

Empire as a moving target

Jane Burbank, Mark von Hagen, and Anatolyi Remnev, eds., *Russian Empire: Space, People, Power, 1700-1930* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007). 538 p. Maps, bibliographic references and index. ISBN-13: 978-0-253-34901-9.

The collection *Russian Empire: Space, People, Power, 1700-1930* is an important landmark in development of historical research and historiographic reflection on the history of empire. The breadth of issues under discussion in the volume and the integral and innovative thematic setting of the problems merit a detailed examination. This collection is a result of a collaborative international project on history of regions of the Russian empire and the early Soviet Union. The collection reflects the primary role of historians in taking up the questions of regions and empire in the framework of the project, yet it also includes representatives of other disciplines, namely anthropology and political science.

Collections of works are proverbially difficult to review. Some renowned professional journals even reject to include collections of works into the review plan, not to mention those publishers who discriminate against edited collections in favor of monographs. This is a sad state of affairs. Volumes that spring from collaborative projects are informative windows into the state of historical profession. Occasionally, they are sites of unique experiments, like this project and collection, in bringing together different national and academic traditions and the experience of translation of research questions and research results from one intellectual setting to another. Given the period when the collaborative project was commenced, the volume in question is also a test case of modernization of historical research in the post-Soviet academic community and as such testifies to the capability of post Soviet scholars to engage in a dialogue with their western counterparts as equals and not as subalterns tasked with the gathering of archival riches and providing curiosities of interpretation.

It must be said from the beginning that this collection sets a very high standard for the rest to follow by molding a genuinely international scholarly dialogue and providing space for exchange of ideas and interpretations beyond subaltern relations between western and post-Soviet scholars.<sup>1</sup> Yet, the problem of translating research agendas for the history of empire into different analytical and intellectual mindsets remains at the heart of the collection's heteroglossia.

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<sup>1</sup> For critical interventions on the problem of international academic dialogue and modernization of professional historiography in the post Soviet space, see: David Ransel. A Single Research Community: Not Yet // *Slavic Review*. 2001. No. 3. P. 550–57; Boris Mironov. Has Postmodernism Come to Russia? Comments on the Anthology 'American Russian Studies' // *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*. 2003. No. 1. P. 201-225; Stephen Kotkin. Academic Innovations: Individuals, Networks, Patronage. An Evaluation of Academic Community Building in Russia. With a Preface by Alison R. Bernstein and Steven Solnick. Moscow, 2006; The editors. The Imperial Turn // *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*. 2006. No. 4. P. 705-712; Ilya Gerasimov et alia. Letter to the Editors of *Kritika Journal* // *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*. 2007. No. 1. P.

The collection is focused on empire and thus it joins the burgeoning international and interdisciplinary field of empire studies. "Empire" in the present research literature stands for themes of hegemony, interconnectedness, and diversity.<sup>2</sup> This field is heavily touched by political debates on the present day status of the USA as the world hegemon, the emergence or reemergence of regional powers, like the Russian Federation, the evolution of forms of political organization, like the EU, that constitute the challenge to the historical form and ideal of the nation-state. Moreover, as I argued elsewhere, "empire" also stands for the epistemological challenge that brings ambivalence to the underpinning elements of historical thought, such as the historical narrative, the conceptualization of the historical time and the spatial imagination of historical processes.<sup>3</sup> Empire is thematized simultaneously as an archaic and supra-modern form of social and political organization, its historical experience includes such forms of diversity and exceptionalism that are difficult to contain within the post-Enlightenment grid of social and political categories and post-Romantic type of narrative. It is this epistemological challenge, explicit or implicit, that primarily explains the widespread attraction of scholars to the theme of empire: it leads to a critical reflection on the general questions of modern historical knowledge rather than fulfills the alleged "promise" of empire to add more historical facts to the storage bin of historical science and settle the disputes of historical interpretation. The book under review fully partakes in critical and reflexive perspective on empire and seems to embrace the premise of the epistemological challenge of empire.

