



COLONIALISM AND EXPLOITATION: A POSTMODERN CRITIQUE ON RUSSIA

SÖMÜRGEÇİLİK VE SÖMÜRÜ: RUSYA ÜZERİNE POSTMODERN BİR ELEŞTİRİ

Abstract

In this article, following an interdisciplinary and Postmodern view, there will be adopted a different kind of approach to the ambiguous relations between the people who may be both in the position of 'exploiter' and 'exploited' and to the vast Russian history and geography. Accordingly, despite its blurred lines, Postmodernism will be taken as a chance to approach to the current crises of nation-states and their colonial legacies. Hence, the idea that 'everything is like a text' might be taken as one basic principle for 'decoded' or 'deconstructed' societies and their rulers, and this make us more suspicious against the established status-quos. As Russian logic has proved us several times in history and also today, systematic uses of language as an 'inherently unreliable cultural construct', must be seen therefore as the key for new ideologies for all nation-states. These states tend to change the overall picture always in favor of their 'rational' causes, if their masses are already prepared for more de-codes and de-constructions. So, this work with its interdisciplinary line will try to combine theoretical discussions on the thoughts on the terms; 'exploitation' and 'colonialism' in general with some findings and definitions on postmodernism with what happened in historical practices in the case of Russian affairs.

Melih DEMİRTAŞ*

* Doktor Adayı, Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi (ODTÜ), Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Bölge Çalışmaları Doktora Programı

E-posta/E-mail:

melih.demirtas@metu.edu.tr

Orcid: 0000-0002-6206-1349

Keywords: Exploitation, Colonialism, Postmodernism, Orientalism, Russia.

Öz

Bu makalede, Rusya'nın geniş tarih ve coğrafyasına ve bu yolla hem "sömüren" hem de "sömürülen" kişiler arasındaki muğlak ilişkilere disiplinlerarası ve Postmodern bir bakışla, farklı bir yaklaşım benimsenecektir. Buna göre, üzerinde devam eden tartışmalara rağmen, Postmodernizm, ulus-devletlerin mevcut krizlerine ve onların sömürge miraslarına yanıt verme şansı tanıyan bir yaklaşım olarak değerlendirilecektir. Bu nedenle, "her şeyin bir metin gibi olduğu" ana fikri, "kodları bozulmuş" veya "yapı-sökümü" gerçekleştirilmiş toplumlar ve onların yöneticileri için temel bir prensip olarak ele alınabilir ve bu bize yerleşik statükolara karşı daha fazla şüpheli olmamızı sağlayacaktır. Rus mantığının tarihte ve bugün de bize birçok kez kanıtladığı gibi, dilin 'doğal olarak güvenilmez bir kültürel yapı' olarak sistematik kullanımları, tüm ulus-devletler için yeni ideolojilerin anahtarı niteliğinde görülmelidir. Bu devletler, eğer kitleleri de daha fazla kod çözme ve yapı bozma için hazırsa, genel resmi her zaman rasyonel çıkarları için değiştirme eğilimindedirler. Dolayısıyla disiplinlerarası çizgisiyle bu çalışma, 'sömürü' ve genel olarak 'sömürgecilik' kavramlarına ilişkin kuramsal tartışmaları, postmodernizme ilişkin bazı tespit ve tanımlamalarla birlikte, Rus meselesi örneğindeki tarihsel pratiklerde yaşananlarla birleştirmeye çalışacaktır.

Başvuru/Submitted: 19.08.2022

Kabul/Accepted: 14.09.2022

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sömürü, Sömürgecilik, Postmodernizm, Oryantalizm, Rusya.

Introduction

So, I will start with the fact that modern Ukraine was entirely created by Russia or, to be more precise, by Bolshevik, Communist Russia. This process started practically right after the 1917 revolution and Lenin and his associates did it in a way that was extremely harsh on Russia – by separating, severing what is historically Russian land. Nobody asked the millions of people living there what they thought (Putin, 2022).

Vladimir Putin, President of the Russian Federation said these words on February 21st, 2022 just before the start of the current attacks on Ukrainian cities by the Russian military forces (Putin, 2022). Surely, Russian state and its governing elite are aware about how people's destinies can be altered with some competency on words and with a skillful usage of some texts according to changeable historical and sociological evaluations. Russia with its semi-dark, semi-lighter past has appeared therefore as one of the most interesting case studies to approach to social sciences with a new style of thinking and mostly with an interdisciplinary sense.

In this article, as a follower of interdisciplinary methods, I chose to be in line with a postmodern stance in terms of ambiguous relations between the people who may have both exploiter and exploited statuses in the vast Russian history and geography. Accordingly, with a very clear sense in this article I will follow Gellner to grasp postmodernism where he says "everything is a 'text', that the basic material of texts, societies and almost anything is meaning, that meanings are there to be decoded or 'deconstructed', that the notion of objective reality is suspect" (Gellner, 2003:23). So, as postmodernism indicates and Russian logic has proved to show us several times in history, "all reasonably systematic uses of language are to be seen as having a particular power-enforcing function. You believe what the young surgeon tells you, and so give him permission to anaesthetize you, cut you up, and help you recover" (Butler, 2002:45). This "surgeon" can be thought also as politician, military or diplomatic personnel and in everyday life this leads the way for more "language games" where new styles of discourses continue to flourish and consolidate "the authority of those who are empowered to use [these discourses i.e., the language] within a social group" (Butler, 2002).

