainian historiographic forum (N. Iakovenko, Ia. Hrytsak, G. Kasianov, Th. Prymak, A. Zayarnyuk) of *Ab Imperio*. 2003. No. 2. Pp. 376-519.

³⁶ Andreas Kappeler. *Russland als Vielvölkerreich: Entstehung, Geschichte, Zerfall*. München, 1993.

³⁷ These processes have been reflected upon in the permanent rubric of *Ab Imperio*, which is dedicated to the emergence of new national historiographies in relation to the politics of identity and the new academic markets. So far, the journal has hosted debates on Baltic, Moldovan, Ukrainian, Tatar, Kazakh, and Cossack histories.

geneous imperial society have become clearer and are defined by the needs of the current research agenda. We are lacking theory to understand how archaic institutions manage to preserve their specific character while being transformed under the impact of modernization processes and the intrusion of normative modernity from the West; we still cannot answer for certain the question about the character of nation-building processes in multinational contexts, taking into account the various horizontal and vertical ties penetrating imperial society. We do not have a model describing the dynamics of society's development in the imperial context. Should the boundaries of that society necessarily coincide with that of the state? Or do we need to determine the degree of integration of each ethnic, social, or cultural segment into the empire on a case-by-case basis? Finally, scholars lack a theory to explain the empire's disintegration (the question of the unavoidable/relative pre-determination of disintegration remains open). We also need more theory to understand the specifics of the post-imperial situation, in which many imperial practices have been inherited by the newly independent successor nation-states.

A New Imperial History of Russia and the Soviet Union

We offered the reader a collection of articles that attempted to reflect on the state of the art in an emerging field within Russian and Soviet studies.³⁸ As we hope, this field will grow into a New Imperial History of Russia. As the articles in this collection illustrate, several research paradigms exist simultaneously in the field of Russian studies. First, the tendency to uncover "white spots" of history, which began during the perestroika years, remains highly relevant. This tendency attempts to explore various specific historical subjects and to help erode the "centripetal" narrative of Russian history. It is within this paradigm that we detect traditional perceptions of history as, first of all, a history of the nation. The latter appears as an entity that equals itself throughout the centuries and lives on through "formations" within the framework of a homogeneous "national body." One encounters the Romantic narrative in its pure form quite seldom today. However, the narrative remains a significant part of many studies, especially at the level of methodological assumptions and research frameworks, which artificially separate one's "own" subject of research from that of the "others"

³⁸ I. Gerasimov, S. Glebov, A. Kaplunovski, M. Mogilner, A. Semyonov (Eds.). *Novaia imperskaia istoriia postsovetского prostranstva*. Kazan, 2004.

(empire, other ethnic groups, “non-national” elite behavior, etc). While criticizing such an approach, we have to admit that our new imperial history ought to rely upon the multiplicity of situations in which groups interact with each other (including interaction between nations) and therefore it should always remain involved in a dialogue with the national perspective.³⁹ Besides, the national perspective compensates for one of the shortcomings of the concept of empire; that is, the tendency to treat the latter as a historical experience frozen in an archaic form. This tendency, as we attempted to show above, is built into the political language of modernity.

An alternative and broadly generalizing research perspective is represented by the collection of articles in the *New Imperial History of Post-Soviet Space*.⁴⁰ This perspective is rooted in traditional political and institutional histories. Originally, this tradition of scholarship substituted the study of central organs of power through their archives for the history of the enormous and infinitely diverse country. However, a modified version of this historiographic perspective is relevant for the formation of New Imperial History. It counterbalances the perspective of national history, which precludes research on such phenomena as diasporas, displaced and non-titular (in the definition of nation-builders) groups of population (with the Jews being the most conspicuous example in the Western provinces of the empire).⁴¹ National

³⁹ It is interesting that in the peculiar post-Soviet situation – perceived as a liberation from the “prison of peoples” – national histories are identified with “history from below”, which is in direct opposition to the West European understanding of national history as the dominant discourse of violence, exclusion, and suppression. It would suffice to recall Pierre Nora’s project of *lieux de memoir*, the revisionist pathos of which was directed at the historicization of memory and the unraveling of historiography’s role as an agent in memory construction. However, even in the East European context, national history gives rise to a meta-narrative that maintains overtly rigid and exclusive boundaries. This meta-narrative represses the heterogeneity of the past by creating a progressive map of the nation’s development.