The reviewed collection is well positioned in these overlapping and sometimes contradictory threads of conceptualization of "empire" both in terms of the general and comparative debate and the historiography of empire in Russian and post Soviet studies. The initial focus on regions of the collaborative project has been molded into the focus on territory and territoriality of empire in the final shape of the collection. Taking the collection in its entirety and at a bird's view distance, its contribution may be judged as both innovative and complementary to three most prominent trends of historical studies of Russia that thematize empire as a space and regime of diversity, namely the empire as an instrument of rule, as a multinational space, and as a multiconfessional space. The first trend comes from the traditional preoccupation of Soviet and

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222-224; Ben Eklof. *By a Different Yardstick*, Boris Mironov's Social History of Imperial Russia and its Reception in Russia // *Ab Imperio*. No. 3 (2008, forthcoming).

<sup>2</sup> Dominic Lieven. *Empire. The Russian Empire and its Rivals from the Sixteenth Century to the Present*. London: John Murray, 2000; Linda Colley. *What is Imperial History Now?* // David Cannadine (Ed.). *What is History Now?* Palgrave, Basingstoke, 2002. P. 132-147; Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005; Stoler, Nicholas Dirks. *Scandal of Empire. India and the Creation of Imperial Britain*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Ilya Gerasimov, Sergei Glebov, Alexander Kaplunovskiy, Marina Mogilner, Alexander Semyonov. *V poiskakh novoi imperskoi istorii* // *Novaia imperskaia istoriia postsovetskogo prostranstva*. Kazan: Center for the Study of Nationalism and Empire, 2004. P. 7-29; Alexander Semyonov. *Empire as a Context Setting Category* // *Ab Imperio*. 2008. no. 1. P. 193-204.

Russian historiography with the history of institutions and government, history seen from above.<sup>4</sup> Yet it also reflects the relative lack of bourgeois democracy and society and the persistent role of state intuitions in structuring the social space and identities in Russian history. Above all, this trend relies on the core semantic of *imperium* that denotes power and sovereignty. The second trend puts forward the diversity of ethnic and linguistic groups as the primary marker of imperial diversity and the regime of governance. As Richard Pipes' *The Formation of the Soviet Union* with its focus on national forces in political contestation was important for the early development of historical studies of Russia, so was Andreas Kappeler's *Russia as a Multinational Empire* with its emphasis on ethnic heterogeneity and the role of national movements was pathbreaking for the recent imperial turn. This trend has provided a particularly enduring optics for viewing diversity of Russian and Soviet historical experience. It is true that this approach erred many times on the side of projecting the national imagination back to the imperial and pre-modern past,<sup>5</sup> but it is equally true that it also captured the dynamics of modern historical development that brought about the nationalization of perception of and politics in the heterogeneous space of empire.<sup>6</sup> The third trend in historical studies that highlights the irreducibility of religious and confessional diversity to ethnic heterogeneity has been prominent in the recent phase of historiography of the Russian empire.<sup>7</sup> By introducing the stress on religious policies and identities as distinct from that of ethnic groupness and national discourse this trend further complicates the landscape of diversity and raises the problem of interpretation of imperial historical experience as *uneven* and heterogeneous space, i.e. the space that exhibits different and palimpsestic facets of diversity.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example: V.S. Diakin. *Natsional'nyi vopros vo vnutrennei politike tsarizma (XIX-nachalo XX vv.)*. St. Petersburg, 1998.

<sup>5</sup> Alexei Miller. *Shaping Russian and Ukrainian Identities in the Russian Empire During the Nineteenth Century. Some Methodological Remarks // Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*. 2001. no. 2.

<sup>6</sup> Ronald Grigor Suny. *The Empire Strikes Out: Imperial Russia, "National" Identity, and Theories of Empire // Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin (Eds.). A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Geraci and Michael Khodorkovsky (Eds.). *Of Religion and Empire. Missions, Conversion, and Tolerance in Tsarist Russia*. Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 2000; Robert Crews, *For Prophet and Tsar, Islam and Empire in Russia and Central Asia*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2006; M. Dolbilov. 'Tsarskaia vera' i massovye obrashchenia katolikov v pravoslavie v severo-zapadnom krae Rossiiskoi imperii // *Ab Imperio*. 2006. no. 4. P. 225-270. See also pertinent and insightful remarks by Paul Werth on the history of the Russian Empire as approached through the prism of religion, religiosity, and confessions, despite the fact of employing a rather misleading for critical historical thinking term "imperiology": Paul Werth. *Imperiology and Religion. Some Thoughts on a Research Agenda // Kimitaka Matsuzato (Ed.). Imperiology. From Empirical Knowledge to Discussing the Russian Empire*. Sapporo: Hokkaido University and Slavic Research Center, 2007. P. 51-67. Werth suggests that there is a potential of an inquiry into the religious issues to provide a synthetic framework for exploration of imperial governance and heterogeneous space in their interconnectedness.

