Marxism, Early Soviet Oriental Studies and the Problem of 'Power/Knowledge'

Few would be surprised to learn that the Russian Revolution of 1917 resulted in a radical reconfiguration of relations between intellectuals and the state and between networks of individuals themselves. However, despite the important work of a number of recent specialists including Alpatov (1997), Tamazishvili (2008), Hirsch (2005) and Buttino (2014), the nature of this reconfiguration often remains poorly understood among non-specialists and some specialists alike. The enduring influence of Michel Foucault's notions of discourse and of power/knowledge plays an important role here. By collapsing the distinction between power and knowledge it becomes impossible adequately to consider their interrelationships and their crucial historical transformations. In place of careful analyses of the numerous reconfigurations that followed 1917, the adoption of a Foucauldian framework tends to lead scholars to speak about a 'Soviet discourse' of this or that area or problem as if a unitary and unshifting paradigm reigned from 1917 to 1991. While there is clearly continuity in the vocabulary utilized by those in political power and in much academic writing of that period, one should not be misled by lexis. As Edward Said noted, there is 'a sensible difference… between Logos and words: we must not let Foucault get away with confusing them with each other, nor with letting us forget that history does not get made without work, intention, resistance, effort, or conflict, and that none of these things is silently absorbable into micronetworks of power' (1983, p. 245).

Nowhere is the Foucauldian approach more debilitating than in studies of the

production of knowledge about societies that were adversely affected by colonialism and imperialism, for here key transformations of constellations between intellectuals and institutional power are often buried beneath *longue durée* conceptions about discursive formations. The notion of a single 'Enlightenment discourse' is particularly problematic given the highly contested dialogues between the radical, atheistic currents within the Enlightenment, beginning with Spinoza's philosophy, and those moderate *philosophes* determined to reconcile the advance of science with religious prejudices and the established social order on which Jonathan Israel has written in detail. The rise of colonialism acted on this field in complex ways (Israel, 2006, pp. 590–614), but these are often glossed over in accounts of intellectual history framed by poststructuralism.

How much more problematic then when the same approach is applied to oriental studies in the early USSR. Michael Kemper, author of a number of valuable works on central Asian Islam and certain aspects of Soviet Oriental Studies, for instance, characterizes Marxism as 'an extreme form of European Enlightenment thinking' (Kemper 2006, p. 6) and proceeds to present a putative 'Soviet discourse on the origin and class character of Islam' by assimilating a wide variety of exploratory works on the socioeconomic foundations of early Islam into a unitary discourse with little trace of surplus or marks of resistance. Such works were allegedly instances of a 'Marxist discourse' that 'was itself pure "Orientalism" (in the sense of Edward Said),', he argues, holding the 'essentialist view that it was possible to grasp the "character" of early Islam, and that this knowledge would provide them with an understanding of contemporary Muslim peoples.' Such thinkers 'unquestionably put their knowledge at the disposal of the state, which used it for ruling and thoroughly transforming these

contemporary Muslim societies' (Kemper 2009, p. 46). There are a number of reasons to object to this attempt to grasp the essential 'character' of early Soviet oriental studies. Firstly, to analyse the socioeconomic conditions under which Islam arose, or to seek to identify the specific social groups among which it originated, is not in itself 'essentialist.' Secondly, such an approach does not necessarily suggest that the social bases of the religion remained unchanged and that social analysis of its origins provided some sort of template for understanding contemporary Islam in the USSR. Rather, it suggests merely that in order to understand a complex, cultural phenomenon one needs to approach the matter historically, commencing with an analysis of the conditions in which it arose. Thirdly, while it is undeniable that the Stalin regime did indeed employ the work of orientalists to rule and transform Muslim societies, it does not follow that from the very outset of the Revolution there existed a unitary 'discourse of Soviet orientalism' that functioned 'to turn the Orient into an instrument of Soviet Russia' (Kemper 2010, p. 449). There is a fundamental difference between attempting to win leadership in a revolutionary struggle against a common adversary and treating an ally simply as an instrument. The many debates about the strategy of hegemony before and after the Revolution focused specifically on this distinction (see Brandist 2015). While there are plenty of reasons to be critical of many contributions to early Soviet oriental studies, simply to read a putative 'discourse' back into the debates of the 1920s is questionable indeed. It is, however, legitimate to argue that in the 1930s there was indeed a concerted effort to homogenise Soviet perspectives on the East and to use the knowledge generated as a resource for the imperial domination of the Soviet 'East' and the subordination of the independence movements across the colonial world to the foreign policy of Moscow.