⁴⁰ I. Gerasimov, S. Glebov, A. Kaplunovski, M. Mogilner, A. Semyonov (Eds.). *Novaia imperskaia istoriia postsovetskogo prostranstva*. Kazan, 2004.

⁴¹ In that sense the concept of “imperialist historiography” loses its analytical meaning because both the “scheme of Russian history” (as distinct from the earlier historiographic experiments with Russian [rossiiskaia] history by I. Georgi and even N. M. Karamzin) and the ethno-populist historical canons of Russian (regionalists in Siberia) and non-Russian (proto)national movements are constructed on a common Romantic and positivist interpretation of history as an evolution of a single national body. We can detect today a scholarly interest in those directions of Russian history that did not follow the nation-centered narrative of Russia’s past. For example, A. Kapeller looks at the pre-national discourse of Russia as a multiethnic state (I. G. Georgi. *Opisanie vsekh v Rossiiskom gosudarstve obitaiushchikh narodov, a takzhe ikh zhiteiskikh obriadov, ver, obyknovenii, zhilishch, odezhd, i prochikh dostoprimechatel’nostei*. 3 Vols. Sankt-Peterburg, 1776-1777).

history also excludes research into proto-national identities, which were formed on the basis of regional, confessional, and estate markers in the East European region of belated and incomplete modernization. These identities did not necessarily connect their carriers with the national language, national territory, or the national past. National history does not presuppose a study of how empire stimulated the nation-building of non-titular nationalities through policies of preservation or even strengthened traditional institutions and customs in the course of conscious attempts by the imperial center to balance competing national projects. Finally, the nation-oriented framework of analysis ignores the supranational identities that formed as a result of co-habitation by various ethnic populations in given regions or as the empire attempted to implement social and political practices of imperial citizenship. All these subjects require a panoramic and pan-imperial view and perspective.

In reality both approaches – the “exclusive” national and the comparative, generalizing imperial – are merged and mixed in most of the articles that were included in our collection. It seems to us that it is in this coming together

Interesting ideas on pre-national conceptualizations of Russia’s history were put forward by Paul Bushkovich. *The Formation of a National Consciousness in Early Modern Russia // Harvard Ukrainian Studies*. 1986. No. 10. Pp. 355-376. Mark von Hagen pays special attention to the problem of the “federalist tradition” in Russian political thought. According to von Hagen, it contains a range of alternatives to the nation-centered historical narrative. M. von Hagen. *Writing History of Russia as Empire. The Perspective of Federalism // Kazan, Moskva, Peterburg. Rossiiskaia imperiia v zgliadom iz raznykh uglov / Ed. by B. Gasparov, C. Evtuhov, A. Ospovat, M. Von Hagen*. Moscow, 1997. Pp. 393-410. At the same time, it is clear that we lack works that treat the intellectual genealogy and consolidation of the national narrative of Russian history in the same way such exploration were conducted on West European material. See, for example, C. Crossley. *French Historians and Romanticism*. Thierry, Guizot, the Saint-Simonians, Quinet, Michelet. London, 1993. The existing literature either follows the established tradition of discussing major schools of Russian historiography or simply makes no distinction between imperial and national characteristics of historiographic canons. T. Emmons. *On the Problem of Russia’s “Separate Path” in Late Imperial Historiography // Th. Sanders (Ed.). Historiography of Imperial Russia. The Profession and Writing of History in a Multinational State*. Armonk, 1999. Pp. 163-187 and other articles in this collection focusing on Russian historiography. See also M. Bassin. *Turner, Solov’ev, and the “Frontier Hypothesis”. The Nationalist Signification of Open Spaces // The Journal of Modern History*. 1993. Vol. 65. No. 3. Pp. 473-511. A notable exception is the works by S. Becker, which explore political and cultural functions of the nation centered narrative of Russian history. S. Becker. *Contributing to a Nationalist Ideology. Histories of Russia in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century // Russian History*. 1986. Vol. 13. No. 4. Pp. 331-353.