<sup>8</sup> I owe the insight leading to this formulation to Alfred Rieber and his rather underappreciated text: *The Sedimentary Society // Edith Clowes, Samuel Kassow, and James West (Eds.). Between Tsar and People: Educated Society and the Quest for Public Identity in Late Imperial Russia*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991. P. 361 and 362, as well as to the common to both of us reading of Vasilii Osipovich Kliuchevskii, Fernand Braudel, and Lev Trotskii.

In contrast and in addition to these approaches the present volume advances the interpretation of hegemony, interconnectedness, and diversity in the Russian imperial past through the prism of territory and territoriality, thus making a critical contribution to historiography of the Russian and Soviet Empire. The editors assert the heuristic primacy of territory over other forms of groupness (Rogers Brubaker's term): "the fruitfulness of beginning with territory, rather than with people and their presumed kinds of allegiances. Most empires present complex and incongruent overlays of ethnicity and religion upon territory. Starting out a study of empire with categories of ethnicity, or religion, or nationality shapes the description of people and their aspirations in ways they may not themselves have chosen." (21). Starting with the territory contributors to the volume develop three interrelated meanings of territory in their analysis and employ them to a different degree in their accounts of imperial historical experience.<sup>9</sup> The first meaning is the territory in the sense of physical and historical geography. The authors of the introduction re-state this aspect and remind us of the conventional dictionary definition of empire that invariably includes vast space as the necessary attribute of this phenomenon: "As for other empires, size mattered." (16). Moreover, the volume takes seriously the territorial growth (and not so much contraction and collapse) of the Russian Empire and provides proof for the well known wisdom of students of empire: borders and liminal positions offer the best possible view on things big and central.<sup>10</sup> Most chapters in the volume take for the frame or object of their inquiries what is conventionally called the borderlands of the Russian Empire. These borderlands include The Kingdom of Poland (Ekaterina Pravilova), the Grand Duchy of Finland (Irina Novikova), North Caucasus, or, to be more precise, East North Caucasus (Vladimir Boborvnikov), the Don region (Aleksei Volvenko and Shane O'Rourke), the steppe frontier and Bashkiria (Charles Steinwedel), the Volga-Kama region (Paul Werth and Elena Campbell), the North, Siberia, and Far East (Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov and Anatolyi Remnev). It should be noted that, although the volume is focused more on the problem of interpretation, rather than on systematic coverage of administrative-geographic forms of diversity, still the lack of a chapter on Western borderlands (as different from the Kingdom of Poland), South Caucasus, and Central Asia (Turkestan) stands in contrast to the breadth of coverage of the volume and the dramatic increase of historical writing on these areas in recent years.

The second meaning of territory is space as a framework of political, social, and cultural relations and as a dimension of governance and identity. In this second meaning space appears to be in a denaturalized form (Ronald Suny's term), i.e. it is approached as an emergent property of

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<sup>9</sup> For the sake of this review I do not follow the structure of the volume but include it here: Part 1 "Space," Part 2 "People," Part 3 "Institutions," Part 4 "Designs."

<sup>10</sup> The explication of this statement may be found in editorial introductions to four issues of *Ab Imperio* in 2003 under the thematic umbrella "Imperial Borders and Liminalities."