To understand all these blurred views on power of discourse, in the first part of the article, I will deepen into the theoretical discussions in order to grasp the relations among exploiter-exploited sides, mostly with the help of the terminology on colonialism. In the second part, I plan to combine the thoughts on exploitation and colonialism in general with some findings and definitions on postmodernism and debates on it. In the final part, my findings in theory will be merged empirically upon Russia. The character of the historical Russian state power and their leading voices will support my main thesis that exploitation is just a matter of changeable fact for states like Russia, and for the timely-constructed agendas of their elites and statesmen.

1. Colonialism, Nation States and Understanding Exploitation as a Modern Method

The system of Westphalia and the rise of the modern nation states backed by the ideals of the French Revolution in 1789 signify a turning point in the world history. Specifically, the Westphalian system of states in 1648 and approx. 400 years since then has been in line with the supremacy of contemporary colonial or neo-colonial states whose ambitions for more territorial sovereignty has brought new assimilative strategies for the "others". The practice and power of the nation-states "makes nationalism one of the most powerful forces in contemporary societies" slowly but strongly until the point, we have arrived today (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 2000:136). During the ages of the statist powers and their "modern" nations whose ignorance and exclusions to the indigenous people or in general, to the "others", who were continuously conquered and/or assimilated, some principles backed by colonization have appeared as key to grasp the world history (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 2000).

Here, what Myer argues becomes significance that “colonialism represents the dominance of one area over another, an imbalance of political, economic and cultural power” (Myer, 2002:34). Moreover, to understand the “weaker” side, Eagleton rightly touches upon the point that “what any oppressed group has most vitally in common is just the shared fact of their oppression. Their collective identity is in this sense importantly” (Eagleton, 2001:37). However, maybe Edward Said remains as one leading name in comprehending some historical constituent elements for colonialism:

...culture played a very important, indeed indispensable role. At the heart of European culture during the many decades of imperial expansion lay what could be called an undeterred and unrelenting Eurocentrism. This accumulated experiences, territories, peoples, histories; it studied them, classified them, verified them; but above all, it subordinated them to the culture (...). All of the subjugated peoples had it in common that they were considered to be naturally subservient to a superior, advanced, developed, and morally mature Europe, whose role in the non-European world was to rule, instruct, legislate, develop, and at the proper times, to discipline, war against, and occasionally exterminate non-Europeans (Said, 2001:72).

Accordingly, among the constituent elements of the colonial understanding, that can be also labelled as a two-sided game with exploiter and exploited sides, first, “geographical imagination” opened the gates to us to deepen into the pre-defined agenda of the nation-states. In such a kind of imagination where “the demarcation of specific areas” may turn to be a natural level of professionalism, this professionalism can be backed purely by “politically laden assumptions about how the world is scaled and divided” (Smith 2016:35). In today’s “modern” terms of bureaucracy, these scales and divisions have been in line for instance, with the politically driven character of the area-selections as in the famous example of “the designation of Russian and East European Studies” by the United States (U.S.) and its allies during the Cold War, or as in the example of the Soviet/Russian historical Oriental Institutes on Turkic, Caucasian, Muslim and other Asian communities (Smith, 2016:29).

Second, despite the professionalization with high-rationalization of many experts in several states, one question remains as the insufficient “capacity to understand others” who are different from us (Fay, 1997:89-90). Although this capacity is vital in order to grasp the real essence in societies and their livings, interest-driven agendas have had the primary positions. Indeed, still considering all the states’ official bodies in policy making today, it is true that high capacity-building with departmental thinking is coupled with categorization and hierarchy. Therefore, in different states’ official centers or foreign ministries currently, with special sections linked to distinct regions like “South Asia”, “Middle East”, “Eurasia”, “Caucasia/Central Asia” etc., there has been always a “serious” and “rational” statist behavior despite the ongoing blindness to the unfamiliar areas remains as an issue (Smith, 2016:32-33).

Third, despite this existent blindness to the ‘unfamiliar’ ones, in relation with the rationalization in state-bodies, there has been also a higher level of reliance on knowledge derived from area-selectivity. That is to say, in a highly state-dominated system of the continuing world order, area-selection or regionalization might be also grasped only according to some pre-defined “geographical imagination” while it must not be forgotten that in this imagination, “production of scale is a matter of extraordinary political import” (Smith, 2016:32-33). This means rather the real essence of the communities, which include history, sociology and all necessary personal relations inside, the selected features of the groups turn to be useful for the professionals who govern them. Consequently, the general tendency of subjective selectivity has led to a new kind for sources for material or spiritual exploitation. In my opinion, in modern terms, such attempts for exploitation goes hand in hand as a post-colonial method and with what Foucault expresses in his “power/knowledge” binary overall (Foucault, 1980; Dutton, 2005:116).