of different research perspectives that we can identify the most powerful potential for a New Imperial History. A New Imperial History allows us to focus on problems of *method* for the analysis of empire and not on classifications and definitions. Indeed, as many attempts have clearly demonstrated, no “imperiology”, a universal theory of empire equally applicable to Russia, Great Britain, Ancient Rome, or the Aztecs, is possible, and the very undertaking is absurd.

In recent years such attempts at a structural and typological imperiology have been made in the framework of increasingly popular comparative studies of empires. The basic assumption here is that having left the boundaries of a particular empire, having compared certain empires identified on a number of certain features, having discovered “the general and the particular” in their functioning, one can distill the structural element of the empire and explain the mechanisms of its operation.⁴² No doubt, comparative studies of empires can alter our perceptions of the uniqueness or specificity of certain processes and phenomena; they suggest mutual “borrowing” by empires or even (in some cases) their logic of development. The principal methodological weakness of this approach is caused by a conceptual “natal trauma.” It is genealogically connected to the structuralist paradigm of social analysis. Structuralism leads to the reification of borders between objects necessary to run comparisons, which damages the exploration of areas of interactions (boundaries or regions that untied rather than separated populations). It also tends to perceive common social and cultural characteristics as the result of typologically similar autonomous development, but not as the potential product of mutual influences, common experiences, and reactions to common challenges. It is exactly because of the need to compare single objects rather than complex composite hierarchies that the structural and typological comparative studies ascribe internal homogeneity to the extremely

⁴² Rossiiskaiia imperiia v sravnitel'noi perspektive. Sbornik statei / Ed. by A. Miller. Moscow, 2004. This collection was a result of the conference “History of Empires. Comparative Methods of Studying and Teaching” held in Moscow on June 7-9, 2003. This conference, in turn reflecting the thematic and methodological orientation of the “imperial” project, was supported by The Open Society Institute. A “structuralist” reading of comparative studies of empire, see in A. Miller. Between Local and Inter-Imperial: Russian Imperial History in Search of Scope and Paradigm // *Kritika*. 2004. No. 1. Pp. 7-26. A parallel project is being realized in Vienna by the Austrian Academy of Sciences, which held a conference in March 2004 on “Power and Subjects in Comparative History of Continental Empires, 1700-1920”. See http://www.oeaw.ac.at/shared/news/2004/pdf/historische_einladung.pdf. Last visited July 15, 2004.

heterogeneous and dynamically changing territory of empire. Besides, existing comparative history projects limit themselves to the experiences of continental empires, such as that of the Romanovs, the Habsburgs, or the Ottomans, thus tending to downplay the cultural component of imperial history, which is already suffering from an overt inclination toward conventional political and social historical methods. An approach that compares the Russian Empire exclusively to continental empires precludes investigation of processes of Europeanization, without which one cannot adequately assess practices of cultural colonization, mapping, and description of the territory and interpret imperial ideologies.

Thus, “imperial comparativism” as such cannot be seen as a universal method for the creation of an analytical model of empire. One can only compare directly those phenomena that were characteristic of all social and political structures of a given era,⁴³ whereas the sought after historical semantics of empire remains a *Ding an sich*. Its reconstruction requires a totally different framework for “thick description.” As a result, comparative studies tend to reduce the meaning of empire to aggressive foreign policy and to various schemes for the mobilization and distribution of resources, both of which are equally characteristic of “non-imperial” states (the differences are really in the scale of these actions). Often, these characteristics were simply borrowed from the more efficient nation-states of Western Europe.