One might here recall Said's discomfort with Foucault's assumption that 'the individual text or author counts for very little', and the former's insistence that 'individual writers' do leave a 'determining imprint' on an 'otherwise anonymous body of texts constituting a discursive formation like Orientalism' (Said 2003 [1978]: 23). Rather than assimilating every utterance to a closed discursive circle, it is of crucial importance to focus on the 'dynamic exchange between individual authors and the large political concerns shaped by the… great empires' (Said 2003 [1978], pp. 14-15), of the period in question, if the formation of something like a 'Soviet Orientalism' is to be identified and understood. Most crucially, one must overcome what Said called Foucault's 'flawed attitude to power [which] derives from his insufficiently developed attention to the problem of historical change' (Said 1983, p. 222). The current article aims to develop a perspective on the emergence of Soviet oriental studies that takes account of some of the complexities of exchanges between networks of individuals in the context of historical transformations, and to shine some light on forgotten aspects of the history of postcolonial theory itself.

Russian Marxism and the 'East'

Just as there was no single Enlightenment discourse about the orient, as Bryan S. Turner noted in a book published the same year as Said's *Orientalism*, 'there is no such thing as a homogenous tradition of Marxist analysis' about the Orient, or indeed about many other matters (Turner 1978, p. 8). In his later works Marx made considerable advances in freeing himself from the unilinear narrative of historical development he had inherited from the contemporary positivist historians he was reading (see, *inter alia*, Habib 2006; Anderson 2010 and Achcar 2013). While

deriving considerable empirical data from such studies, his works are marked by an increasingly critical perspective on the modes of conceptualization and generalization such scholars employed, and his late works made it clear he did not regard the pattern of development of European societies to apply directly to non-European societies. Trotsky's historical writings on the particularities of Russian historical development, in which he developed the principle of combined and uneven development, marked a further step in this direction (see Banaji 2010; Anievas and Nisancioglu 2015). Here the establishment of the so-called 'laws of motion' of specific historical formations take precedence over locating societies on a pre-established scheme of stadial development, what in Stalin's time came to be referred to as the '*piatichlenka*' (primitive society, slave-holding society, feudalism, capitalism and socialism). *Contra* Kemper (2009, p. 35), this 'concept of five universal socio-economic stages' was not 'the classical Marxist conception' but was, from the outset, a positivist reduction of Marxism developed by Second International determinists, including the founder of the first Marxist political group in Russia Georgii Plekhanov. This was subsequently canonized by Stalinist historians. Between them was a period of considerable debate and discussion around central Marxist conceptions and a rethinking of the patterns of historical development of developing societies, which had been necessitated by the Russian Revolution itself. If we consider these questions historically then the achievements of this short period appear all the more impressive.

The development of a new, Marxist approach to studying the East was severely hampered by a severe shortage of Marxists who knew oriental languages or who had focused their research on the colonial world. The centre of revolutionary activity, including the struggle for national self-determination, had been in Europe, even

though Lenin in particular had recognized the significance of the 1905 defeat of the Russian state by the ascendant Asian state of the time, Japan. 'Advancing, progressive Asia', Lenin proclaimed, 'has dealt backward and reactionary Europe an irreparable blow' (Lenin 1962 [1905], pp. 48-49). Although Lenin increasingly considered the national and colonial questions, many regional Party organisations before the Revolution relegated the national question to a secondary position in search of a unified Marxist organization across the Empire (Blanc 2016). This undoubtedly contributed to a lack of connection between rising demands for legal equality and cultural autonomy among such 'Eastern' peoples as Buriat-Mongols and Kazakhs after 1905 and the workers' movement based in the cities (Sablin and Korobeynikov 2016). While Lenin's *The Right of Nations to Self-Determination* (1964a [1916]) and the Lenin-Bukharin analysis of imperialism (Lenin 1964b [1916]; Bukharin 1929 [1915, 1917]) were important milestones in Marxist thinking about the colonial world, it was failure to establish new Soviet governments in some regions during the 1918-21 Civil War (Poland, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Finland and others), followed by successes in some areas, often assisted by Red Army intervention, soon after, that placed the need to address the aspirations of the non-Russian populations at the forefront of the political agenda of the entire movement. In a number of cases the central authorities had to intervene to rectify Russian-chauvinist policies developed by local Soviets that were dominated by Russian colonists (Safarov 1921, pp. 104-123; Buttino 2014). Non-Russians who joined the Party in this period were generally not experienced Marxists, but brought a range of populist, nationalist and other ideas with them. The formation of Communist Parties outside what was to become the USSR similarly led to the recruitment of anti-imperialists with a range of backgrounds and perspectives and whose understanding of Marxism was rudimentary

at best. Thus early attempts, particularly at the *Congress of the Peoples of the East* in Baku in September 1920, to establish a framework for a united front against imperialism, in which Marxist internationalism would make an attempt to win a leading role, resulted in some awkward formulations, with Zinoviev's call for a 'Holy War' against imperialism only the most notorious (Riddell 1993, pp. 85-89). It would take concerted efforts focused on the first four congresses of the Communist International (1919-22) to work out a strategy for negotiating the various trends within the movement against imperial domination in the colonial world.