Moreover, deepening this power/knowledge issue deserves a little bit more attention, while we remember the famous discussions that only the West is the powerful side who translated the "truth" inside the East according to its "western homogenous" or, "scientific reasoning" (Dutton, 2005; Said, 2003). As Boyle indicates, at the point we have arrived during the end of the Cold War, "neoliberalism and neo-conservatism are performing an awkward tango in which specific concepts of freedom, democracy, order, sovereignty, and reason, are being reified in intense ways" (Boyle 2008: 726). The Western hegemony seems to be "reinvigorating the sense that 'our' civilisation is bigger, better, and more advanced than 'others'", and that the West has "a moral duty to export and impose our concepts of progress upon other civilisations whether they want it or not" (Boyle, 2008:726).

Nevertheless, in contrast to this Western supremacy, the same motivations can be observed within the current multipolar world with the re-born of some 'others' like Russian or Chinese powers who have already proved that they may be capable hegemonies in their wider regions today. This is more or less what we are facing within diplomacy, especially since the end of World War II or the end of the Cold War. For instance, during the Cold War, we had the well-known devilish rhetoric against the Soviet Union and its allies. And still, during contemporary issues like terrorism or extremism, there is an automatic (and maybe West-oriented) tendency to focus on some Eastern or Islamic regions/states. In fact, maybe during the whole of human history, under the pressure of some popular public opinions and biased-societal reasoning, there has been no rejection of some "rational" methods of some powerful actors to explain or provide new knowledge and texts on their current threats. Indeed, it is true that there are still many scholars from the Occident who approach the issues from this narrow Orientalist perspective and approve of the natural power or hegemony of One (West or Russia or China that can be seen all as equally-professionalized rational actors presently) over the 'others' that are even "incapable of studying their own cultures" (Ho-fung, 2016).

In my opinion, powerful states' pretext based on this incapability of their minor elements can be seen in line with wider cultural considerations in their "geographical imagination" that constitutes the base for new exploitations by their nation-states. To give an example, as I will explain in the following parts, some great powers like Russia have not hesitated to use pretexts that some of their 'small' partners are so inadequate or underdeveloped to evaluate their own history or society. Such an understanding has brought more glory and strength to the powerful Russian nation over Tatar, Turkic, Georgian or Ukrainian co-partners throughout different epochs of history whether it is Imperial, Soviet, or current Federal periods. Today, President Putin's sayings against some 'Nazi-Ukrainian governors' can be grasped better in this way (Putin, 2022).

On the other hand, for those people that are seen even "incapable of studying their own cultures", some leading names like the anthropologist Eric Wolf have brought considerable new perspectives as opposed to the modernist ideas of 'rational' elites and academicians under the service of leading nation-states. So, Wolf in his famous book "Europe and the People without History" touches on significant historical eras where the effects of colonialism were still being felt heavily, but newly independent states began to appear every day as emancipated-players from being 'colonies' or 'dominions'. Rather, they appeared also as skillful creators of the web of relations between each other, as opposed to many other claims that they are "without histories" (Wolf, 1982:7-9). The demise of the Soviet Union at the beginning of the 1990's might be taken as the continuing phase of this era where new states have re-explored their own cultures, identity, and history. Such post-modern developments, in my opinion, is just in contrast to the general tendency that nurtures from the idea, Europe/West (or Russia or China), backed by their "disciplinary imperialism" or "epistemic violence of imperialism" (Dutton, 2005), are the sole center of the world with all of their ruling elites and with their colonial and capitalist achievements.

2. Postmodernism: a Chance for Escape from Exploitation?

I take Postmodernism as an important source for “reaction” or opposition against the one-sided ideas and values of modernism that has been highly utilized by modern nation-states, in the name of their dominance and new forms of exploitation. Ernest Gellner’s following words might be taken for reference in social sciences for the linkage of postmodernism and (de) colonization;

In world history, the period since the Second World War has been, amongst other things, the period of decolonization, the termination of that overt European domination of the world which had begun with the great voyages of discovery, and which reached its peak in the early twentieth century. Part of the system of ideas under consideration seems to be the claim that the two processes are linked: colonialism went with positivism, decolonization with hermeneutics, and it eventually culminates in postmodernism. Positivism is a form of imperialism, or perhaps the other way round, or both. Lucidly presented and (putatively) independent facts were the tool and expression of colonial domination; by contrast, subjectivism signifies intercultural equality and respect. The world as it truly is (if indeed it may ever truly be said to be anything) is made up of tremulous subjectivities; objective facts and generalizations are the expressions and tools of domination (Gellner, 2003:26).