historical processes, policies, and discourses that accompany them. Thus the volume overcomes the most dangerous analytical trap of taking the territoriality as a historical given or, specifically for the history of Russia, taking at face value the discourses of *kraevedenie*, regionalization, and geopolitics that are so prominently represented in the Russian historical and historiographic material.<sup>11</sup> All the authors in the collection reflect on the evolving role of territoriality in historical development of empire and approach this problem from different angles. The volume is opened with the stage setting chapter by Willard Sunderland ("Imperial Space: Territorial Thought and Practice in the Eighteenth Century"), who suggests that the eighteenth century witnessed the development of territorial governance and the conception of territory as an instrument and resource. This chapter provides an interesting parallel to historical studies of western empires, which show that the emergence of modern sovereignty (whose distinguishing feature was the territorially bounded polity) was connected as much to the political development inside Europe as to the opening of the New World and colonial conquest of it.<sup>12</sup> Sunderland demonstrates the interconnectedness between the development of sovereign (still called in historiography "centralized") state and empire-building in the case of the Russian Empire of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Other authors continue this line of inquiry into the history of spatialization of governance and identities: Charles Steinwedel demonstrates how the territorialization of governance yielded the effect of integration (without homogenization) of the political space of empire (103) and how the framework of territorialized governance served as a ground for signification strategies of symbolic geography (95, 110-111); Nailya Tagirova ("Mapping the Empire's Economic Regions from the Nineteenth to the Early Twentieth Century") shows the evolving penetration of territoriality dimension in the economic thought of the Russian empire; Shane O'Rourke ("From Region to Nation: The Don Cossacks, 1870-1920") provides evidence of how the territorial-administrative arrangement of the imperial regime laid the ground for subsequent emergence of modern Don Cossack nationhood with its necessary territorial dimension (231); Elena Campbell analyzes the interconnection between the policy of the imperial government toward the Muslim question and the strategic considerations of foreign and domestic policy toward the "eastern" dimension of the empire (324, 336); Rustem Tsiunchuk ("Peoples, Regions, and Electoral Politics: The State Dumas and the Constitution of New National Elites") shows how regional-administrative peculiarities were reflected in the political reforms of the early twentieth century; Anatolyi Remnev ("Siberia and the Russian Far East in

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<sup>11</sup> See the critique of essentialization of regions in: Aleksei Miller. *Imperiia Romanovykh i natsionalizm*. Moscow: NLO, 2006. P. 14-19.

<sup>12</sup> Eviatar Zerubavel. *Terra Cognita: The Mental Discovery of America*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992; Benno Teschke. *The Metamorphoses of European Territoriality: A Historical Reconstruction* // Michael Burgess and Hans Vollaard (Eds.). *State Territoriality and European Integration*. London, New York: Routledge, 2006. P. 37-67.

the Imperial Geography of Power") provides an interpretative account of how the territorialized regime of governance reflected the spatial peculiarities of imperial expansion and how the policy of constructing and manipulating territorial arrangements ("geographies of rule" in the author's words) became an operational mechanism of maintaining and reproducing empire.

Moreover, some chapters in the collection move further the constructivist understanding of territory and territoriality by suggesting that there were spatial logics of social and political practices and imagination other than those of "gardening state" and territorial sovereignty. Jane Burbank ("Thinking Like an Empire: Estate, Law, and Rights in the Early Twentieth Century") does not start with territory, nor does she use region as a provisional category. Her account of the imperial space is based on the historical reconstruction of vertical and layered logics of spatial formations, such as differentiated rights regime of estate system and locality (down to *volost'* level) of peasant self-justice. The title of her chapter echoes James Scott's famous book *Seeing Like a State*. But instead of following the paradigm of modernity and its disposition Burbank proposes a different model of imperial citizenship based on corporate membership, particularistic allegiance, and politics of difference. A similar approach to variegated spatial logics may be found in other contributions: the chapter on North Caucasus by Vladimir Bobrovnikov presents a fascinating *longue durée* exploration of social practice and semantic of *abrechestvo*, for which the concept of frontier zone and frontier encounter is crucial; the chapter by Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov introduces the locality a site of micro-politics and a window into the macro-narratives of Russian and Soviet power; the chapter by Ekaterina Pravilova demonstrates the diversity of monetary-economic spaces in the empire and their incongruence with the spatial logic of internal administrative borders and external political borders of the Russian Empire.

The third meaning of space and territoriality that appears in the volume is the symbolic geography and discursive signification of space in the authoritative discourses. Willard Sunderland devotes half of his chapter to the exploration of the signification of the territory of empire as a marker of identity in the discourse of imperial patriotism. Sunderland traces the ambiguity of the symbolic geography of Russia national identity from this nexus. Leonid Gorizontov ("The 'Great Circle' of Interior Russia: Representations of the Imperial Center in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century") continues this line of inquiry with a study on the emergence of a distinct symbolic geography of the Russian national core in the discourse of Romanticism and organicity.<sup>13</sup> Francine Hirsch ("State and Evolution: Ethnographic Knowledge, Economic Expediency, and the Making of the USSR, 1917-1924") presents in her research the