The inadequacy of the research paradigms described above obviously cannot be “*aufgehoben*” through a mechanistic synthesis. Such a synthesis, moreover, is precluded by the indefinite epistemological status of empire in modern social sciences and humanities. Is empire a historical category, an analytical concept, a metaphor for heterogeneity, or simultaneously all of the above? In our view, empire is a research context rather than a structure, a problem rather than a diagnosis. Any society can be “thought of” as an empire, just as features characteristic of nation-states – indeed characteristic of entire epochs – can be discerned in any empire.⁴⁴ The key to the paradox

⁴³ Both Sultan Mukhammed II and Empress Catherine II annexed bordering territories, and yet just comparing the expansionist foreign policy and regimes of governing annexed lands in the Ottoman and the Russian empires does not reveal any imperial “specifics.” Outside of the concrete and unique circumstances, we can only compare technologies, which are determined by the level of development of material and spiritual culture.

⁴⁴ It was this approach that inspired the organizers of yet another “imperial” conference which took place in Warsaw in September 2004 on “Problem Imperium Rosyjskiego w Historii Rosji, Polski, Litwy i Ukrainy (XVIII-początek XXI w.)” The main sponsor of the conference was the Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences.

is the fact that the analytical apparatus of modernity is entirely “national” and thus empire cannot be described within any single model or meta-narrative. One can see empire only by combining different research frameworks. By pointing to the redundancy of scholastic debates about the “true” essence of this or that term, new imperial history offers a multidimensional view of social, political, and cultural actors, and of the spaces in which they function. At the same time, it takes into account specific effects of modernization in the Eurasian territory, where a particular mixing of modern and pre-modern social identities took place.⁴⁵

Thus, new imperial history appears in the form of an “archeology” of knowledge about empire. We understand “archeology” in the sense of a Foucauldian post-structuralist paradigm, which deconstructs basic and normative concepts of the social sciences and humanities.⁴⁶ Despite the lack of consensus on the applicability of Foucauldian approaches to Russia’s imperial history, this method has immense potential for a revision of the recently formed orthodoxy in evaluating the Russian empire as a political, cultural, and social space neatly divided by national – and only national – lines and boundaries. An archeology of knowledge about empire allows the demonstration of how a “common” past is appropriated in multiethnic regions and cities (St. Petersburg, Warsaw, Odessa, Vilna, Baku, Kiev, etc). This archeology of knowledge permits the restoration of the palimpsest of social identities (regional, confessional, estate, etc.) that are usually narrated into the teleological and mono-logical paradigm of the building of a nation, class, or confession. The archeology of knowledge renders possible a contextualization

⁴⁵ These aspects of the history of the Russian empire and USSR were discussed in the four issues of *Ab Imperio* published in 2002 within the framework of the annual theme of “Russian Empire/USSR and the Paradoxes of Modernization”.

⁴⁶ Another reading of Foucault can be found in A. Miller’s introduction to his “Ukrainskii vopros” v politike vlastei i russkom obshchestvennom mnenii. *Vtoria polovina XIX veka*. Petersburg, 2000. Miller accepts a Foucauldian understanding of discourse as the normative version of modernity. In application to the topic treated by the author, such a discourse divides the modern world along national lines. The task of new imperial history is formulated on the basis of the critical part of Foucault’s legacy, at the center of which is the deconstruction of normative versions of modernity through historicization of the emergence of modern practices and norms of social life. On ignoring the critical component of the post-structuralist theory in post-Soviet humanities see S. Glebov, M. Mogilner, A. Semenov. “The Story of Us.” *Proshloe i perspektivy modernizatsii gumanitarnogo znanija glazami istorikov* // *Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie*. 2003. № 59. Pp. 190-210.

of the contemporary processes of constructing the national past through historiography as a purposeful act and an instrument of political struggles.