As Gellner rightly touches upon, despite post-modern approach has turned to be more popular in the second half of the 20th century, and has some Eurocentric one-sided elements in evaluating various parts of human ideological history; I take it much more as a kind of resistance against an established order that nurtures new sorts of exploitation. First, as an art style of opposition, postmodernism becomes more and more common word among intellectuals during the 20th century, but I think we should have borrowed more than we did from postmodernism in the sense of political and social theories.

Jameson claims that “the traces of imperialism can therefore be detected in Western modernism, and are indeed constitutive of it; but we must not look for them in the obvious places” (Jameson, 2001: 64). And as Çalkıvık argues as “a mode of critical thinking” about universal truths and commonly-accepted rules, postmodernism turns to be a “radical” way, so that for many scholars, it is still a prolemaque realm that may have some destructive results to the established norms and mechanism (Çalkıvık, 2017). However, considering the status-quo nurtured by continuing relations of ‘exploiters-exploited’, postmodern approach may not be regarded as a mere destructive sum of thinking, rather as “a critical attitude that focuses on the question of representation and explores the ways in which dominant framings of world politics produce and reproduce relations of power: how they legitimate certain forms of action while marginalizing other ways of being, thinking, and acting” (Çalkıvık, 2017: 1). Consequently, I do not hesitate to call Postmodernism a chance, even if it is not a big one yet, to escape from the established unequal relations of the current nation-states.

There have been objections for sure that Postmodernism is not a theory at all. Thus, I also agree that rather than a single theory like the ‘holy’ Realist rhetoric on the main idea of the survival of the fittest ones, Postmodernism is more a culmination of approaches and oppositions against modernist ideal and rational world, which in fact sometimes turn to be the ideal realm only for some interest-driven and stronger actors above the exploited (formerly-colonized) ones. At that regard, as Postmodernism indicates, except some indivisible rights of human and individuals, seeking always for some other universal certainties or truths especially for the sake of nation-states and their ‘constructed’ societies will be time-consuming. That means that actors, whether they are nation-states or individuals, should re-arrange themselves to the new challenging and changing circumstances to rights and dignities of all. The following explanation from the official web-site of the famous British Tate Museum on Post-modernism and its theoretical base can be also enlightening:

While the modernists championed clarity and simplicity; postmodernism embraced complex and often contradictory layers of meaning. Anti-authoritarian by nature, postmodernism refused to recognize the authority of any single style or definition (...) Jacques Lacan (1901–1981) re-examined the psychiatry of Sigmund Freud, giving it a contemporary intellectual significance. He questioned the conventional boundaries between the rational and irrational by suggesting that the unconscious rather than being primitive, is just as complex and sophisticated in its structure as the conscious. He proposed that the unconscious is structured like a language, which allows a discourse between the unconscious and conscious and ensures that the unconscious plays a role in our experience of the world (Tate Museum Definitions).

Hence, also for international politics where some serious and darker sides of rationalist calculations continue to be alive (Devetak, 2005), major concepts of postmodern thought such as “subjectivity, language, text, and power” might be taken into consideration first of all. In this way, “epistemological and ontological challenges” of Postmodernism to our established “disciplinary knowledge production on world politics” can be grasped noticeably (Çalkıvık, 2017; Der Derian, 2016).

As this article indicates also, the choice for Postmodernism must be thought then together with the focus on the question of ‘hierarchy’ and ‘representation’ in international affairs like in domestic cases. In view of that, Çalkıvık reminds, rather than “what”, the question word of “how” becomes a considerable meaning as we ask “how world politics produce and reproduce relations of power and “how they legitimate certain forms of action while marginalizing other ways of being” (Çalkıvık, 2017:2). Accordingly, Ashley gives a concise account on postmodern challenge to the current status quos, while he provides clues to us about how should we behave in social sciences from a perspective free from the established norms of rationalism that pushes us for more at the expense of some “others”. Hence, he underlines especially on one pioneering name of state-rationalization who is Max Weber and said about him “Weber equated modernity with rationalization in science, art, morality and knowledge. All of these different types of rationalization increase the separation of the subject from its objects of understanding, enabling this subject to exercise heightened control over them” (Ashley, 1991:281-282). This anti-Weberian line can be also a guide for us.

I take the all above mentioned arguments against interest-driven rationalization of nation-states together with a struggle to the tools of hierarchy at all levels that leads the way for more exploitation in our lives whether it happens domestically or in international spheres. In this regard, in evaluating some established norms or terms like ‘Culture’ or ‘Diplomacy’ according to the logic of this state rationalization, “rejecting the notion that the nature of things is defined by universal, atemporal qualities” and to start with “impossibility of a pre-given, self-determining essence” might be some of our main principles (Çalkıvık, 2017:5). Then the postmodern idea that “the world is constituted like a text”- “a complex, multilayered, interconnected text” (Çalkıvık, 2017:7) becomes more meaningful in order to eradicate the selfish hierarchies and to weaken the adversary scopes of nation states’ one-sided rationality based on their exclusive interests.