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<sup>13</sup> A different view on the symbolic geography of modern Russian nationalism is presented in the research by Alexei Miller: Miller. *Imperiia Romanovykh i natsionalizm ...* . P. 145-170. Miller contends that the symbolic geography of modern Russian nationalism did not reflect territorial and ethnic boundaries of the imperial context, but was a product of constructivist national imagination, whose essence was encapsulated in the cultural and assimilatory conception of nationhood.

process of employment of modern knowledge in early Soviet Russia and Soviet Union to the effect of transformative application of power, what she calls the "conceptual conquest." This chapter vividly demonstrates the constitutive role of authoritative and normative discourses in signification of territory, that is to say that territory appears to be a dependent variable rather than a constitutive meta-framework. This chapter also sheds lights on the presence of ruptures and contestations in the ways territory was assigned meaning and instrumentalized in governance.

Mark von Hagen presents in his chapter ("Federalisms and Pan-movements: Re-imagining Empire") a case of forgotten and important thread of conceptualization of the political space of the Russian Empire through the lens of decentralization and plurality. The author reconstructs the persistence of a federalist pattern of thought through the imperial and early Soviet period and through the succession of different intellectual paradigms (Enlightenment, Romantic, and post Romantic) and points out the connections between the federalist thought and reformist mindset, projects of autonomy, and pan-movements. This thread of conceptualization of the political space of empire is positioned by the author as an alternative and possibly authentic voice of empire thus capable of producing a model of empire as a regime of diversity rather than the regime of center-periphery asymmetry and hegemonic monologue (505-506). Mark von Hagen suggests an important peculiarity of what he calls federalist thought. It followed the imperial condition of uneven and heterogeneous space, i.e. it weaved together an imagination of a supranational space (like Slavdom) with the projects for local autonomy (as in the case of Dragomanov and history of the *zemstvo*). This pattern of thinking is rather different from the rationalist designs of modern theory of federalism and closer to the discourse of political pluralism in the definition of Isaiah Berlin, a leading theorist of revived liberalism for the illiberal twentieth century.<sup>14</sup> Another suggestive observation by Mark von Hagen holds that the moments of intense articulation of federalist designs coalesced with the periods of intensified encounter in the uneven and heterogeneous space of empire. Other contributions in the volume point out the importance of such moments as the Great Reforms, the January Uprising of 1863, and the revolution of 1905 and political reforms of the early twentieth century (Charles Steinwedel, 104-107; Paul Werth, 177; Elena Campbell 320, 330; Rustem Tsiunchuk, 389-390). Apart from constituting ruptures in the historical development of empire, these moments procured the discursive frame for cognizance of a systemic or interrelated nature of imperial heterogeneity beyond the individual cases of borderlands and groups of population and the famous particularity-asserting frame of governmental "questions." Thus the federalist discourse

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<sup>14</sup> Isaiah Berlin. *Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century* // *Foreign Affairs*. 1950. No. 3. P. 351-385.

may be interpreted as a cognitive and political strategy of rationalization of empire's paradoxes, incongruities, and unevenness.<sup>15</sup>

What distinguishes this volume from other publications on the Russian Empire is two features: the decision of the editors to "let diversity take its own form" (XII), i.e. to include the diversity of approaches as a reflection of empire as a form of diversity and to face a challenge of bringing the differing interpretations into a consistent and verifiable analytic fold and the attempt by the editors to produce a comparative-suggestive and theoretically oriented reflection on the added value of the presented research. The latter feature becomes evident upon the close reading of the informal, thought provoking, and agenda setting introduction by Jane Burbank and Mark von Hagen ("Coming into the Territory: Uncertainty and Empire"). The authors of the introduction take a bold step in putting empire at the center of historical reflection as a distinct ideal type and historical phenomenon. In other words, they break with the tradition of the negativity of the definition of empire, when empire is defined in contrast to the more familiar form of nation-state or when it is cast as a preceding historical form or the function of external expansion of nation-state (imperialism).<sup>16</sup> The boldness of the editors' methodological step is accentuated by their move to posit nation-state as a "historical rarity, if not impossibility" (2) and to conceive of empire as the more spread and persistent form of political organization. The introduction contends that empire as a state form and structure of relations has been more real than a "powerfully disruptive and unrealizable ideal" (2) of nation-state, though another part of the text suggests that empire should be understood as an "ideal-type" and "a moving target ... in a sense of its constructedness" (16).