One note is in order on this particular aspect of the post-structuralist mode of writing new imperial history. Quite often the concept of “imperial history” is perceived as an attempt to interpret or even to resurrect the political space of empire through a rejection of clear national lines of division in a diachronic perspective. Of course, it is upon the assertion of these lines of division that the logic of any national history rests. Such a perception clearly points to the positivist and Marxist foundations of the methodological principles of post-Soviet historiography and reveals an inability on the part of many professional historians to distance their scholarly research from political discourses. The latter point once again demonstrates specific features of the political language of nationalism in Eastern Europe (at least currently), which is determined more by national images of the past than, for example, by legal discourses. This professional position also appears to be impacted by a traditional paradigm of historical knowledge untroubled by innovative approaches, such as “history from below”, micro-history, post-structuralist anthropology, and oral history – in other words, by critical and democratizing approaches within Marxist and post-Marxist thought. Within the framework of the traditional historical paradigm, the history of stateless peoples (however remote in time and ambiguous the desired statehood) with no aristocracy and elite culture was perceived as not entirely legitimate because it was based on insufficiently rich historical experience. Such an attitude by professional historians is often transformed into myth-making and, even more importantly, it precludes exploration of potentially fruitful directions of analyses into an empire’s national, supranational, and non-national aspects of historical processes. We hope that the emerging field of New Imperial History will not become a political battleground. We envision a dynamic area of scholarly research and theoretical reflection, especially important at a time when issues of interethnic communication and imperial legacies have become increasingly acute.

SUMMARY

Настоящая публикация является англоязычной версией введения к сборнику “Новая имперская история постсоветского пространства” (Казань, 2004). Авторы предлагают историческую

генеалогии термина “империя” и анализируют современные историографические направления в области изучения империй. Один из основных тезисов статьи состоит в том, что современная нам семантика концепта империи, со всеми присущими ей негативными коннотациями, сформировалась в эпоху национального государства и отражала представления о политико-социальной норме и прогрессе, характерные для “эпохи наций и национализма”. Современная актуализация интереса к империи (в связи с процессами европейского расширения, проявлением империализма во внешней политике США, с распадом СССР и советского блока в целом) не приводит к переосмыслению языка научного анализа. В статье ставится вопрос о том, как происходит этот процесс в рамках общественных и гуманитарных наук – от сравнительной “империологии” до постколониальных исследований. Выявляя ограничения разных исследовательских парадигм, авторы приходят к выводу, что концепт империи должен перейти из категории исторического термина, эмпирически фиксирующего ускользнувшую от внимания модерного знания реальность прошлого (многонациональные династические империи), в статус современной аналитической модели, позволяющей осмыслить исторический опыт в эпоху кризиса современных категорий анализа и политики. Исходя из этого, формулируется идея Новой Имперской Истории, где империя предстает как исследовательская ситуация, а не структура, проблема, а не диагноз. “Помыслить как империю” можно любое общество, точно так же как в номинальной “империи” можно обнаружить черты – или целые эпохи – национального. Новая Имперская История выступает в роли “археологии” знания об империи, понимаемой в духе постструктуралистской фуколдианской парадигмы, подвергающей деконструкции базовые и нормативные идеи социальных наук. Археология знания об империи позволяет наглядно увидеть, как происходит национальная апроприация “общего” прошлого в полиэтничных регионах и имперских городах. Именно археология знания об империи позволяет восстановить палимпсест социальных идентичностей (региональных, конфессиональных, сословных), которые обычно встраивают в телеологическую и монологическую парадигму строительства нации или класса/конфессии. Она же делает возможным контекстуализацию современного процесса конструирования национального прошлого через историографию как целенаправленное действие и инструмент политической борьбы.