3. Focus on Russia: Orientalism and a new Era for Expansionism and Exploitation

For my empirical part on Russia, first, I would like to share the views of Dalby’s on the significant Lockean concept of “terra nullius”, which can be seen as one of the legitimizing factors behind the historical expansionist (I think not only European but also in the case of Russian Empire) thinking for "new settlements" (Dalby, 2002:57). ‘Lockean motivation’, despite its inspiring inherent character based on individual freedom or liberalism, has been turned, intentionally or unintentionally, into a source of nation-states’ re-evaluation (if not possible, assimilation or destruction) of pre-existent individuals and all other entities in this terra nullius (Dalby, 2002). While approaching the unknown or unfamiliar territories, the states in their re-evaluations could use new style of political economies, mostly based on capitalism that

“disparages” pre-capitalist systems of livelihood and exchange. Similarly, another strong sentiment like religion may accompany to this nationalist and capitalist discourse as observed historically in the rise of the Catholic or Orthodox Christianity backed by their strong “religious feeling” in Africa, South America or in the Middle East or Central Asia. Overall, as a core assumption, the sense of “otherness” or the general tendency of “drawing boundaries” between units (or between “us-them”) turns to be as one of the main determinants here (Dalby, 2002).

As Edward Said mentioned in his famous work "Orientalism", first published in 1978, the person or peoples that we can regard as ‘unknown and foreign to us’ or ‘others’ are sometimes ‘different, frightening’ to us (Said, 2003). Said skillfully used this situation to criticize the discriminatory window opened by the Europeans mainly French and British, and currently the U.S.; but with this understanding, certain interpretations might be also derived for another efficient force in world politics after 18th century, which is Russia.

It might be argued that while the powerful side, which was European states until the end of 19th century, had skillfully used their Orientalism or their “us-them divergence” as their distinct enterprise, their capitalist interpretation was followed by the strong tool of colonialism, so that the borders of non-Western territories (i.e., of Middle Eastern – African or Central Asian etc.) had been opened to them. In the same way, the environment after the World War II, heavy blow of the devastating effects of the war, and a need for a stabilizing hegemon in such a ruined world order, gave the first impetus for a distinct American enterprise and provided the U.S. a considerable realm for interpreting many new “virgin lands” to focus on both ideologically/academically and materially. Meanwhile, as another victorious side of post-War environment, Soviets had already started the researches backed by their Russian imperial legacy; thus, the virgin lands of Central Asia, Caucasia or Idel-Ural continued to be the main topics of their Orientologists in Academia (Tolz, 2008; Tolz, 2011). Accordingly, the ‘comradeship’ and the wide project based on the so-called ‘titular nations’ also served very well to the central Soviet/Russian elite (Vernadsky, 2011). Shilliam is right therefore in describing Russian source of power as some kind of a different exploiter-entity throughout all these colonial games based on the idea of exploitation of ‘others’:

Alternatively, far removed from the colonial plantation economies lay those regions that might be termed the ‘quasi-colonized’. Here, the threat of Western imperial expansion framed intellectual engagements in a specific way, notably via the identification of European modernity as a resource and a threat. From the time of Alexander II onwards some Russian intelligentsia embraced their developmental destiny as replicating the recent history of Western Europe in order to avoid ‘Asiatic’ morass. However, Slavophiles preferred the idea of a ‘separate’ path for Russia with its claim to the uniqueness and superiority of the Slavic communal spirit. (Shilliam, 2011:18).

In this context, throughout the history from its Muscovite principality to Russian Empire, and from the Soviet Union until today’s modern Federative Republic, it is essential for the Russian ruling elite to preserve the dominance with the territorial expansions in the east-west, north-south lines on the historical plane (Riasanovsky, 2011). However, while many different cultural and historical entities, autonomous and independent lifestyles, and indigenous cultural groups have continued or struggled to maintain their lives just in the middle of these Russia’s expansionist and ambitious world, skillful Czars, Soviet Commissars or current Federation elites have already adopted the ideals of their “Great Russia”, “Great Homeland” or “Eurasia” depending the ‘rational’ needs of the related century. And the ones, who are not accepting those ideals, whether they are Tatars, Mensheviks, Turkic, Chechens or today Ukrainians could be easily taken as a threat to the understanding of ‘holy’ central and statist core.

Concerned with this situation, creating a controlled public agenda and skillfully keeping small identities and founding Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Turkic, Russians etc. together remained

undoubtedly an important achievement of the Russian state. At this point, according to some, the principle of "peaceful coexistence" with a competent cultural approach has been capably instrumentalized for the purpose of maintaining power of a small circle of elite in different ways (Tolz, 2001). Russian President Putin's following words just before the beginning of the current military attacks on Ukraine are therefore so meaningful: "Since time immemorial, the people living in the south-west of what has historically been Russian land have called themselves Russians and Orthodox Christians. This was the case before the 17th century, when a portion of this territory rejoined the Russian state, and after" (Putin, 2022).