Conceiving of empire as a distinct and *sui generis* historical phenomenon conditions the interior-looking perspective of the volume, which may be likened to the participant observation of anthropologists. It stands in contrast to the exterior-looking perspective of two other prominent schools of defining and classifying empire: the perspective of international relations and world order and the one of comparative history. This explains the lack of focused chapters and sections on foreign policy and comparative history of empires in the volume under consideration. To the structuralist comparative studies of empires the volume sends the message of the dangerous effect of such a method, which leads necessarily to the assumed homogeneity of entities of comparison to the cost of under-appreciating the internal heterogeneity of empires as state-

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<sup>15</sup> Rationalization is understood in the tradition of Max Weber, i.e. as involving substantive rationality (Karl Mannheim's translation) and disenchantment of the world.

<sup>16</sup> I develop the theme of negativity of the definition of empire in historiography and languages of self-description of empire in Semyonov. Empire as a Context Setting Category ...

formations and spaces of experience.<sup>17</sup> Even more to the point, the reviewed volume (especially the contribution by Francine Hirsch, which registers the importance of reference to colonial empires in the deliberations of Soviet policy) demonstrates the so far neglected and important aspect of the history of empires, which may be called the entangled history of mirrors and refractions of imperial imagination. To students of empires as hegemon of international relations the volume convincingly demonstrates the assumptive nature of the boundary between foreign and domestic policy.

The authors of the introduction suggest the definition of empire that combines the view of empire as an agency and as a space of experience. The underpinning elements of this definition is state-form and structure of relations. The key to the proposed definition is "differentiated governance of differentiated population" (25). Jane Burbank, Mark von Hagen and other contributors to the volume stress that not any type of governing difference and not any shape of territorial, social, and cultural difference constitute a prerequisite for the definition of a historical situation as imperial. It is the uncertainty or unevenness of difference as historically refracted in the imagination, policies, and structures of relations and identity that forms the distinguishing and explanatory core of their definition of empire. This defining feature of the Russian Empire was shaped by the process of expansion of the empire and encounter of the imperial rule with the variegated forms of difference (16) and at the same time became a "habit of thought" (7) and flexible arrangement of multiple frames of reference (17), which provided for the durability and reproduction of empire (15).

The proposed explanatory perspective is rich in meaning and thus invites a discussion and raises a number of difficult questions. Some of them are suggested by the interpretative tensions that surface in the cross-reading of different parts of the volume. These tensions may be summarized in a form of critique that addresses three problems of interpretation: territory and territoriality as a meta-framework for the study of empire, empire-realism,<sup>18</sup> and historical change and persistence.

The volume's design conceives of territory and territoriality as an influential historical factor and analytical meta-framework for understanding empire. Willard Sunderland contends that the end result of the Petrine and post-Petrine historical transformation was "the consolidation of a highly territorial state presided over by a highly space-conscious elite, whose ways of seeing and ambitions for shaping territory were distinctly different from those that had prevailed a century

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<sup>17</sup> A similar critique has been developed in the project of New Imperial History, see also the editorial introduction "Politics of Comparison: Inescapable Centrality and Elusive Clarity of Matching Things Up" to the thematic issue of *Ab Imperio* "Politics of Comparison" (Ab Imperio. 2007. No 2. P.13-16).

<sup>18</sup> This formulation draws on Rogers Brubaker's concept of "the realism of the group": Rogers Brubaker. *Myths and Misconceptions in the Study of Nationalism* // John A. Hall (Ed.). *The State of the Nation*. Ernest Gellner and the Theory of Nationalism. Cambridge, 1998. P. 292.

