

The “Ideological Geography” of the Russian Empire: Space, Borders, Inhabitants

SUMMARY

This monograph is a result of the research project “The ‘Ideological Geography’ of the Western Borderlands of the Russian Empire in Literatures”, which was carried out by a small group of researchers at the Department of Russian Literature, University of Tartu, in 2009–2012.

The topic and issue as declared in the title of the book seems to be too multifaceted to be covered comprehensively. However, while dealing with fiction, memoirs and social and political journalism, the research team found new facts and material (in particular archival) for consideration within the framework of the concept of “ideological geography”. So far, mainly historians, sociologists and political scientists have used this concept, speaking of “the ideologization of space”, “the civilizing mission of the metropolis vs. the victimization of borderlands and subalterns”, ethnic stereotypes, etc. As literature scholars, the authors of this book instead approached these conventional ideological concepts as the mythologems often generated and reflected in fiction.

The authors of this book define the concept of “ideological geography” broadly. According to their definition, the ideologization of space (i. e. the transformation of its representation as influenced by ideology) is inevitably connected with national and state myths and with the official and opposition ideology of the time. The book focuses on the imperial epoch, during which the spatial myths and interpretation of such concepts as “metropolis” vs. “borderland”, “native” vs. “alien”, “frontier”, Orient and West were dependent on imperial politics in relation to nationalities and the understanding of the very notion of “Empire”; that is, it explores why it was impossible to separate the investigation of a specific space from the description of its inhabitants (i. e. ethnic groups and nations). From this perspective, the concept of “ideological geography” contains

the stereotypes and images of the “Other” (nations, ethnic groups) which “settle” the given region. This book focuses mostly on the discourse about the Western borderlands of the Russian Empire: Estonia and the other Baltic provinces, Little Russia (Малороссия), The Kingdom of Poland, and the Grand Duchy of Finland.

The researchers mainly examined Russian fiction and political essays of the 19th and early 20th centuries, tracing the formation of spatial ideological constructs and the emergence of ethnic stereotypes about the peoples living in this region (Estonians, Latvians, Poles, Ukrainians, Jews, and Russians). Additionally, the reader can find examples from Estonian, Polish, Ukrainian and Finnish literatures. Using all of these as sources, the researchers intended to reveal and to analyze the rhetorical devices and discursive strategies underlying both spatial and ethnic ideological constructs.

Chapter 1 “Empire as the Space of the National State Building — *contradictio in adjecto*? The Role of Literature” describes various projects and discursive strategies used by imperial authorities and their opponents in their efforts to reconcile incompatible ideas (imperial and national).

As it expanded its territory, the Russian Empire became more and more multiethnic; meanwhile, the cultural development of young nations resulted in a fight for national independence and, ultimately, separatism. Thus, contextualizing the appearance of the book “Estonians and Latvians, their history and mode of life” (1916), L. Kisseljova demonstrates how the leaders of national minorities and their allies aspired to influence the government and Russian society and to prove the success and maturity of their nations. As Kisseljova demonstrates, another interesting publication of the time («Отечество. Пути и достижения национальных литератур России. Национальный вопрос») argued the perniciousness of Russian state policy and, at the same time, the possibility of the Empire to transition to a democratic multiethnic state. In precisely these years (the 1910s) different political forces designed a whole range of literary anthologies representing the literatures of subaltern nations (e. g. Maxim Gorky’s project within the publishing house «Папыс»). Not all of the planned anthologies were published, due to the Empire’s collapse in 1917, which dem-

onstrated once again that the imperial and the national are *contradictio in adjecto*.

Another example from Ukrainian history is no less relevant in this context. Describing Nicolas I's politics in domesticating Ukraine and suppressing the Polish uprising (1830), I. Bulkina shows how "ideological geography" was manifested in the imperial project of the revival of Kiev as an "indigenously Russian" religious and cultural centre. However, the idea developed by Russian imperial officials of "Kievan Rus" as a Russian space clashed against the Polish concept of "lost borderlands" (Kresy Wschodnie).

The case that follows concerns the national policy of the Empire in the outlying district of Finland. T. Guzairov examines how the official public opinion regarding the Finns and Karelians, deliberately constructed in St. Petersburg through government magazines and newspapers, changed drastically. The idea of problem-free integration was followed by the escalation of the opposing idea of conflictedness in the late 19th century, when the authorities tried to justify their repressive measures against the local population.