Historically, 19th century seems crucial in order to grasp today's Russian rising hegemonic acts through its military and hard power. In the second half of that century, like the precursor of 20th century's tactics, Russian armies appeared everywhere and especially its influence spread everywhere what they call in 'Central Asia', which was originally historical 'Turkestan'. Tashkent, Samarqand, the emirate of Bukhara, Khiva, Kokand- all came into Russian control in couple of years during the second half of the 19th century (Benjamin, 2007:15). On the other hand, in those critical decades of that century, during which everyone was competing with the other one in conquering and colonizing a new territory, European jargon for colonial and postcolonial moves do have also their own productions and "mostly about critical historical moments and interrelated processes" coming from "a form of Eurocentrism" as Cooper (2005) explains. Maybe because from this reason, while "Central Asian Muslims conquered by the tsars and subjected to the violent and modernizing project of the Soviets do not receive the attention devoted to North African Muslims colonized by the French", hence even for the later years "1989 is not marked in postcolonial circles as a milestone of decolonization" (Cooper, 2005:23).

So, it can be argued that Orientalism and colonialism practiced by traditional European powers such as France or England have essentially placed Russia long before to the club of "exploited", "backward/inferior" or "Asian" societies throughout the ages too. It is naturally possible to see the traces of this situation in the academic understanding of the 20th and 21st century American hegemony. Although the aforementioned traditional European or Anglo-Saxon mentality did not see Russia in its own cultural unity, "Europeanized Russia" in the 18th and 19th centuries was, in Sahni's words, "mentally colonized by Europe", although not truly colonial (Sahni, 1997). It also "created the uniqueness and inherent contradictions of Russian history" (Sahni, 1997:15). In this way, the historical role that Russia has drawn for itself in Eurasia has also been determined, and the issue of "civilizing the East", whose cultural effects are not erased even today, has become Russia's reality as well. It had intellectually fruitful results in the areas it conquered, either as an "oppressive hegemon" or "bringer of enlightenment", or maybe a force that simultaneously utilized from both (Tolz, 2001).

In this context, it is also valuable to grasp the historical roots of Russian Orientalism that paves the intellectual way for a Russian kind of colonialism or exploitation. In the 18th century, with the reforms of Peter I (1672-1725), "Europeanized" and naturally elitist and advanced Russian rulers, who built their dominance and influence areas in a wide geography, became more and more Westernized and ended in a rational line with each passing period. In the following 19th century, they have applied a tactical management approach that has gained more and more 'nationalist and patriotic' features also with the effect of some bloody wars, like the Crimean or Napoleonic Wars and afterwards. Meanwhile, the peoples of the Caucasus and Central Asia, most of whom were of Turkish origin, who were under domination, could be described by the Russian-origin rulers, who held power and knowledge, as "low level" and mostly "working in warrior quality", but mostly "people groups who could not get rid of ignorance" (Tolz, 2001). Under this tradition, Schimmelpenninck, in his remarkable book on the birth and development of historical "Russian Orientalism", introduces this idea in question as an academic discipline initiated in the early 18th century throughout the reign of Peter I. Russian state stems from some commercial and political ambitions in Asia and a genuine desire to learn about the world around it

(Schimmelpenninck, 2010). Thus, the Russian Tsar essentially "laid the foundations for a systematic and scientific study of the Orient among his subjects", furthermore the beginning of the 19th century was the years when the foundations of "institutionalized Oriental Studies" were laid in the Russian universities (Schimmelpenninck, 2010).

Meanwhile, in Tolz's assessment, the Russian Empire was no different from some other countries in Europe that made wise use of the different nations in their colonial areas, and it also managed to skillfully exploit the lands in the East it conquered, centered primarily on its resources, people, and brainpower (Tolz, 2011). Such a policy also served as an occasion for developing and including into the system of mostly 'nomadic' and 'backward peoples' in vast lands, with a 'rational' approach of a 'superior' power. In this sense, the nomadic people whose old way of life could not be changed by force could be drawn to the civilized level and then to the elite levels through "education" (Khalid, 2000). For instance, even to study and teach their own cultures, but of course under the Russian patronage, in the 19th and 20th centuries, some prominent personalities from the "Eastern territories" of Russia, especially from groups such as Kazan Tatars, were recruited to the Imperial Oriental Departments in St. Petersburg as academics and research assistants (Schimmelpenninck, 2010).

Consequently, this diversity and development line based on the supremacy of Russian culture and Russian language is critical to understand contemporary cultural politics and diplomacy debates in the Russian Federation. The importance of persuasion of the 'exploited' or 'inferior' ones, under the patronage of St. Petersburg and lately Moscow, with some "textual power" has turned to be an important source for the material power of Russia. In this way, it is possible to see that not only a military or material rise, but also a cultural and soft power logic that might be detailed by a postmodern analysis has brought new successes to Russian elites within the conquered areas. Nazpary touches on an important finding for today's Kazakhs for instance that "while many of them regret their lack of knowledge of the Kazakh language and blame it on the Russians' alleged colonial policies, they are more attached emotionally to the Russian language (Nazpary, 2002:155). Thus, not only for Kazakhs, but for a serious portion, invaded or exploited by Russians and Russian culture, there has been no escape from belonging to this functioning bigger entity.