earlier and whose territorial values set the terms for a modern Russian territoriality." (53). The introduction emphasizes that space as an analytical meta-framework serves as a better starting point for understanding what the essence of empire is in the proposed definition: the uneven heterogeneity of imperial political, social, and cultural landscape and flexibility, differentiation, and uncertainty as the modes of imperial governance. However, other contributions assert the persistence and importance of non-territorial or non-spatialized ways of rule and identity. Charles Steinwedel highlights the role of non-territorial governance of the Muslim population of the empire (99-102), Aleksei Volvenko ("The *Zemstvo* Reform, The Cossacks, and Administration Policy on the Don, 1864-1882") demonstrates how military-service-estate identity of the Don Cossacks defeated through resistance and absenteeism the plans for territorial and integrationist policy of introduction of *zemstvo* in the Done region. It might be also mentioned that despite the territorialization effect of electoral politics of the early twentieth century most political parties and civic organizations remained a lightly territorialized networks of association,<sup>19</sup> that the designs for cultural autonomy were as much in the political air as the federalization plans,<sup>20</sup> and that even in the period of super-high territoriality of the Soviet policy there remained a space for non-territorial political imagination and practice.<sup>21</sup> Many authors in the volume highlight the dependence of territorial imagination and signification upon other authoritative discourse, such as governmental rationalism, Romantic organicism, and modern nationalism (Francine Hirsch, Ekaterina Pravilova, Mark von Hagen, Anatolyi Remnev, and Paul Werth). Indeed, the authors of the introduction themselves relativize their insistence upon territoriality as a meta-framework for the study of empire by suggesting as the fourth operational characteristic of Russian imperial governance – the multiple frames of reference, i.e. "a technology of ruling Russia ... " which was based on "... simultaneous use of different registers for ruling different regions and different people" (17). Following the explanatory core of the proposed definition of empire, it may be suggested that a further development and approbation of this insightful definition should start not with territory, but with the revolving repertoire of languages of self-description and rationalization of empire. This line of inquiry introduces a cognitive turn in imperial studies in a way similar to the cognitive turn in nationalism studies propagated by Rogers Brubaker. But in contrast to the cognitive turn in nationalism studies the research program of languages of self-description and rationalization of empire follows the main

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<sup>19</sup> I treat this aspect in: Alexander Semyonov. Making Politics, Undoing Empire: Political Reform in Russia at the Beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century // Zentrum fuer Deutschland- und Eurapastudien Working Papers. No. 1 (Bielefeld-St. Petersburg, 2004): 79-96.

<sup>20</sup> Peter Holquist. Dilemmas of Progressive Administrator. Baron Boris Nolde // Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History. 2006. No. 2. P. 241-73.

<sup>21</sup> See the treatment of class identification and internationalism in the discussion of Soviet citizenship in: Golfo Alexopoulos. Soviet Citizenship, More or Less. Rights, Emotions and States of Civic Belonging // Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History. 2006. No. 3. P. 487-528.

parameters of the proposed in the volume historicized definition of empire as a polity "based on difference, not likeness" (2).<sup>22</sup>

The introduction to the volume and most chapters take every step to stress the historically emergent, evolving, and constructed nature of empire and its constituent elements in order to avoid the essentialism of empire. The authors of the introduction emphasize that empire was "a muddle ... incapable of being divided according to a single kind of line, without fixed internal and external borders for much of its history" (15). They criticize the "dichotomous and unidirectional casting of center-periphery relations" (4). Yet, some of the contributions in the collection hold the opposite. Shane O'Rourke sets forth the dichotomy of "deep-rooted collective identity of the Cossacks that distinguished them from the Great Russian population" (218). Rustem Tsiunchuk situates his analysis of electoral politics and imperial parliament in the context of "the system of 'center-regions'" and operationalizes in his analysis such categories as "national borderland regions," and "Great Russian ruling elites" (366, 371, 394). Nailya Tagirova contends that "in the eighteenth century the *gubernia* (province) system, organized according to demographic principles, formed the basis for the territorial administration of the empire" (125). Perhaps, this interpretative tension may be explained by the creative productivity of one-sidedness (Lidiya Giznburg's term), i.e. by the unavoidable asymmetry between the complicated and critical reconstruction of one dimension of historical experience to the effect of essentialization and reductionism of others. Still, I would argue that it is crucial for the project of empire studies not to throw the baby of critical insights in theory of nationalism with the water of oppressive and distorting nature of the normative discourse of nationalism.