A. Vdovin examines the case of the literati's participation in the Oriental expedition organized by liberal imperial officials in the mid-19th century.

Chapter 2 "Ideologization of the Borderland Space in 19th century Russian Literature and Political Journalism" is devoted to the "ideological geography" of three regions — Poland, Ukraine and the Baltic provinces (*Ostsee* in the terms of the epoch) as they were reflected in Russian poetry (A. S. Khomiakov, P. A. Vizemsky, N. M. Yazykov, F. I. Tiutchev), travelogues and memoirs. The scholars (T. Stepanischeva, L. Kisseljova, R. Leibov and A. Ospovat, I. Bulkina) study the issue of the relationships between imaginary Russia and Europe and their poetry versions (e. g. "Russian geography" in Tiutchev's lyrics or Poland in Viazemsky's vision). Poland and Ostsee were conceived as either Russian's "own Europe", opposed to the despotic centre, or as "rebellious borderlands".

Chapter 3 "National Stereotypes as Reflected in Russian Literature" varies in perspective and material. The process of stereotyping national characters is presented here in its dynamics in

broad literary, discursive, philosophical and political contexts. Thus, the image of the Finn is studied in the context of A. Shakhovskoi's drama "Finn" (1824). D. Ivanov shows that Finnish mythology in the play is mixed with Baltic mythology, but still the playwright portrays the image of the strong and courageous Finn, whose sensibility at the same time fits him into the romantic conception of the emergence of the Finnish nation. Moreover, as T. Guzairov continues, this character is represented as a loyalist in the Russian fiction of the 1830–40s, which constructed the notion of the Finnish people's peaceful integration into the "body" of the Empire. Needless to say, such interpretation contradicted historical fact.

The main part of the third chapter concerns the representation of Germans in Russian fiction. Ivan Turgenev's novels and short stories, full of German characters, allow E. Fomina to elaborate the role of the "other" (depictions of Germans, in particular) in the formation of the image of the Russian national character.

Whereas Turgenev gives the most sophisticated and least ambiguous treatments of Germans, another famous Russian writer, A. Herzen, uses "Germanness" as an interpretative metaphor in his "My Past and Thoughts", as the research by A. Vdovin has proved. The metaphor refers to the negative features of the German character. Such meaning originated not just from Russian fiction and folk stereotypes, but from Herzen's famous "family drama" — his fatal conflict with German poet Georg Herwegh.

Since the Russian character was designed in fiction only against the backdrop of the "other" (Germans, Jews, Ukrainians), their images become crucial in describing the national discourse as it was shaped in Russian prose. The concept of "Russian" had numerous meanings in different periods. The umbrella conception of official 19th-century discourse was the idea of the "single Russian nation", uniting Russians, Ukrainians and Byelorussians. Among them the Ukrainians acquired special status, which was relevant for Turgenev's prose, as studied by E. Fomina in this chapter.

Unlike the Germans, who were common in Russian prose and included in the repertoire of characters, the Polish theme was one of the most traumatic for the Russian public consciousness and fiction (e. g. the experiences of the Time of Troubles, the Partitions

of Poland, and Uprisings of 1792, 1830–31, 1863). The Polish character and myth as it circulated in Russian literature is discussed by I. Rudik, R. Voitekhovich and M. Borovikova on the basis of M. Tsvetaeva's poetry. The scholars show how her lyrics elaborated traditional Polish stereotypes accumulated in the 19th century cultural memory. Tsvetaeva was proud of her "Polish blood" and designed her poetic "alter ego" and her doubles using Marina Mniszech's image.

I. Bulkina's research clears up the Polish origin of the name of the main character of A. Griboedov's comedy "The Misfortune of Being Clever".

This brief overview of the issues raised in this monograph is not exhaustive, nor is it the final word on the issue presented in the title. Russian literature of the imperial era very actively participated in ideological and national building. Whereas the involvement of Russian fiction in ideology has been studied thoroughly, the history of its role in the escalation of nationalism is still an under-investigated issue. Hopefully, this book will give a broad picture of these trends and will inspire scholars to continue this research.