In this respect, 'culturally enlightening' policies of 18th and 19th centuries' Russia, like modern Russia, have had several reflections not only in its diplomacy but surely in different intellectual branches of literature and art, from novels, to paintings, figures, monuments and sculptures to museology (Forest and Johnson, 2002). In all these sub-branches, important tools of Russian nationalism or unity have been actively used for this purpose. For example, monumental and artistic pieces, which were started to be erected with the main slogan of the unity and solidarity of the peoples against the 'foreign enemy', reached their peak with the World War II or the "Great Patriotic War" in the Soviet Union, not only in Moscow, St. Petersburg, but also in all the cities of the former USSR. On the other hand, all ideas, cultural studies, monuments and artifacts that were not suitable for the central ideology and identity have been seen targets of this 'construction' process and remained as 'threats' or the 'other' side of the coin in textual policies.

I may conclude that the heavy casualties of Russia during the ages, from Napoleonic to Civil War and to the World Wars have left deep scars on this country's history. Russia has derived one source for textual constructions mainly from these critical historical epochs, during which Russia has remained as the one that suffered the most in terms of loss of life and property. On the other hand, this victim-role or exploited side gives still to the current political decision makers and elites a legitimate ideological ground in administration and in the fight against any kind of their opponents. In this way, the main principles and slogans such as 'respect for the Great Patriotic War (1941-45)', 'punishment of those who collaborated with the Nazis', 'fight against fascism', have always been kept their primary positions in Russian administration tactics.

In this regard, historical Russian arguments that paved the way for processes such as the well-known exile of the “Crimean Tatars who cooperated with the Nazis” after the World War II, or the condemnation of opposition leaders and statesmen from the conquered non-Russian lands, as in the case of Sultan Galiyev or Zeki Velidi Togan during the first decade of the Soviet Union, or harsh military responses against the current Ukrainian regime which is likened to the Nazis and seen as oppressor of Russian ethnic population by Moscow and Putin himself (Putin, 2022), can be better understood not only with Russian military power but with an hegemony on social fields, mostly on texts and discourses.

Conclusion

In order to face with the colonial pasts and to deepen into the blurred lines of exploitation today, in this work Postmodernism is taken as an antidote to continuing failures of the nation-states. Hence, I think, against the conservative disciplinary borders, new kinds of interdisciplinary attitude that might be compatible with a value-free postmodern line as adopted in this paper, can be also a tool for the wider Academia in their further researches.

It can be argued that many nations when they achieve adequate power, whether from the West or from the East, make their own definitions according to their own agenda and construct their own truths through language and discourses. In fact, at the point we have come today, there have been more post-modern communities as Wolf argues, which are so compatible and capable to read or even invent and construct their own cultures and history (Wolf, 1984).

Similarly, on the Russian state that has made a name for itself with domination, expansion, and exploitation on the world stage for about 500 years there can be related arguments to investigate. Despite its realist stance with a heavy military tactics, I want to define Russia and its governing elite as a skillful player in words and texts in a postmodern sense, who “invite a further defining move, or ‘play’, with language” (Butler, 2002). Consequently, like many nation-states or like its main hegemonic power rival that is the U.S., Russia can always select, construct and put some new legal, social, or cultural arguments for the sake of its interests. However, with its multi-ethnic and historically hybrid character as both an exploiter and exploited country throughout history, it has appeared as a more competent player in collecting its entire people in its vast geography ‘with the urge to protect the holy motherland (or fatherland) of Russia’ or ‘to support their Russian-speaking brothers’.

In this way, it must be also admitted that Russian strict state policy and cultural and textual expansionism ‘succeeded’ not only in its immediate environment but in its internal affairs too; that is, the ethnic and religious-based separatist identity movements, which were going on in many countries in the past, have been almost nonexistent in today’s colorfully-constructed Russia. Some current rebellious figures like Chechens have been always ‘professionally’ withdrawn to the Center when they were not eradicated; they turned from being competent rebels to the ‘loyal’ commanders and soldiers of the system. It is naturally possible to explain such developments as a success of the Russian Orientalism tradition that supports colonialism in Saidian sense, or with the cultural hegemonic strengths on local elite management process, or with more realist/rational and elitist management approaches. However, in all of those possible explanations, I find some clues from a planned post-modernist resistance of Russian elites, who have always remained as professionals in playing with the history, words, legalities, and destinies of their subjects in their competently-constructed geography in Eurasia.