The volume's important contribution and intention is to challenge "a historical trajectory from empires to nation-states" (1) and assert the persistence of imperial structures, state-form as different from political arrangements by which imperial authorities claim their legitimacy, and tensions between uniform and differentiated governance in the course of Russian history. The volume's definition of empire as "differentiated governance of differentiated population" is capable of accommodating the historical change of forms of political regime and nature of political discourses. Most of the chapters and especially by Francine Hirsch, Paul Werth, and Sviatoslav Kaspé note the importance of challenges to imperial rule and imperial space (the challenge of modern sovereignty, modernization, nationalism) and explicate their impact on the agency and structure of imperial experience. Most importantly they observe that though the Russian empire might have started as the "muddle of empire" it gradually though inconclusively

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<sup>22</sup> Ilya Gerasimov, Sergei Glebov, Alexander Kaplunovskiy, Marina Mogilner, Alexander Semyonov. Languages of Self-description of Empire and Nation as a Research Problem and Political Dilemma // *Ab Imperio*. 2005. No. 1. 23-32. See also: Marina Mogilner. *Homo Imperii: istoriia fizicheskoi antropologii v Rossii (konets XIX-nachalo XX v.)*. Moscow: NLO, 2008, which appears as the first output of the collaborative research project "Languages of Self-Description and Representation of the Russian Empire."

evolved into a much more ordered polity and reflexive policy of colonialism. In fact, the discourse and policy of nationalizing state and colonialism appear to be historically compatible for the direction of their impact is not contradictory: nationalism enforces the homogeneity inside the imagined community while colonialism produces difference on the outside of the national community.<sup>23</sup> The question then arises of how to understand the crucial element of uncertainty that Jane Burbank and Mark von Hagen set forth for understanding the regime of imperial governance. Is it uncertainty of the combination of different registers of governance? Or is it uncertainty about the very constitutive elements of the ruled space? The first type of uncertainty in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century may well turn out to have been the certainty of the project of nationalization of the national core (not necessarily territorial) of the continental empire coupled with the policy of colonialist differentiating this national core from the rest of the same continental empire. This twist of interpretation may further be explicated with the help of what Rogers Brubaker calls the misconception of the Modigliani map (which he borrows from the evocation of the Modigliani painterly style by Ernst Gellner): "The spatial aspect of the representation – the image of continuous and homogenous blocs situated next to, rather than interspersing with, one another – should not be interpreted too literally; it does not necessarily imply corresponding spatial characteristics of what is represented. The Modiglianesque representation of heterogeneity as the juxtaposition of homogenous blocs does not presuppose that the blocs be territorially concentrated. The constituent blocs may be intermixed in space, for their 'blocness' – their boundedness and internal homogeneity – is conceptually located not in physical but in social and cultural space."<sup>24</sup> The second type of uncertainty destabilizes the boundedness and homogeneity of constituent elements of imperial rule and imperial space and therefore may serve as a more reliable distinguishing feature of empire in the age of modern challenges to such a form of polity.

Finally, a few remarks on auxiliary aspects of the volume. Although this reviewer cannot claim expertise in assessing the translation from Russian to English, the translators of Russian-language materials for this volume must be commended on their great job of rendering nuances and peculiarities of historical writing in Russian. The volume is well tailored for teaching not least because it includes historical maps of the Russian Empire (1700, 1825, Asian Russia, ca. 1900, 1914) and the USSR (1930) and others in the chapter by Francine Hirsch. It might have been suggested that a more diversified collection of maps be included for the benefit of underscoring the volumes' message. For example, it could have been the reconstructive map of

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<sup>23</sup> Precisely this issue is at the heart of a debate between Linda Colley and Nicholas Dirks with respect to the history of the British Empire and British national identity: Linda Colley. *Britishness and Otherness: An Argument* // *The Journal of British Studies*. 1992. P. 309–329; Dirks. *Scandal of Empire. India and the Creation of Imperial Britain* ... P. 342.

<sup>24</sup> Brubaker. *Myths and Misconceptions in the Study of Nationalism* ... P. 295.

sacred places of the Volga-Bulgar Islamic ancestors,<sup>25</sup> or the map of ethnographic foundation for the Ukrainian autonomy<sup>26</sup> to name just a few possible options.

All in all, congratulations to the editors and authors of the volume on producing a superb quality research and historiographic landmark. This volume is bound to become a mentoring essential and standard point of reference for future research and discussion on empire in Russian/Soviet history and the world.

Peopling the Russian Periphery: Borderland Colonization in Eurasian History / Ed. by Nicholas Breyfogle, Abby Schrader, Willard Sunderland. Routledge, 2007.

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<sup>25</sup> Christian Noack. From Ancestry to Territory: Spatial Dimensions of Muslim Identity in Imperial Russia // *Ab Imperio*. 2006. No. 2. P. 87.

<sup>26</sup> *Ukrainskii Vestnik*. 1906. No. 1. P. 46-47.