References

- Ashcroft, B., Griffiths G., & Tiffin H. (Eds.). (2000). *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
- Ashley, D. (1991). Introduction: Postmodernism and the Social Sciences. *The Social Science Journal*, 28(3), 279-287.
- Benjamin. T. (Ed.) (2007). *Encyclopedia of Western colonialism since 1450*. Farmington Hills: Macmillan Reference.
- Boyle, M. (2008). Geography, Civilisational Thinking, and the Colonial Present a Good Act of Contrition? *Geopolitics*, 13(4), 724-729.
- Butler. C. (2002). *Post-Modernism: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Calkivik, A. (2017). Poststructuralism and Postmodernism in International Relations, *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies*, 11/2017, Retrieved August 14, 2022 from <https://oxfordre.com/internationalstudies/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.001.0001/acrefore-9780190846626-e-10>
- Cooper, F. (2005). *Colonialism In Question: Theory, Knowledge, History*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Der Derian, J. (2009). *Critical Practices in International Theory: Selected Essays*. Abingdon, Oxo: Routledge.
- Devetak, R. (2005). The Gothic Scene of International Relations: Ghosts, Monsters, Terror and the Sublime after September 11. *Review of International Studies*, 31(4), 621-643.
- Dutton, M. (2005). The Trick of Words: Asian studies, translation and the problems of knowledge. G. Steinmetz (Ed.). *The Politics of Method in the Human Sciences: Positivism and Its Epistemological Others* (pp. 87-125). Durham: Duke University Press.
- Eagleton, T. (2001). Nationalism: Irony and Commitment. T. Eagleton, F. Jameson, & E. W. Said (Eds.). *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature* (pp. 23-42). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Fay, B. (1997). *Contemporary Philosophy of Social Science: A Multicultural Approach*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Forest, B., & Johnson J. (2002). Unraveling the threads of history: Soviet–Era monuments and post-Soviet national identity in Moscow. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 92(3), 524-547.
- Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-77*, Brighton: Harvester Press.
- Gellner, E. (2003). *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion*. London: Routledge.
- Ho-fung, H. (2016). Orientalism and Area Studies: The Case of Sinology. R. Lee, & I. Wallerstein (Eds.). *Overcoming the Two Cultures: Science vs. the Humanities in the Modern World-System* (pp.87-103). New York: Routledge.
- Jameson. F. (2001). Modernism and Imperialism. T. Eagleton, F. Jameson, & E. W. Said (Eds.). *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature* (pp. 43-68). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Khalid, A. (2000). Russian History and the Debate over Orientalism. Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History. *Kritika*, 1-4, 691-699.
- Myer, W. (2002). *Islam and Colonialism: Western perspectives on Soviet Asia*. New York and London: Routledge Curzon.
- Nazpary, J. (2002). *Post-Soviet Chaos: Violence and Dispossession in Kazakhstan*. London: Pluto.
- Putin, V. (2022). *Address by the President of the Russian Federation on 21 Feb.2022*. Retrieved August 14, 2022 from <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67828>
- Riasanovsky, N. V. (2011). *Rusya Tarihi*. (Çev. F. Dereli). Ankara : İnkılap Kitabevi.

- Sahni, K. (1997). *Crucifying the Orient: Russian Orientalism and the Colonization of Caucasus and Central Asia*. Bangkok, Oslo: White Orchid Press.
- Said, E. W. (2003). *Orientalism*. London: Penguin.
- Said, E. W. (2001). Yeats and Decolonization. T. Eagleton, F. Jameson and E. W. Said (Eds.). *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature* (pp. 69-98). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Schimmelpenninck, D. (2010). *Russian Orientalism: Asia in the Russian Mind from Peter the Great to the Emigration*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press.
- Shilliam, R. (2011). The Perilous but Unavoidable Terrain of the Non-West. R. Shilliam (Ed.). *International Relations and Non-Western Thought: Imperialism, Colonialism and Investigations of Global Modernity* (pp.12-27). Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
- Smith, N. (2016). Remapping area knowledge: Beyond global/local. T. Wesley-Smith, & J. D. Goss (Eds.). *Remaking area studies: teaching and learning across Asia and the Pacific* (pp. 24-40). Hawai: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Tate Museum Definitions. *Postmodernism*. Retrieved August 14, 2022 from <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/p/postmodernism>
- Tolz, V. (2001). *Russia: Inventing the Nation*, London: Arnold.
- Tolz, V. (2008). The Formation of Academic of Academic Oriental Studies in Late Tsarist and Early Soviet Russia. *Kritika*. 9(1), 53-81.
- Tolz, V. (2011). *Russia's own Orient: the politics of identity and Oriental studies in the late Imperial and early Soviet periods*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Vernadsky, G. (2015). *Rusya Tarihi*. (Çev. E. Ç. Mızrak, & D. Mızrak). İstanbul: Selenge Yayınları.
- Wolf, E. R. (1982). *Europe and the People without History*. Berkeley and London: University of California Press.
- Wolf, E. R. (1984). Culture: Panacea or Problem? *American Antiquity*, 49(2), 393-400.