These intense and fraught, but important debates, which involved such important figures as the Bengali revolutionaries M.N. Roy (1887-1954) and Virendranath Chattopadhyaya (1880-1937), and the Persian Marxist Avetis Sultan-Zade (1889-1938), were foundational in the establishment of an international movement against imperialism. No sooner had this begun to find theoretical articulation, however, that the final defeat of the German Revolution in October 1923 launched counter-revolutionary processes that would result in the twin disasters of Stalinism and Nazism and would lead to fundamental revisions. Until the end of the 1920s policy and Oriental Studies alike remained subject to competing pressures. It is therefore hardly surprising that Marxist historical and theoretical studies of the East did not appear fully articulated, but had to emerge through interaction with a range of pre-existing perspectives about the Orient in rapidly changing political conditions. Such interactions in some cases enriched Marxist approaches but in other cases required Marxists extricate themselves from the hold of colonial prejudices.

The Heritage of pre-Revolutionary Orientology

Russian ethnography was shaped by the work of dissident, anti-imperialist populists, associated with the *Narodnaia Volia* (People's Will) group, who studied the languages and cultures of the peoples of Siberia while exiled by Tsarist authorities. Among them were the Polish activists and ethnographers Wacław Sieroszewski (1858-1945) and Bronisław Piłsudski (1866-1918) and the Jewish activist-ethnographers Vladimir Jochelson (1855-1937), Vladimir Tan-Bogoraz (1865-1936) and Lev Shternberg (1861-1927). The exiles formed informal networks for research and were able to publish some work with the support of the Imperial Geographical Society. While the first three emigrated after the Revolution, Bogoraz and Shternberg played important roles in the formation of early Soviet ethnography and oriental studies in Leningrad. These fellow-traveller intellectuals generally retained the positivist, evolutionary perspective that was dominant at the time, while advocating the rights of indigenous peoples.

Simultaneously there was a number of pre-Revolutionary orientologists working within the Imperial Academy of Sciences who had been critical *both* of Tsarist nationality policy *and* the dominant types of European oriental studies and who were willing to cooperate with the Bolshevik regime after the Revolution. These specialists were also immersed in positivism and psychologism and they had sought to reform rather than end the Russian imperial state. They opposed the Eurocentrism of British and French oriental studies, which posited the West as dynamic and rational, and the East as stagnant and religious, worked tirelessly to overcome prejudices about the Moslem East, and celebrated the cultural achievements of oriental societies. Yet in doing this liberal Russian orientologists, like the great historian of Central Asia

Vasilii Bartol′d, the Indologist Sergei Ol′denburg and the Georgian archaeologist and philologist Nikolai Marr, sought to defuse separatist sentiment and to promote a hybrid, pan-Russian identity based on common civic values (Tolz 2006). As Gerasimov, Glebov and Mogilner (2016) show, this idea of hybridity became quite widespread in the late imperial period as a way of understanding the imperial situation. The imposition of cultural institutions on subject peoples could now be subject to critique, while separatist ideologies based on the assertion of an integral unity could be undermined.

Liberal advocacy of multi-culturalism became an *alternative* to full national self-determination, while progress was to be measured by the 'peaceful convergence' of the peoples of the East with Russia. While they viewed the direction of social evolution as universal, and the relative positions of different societies in the hierarchy of states as historically contingent rather than reflecting essential capacities, they held that the incorporation of societies with a 'lower' level of culture into a political space dominated by a society with a 'higher' level of culture to be advantageous for all concerned. Bartol′d argued that the Tsarist state should support Oriental Studies because 'the peoples of the east will believe in the superiority of our culture all the more when they are convinced we know them better than they know themselves' (1963a [1900], p. 610). Persuasion did not, however, preclude the necessity of using force to achieve imperial goals, for 'the measures taken by specific [Russian imperial] governments to close down and open up markets, including the aggressive campaigns' in Turkestan, were 'merely unconscious steps on the road to the establishment of the ever more apparent historical mission of Russia – to be the intermediary in the overland trade and cultural intercourse between Europe and Asia'

(Bartol′d 1963b [1927], p. 432).

These thinkers formed the nucleus of the 'old' post-revolutionary Russian orientology, centred on Petrograd/Leningrad, producing much valuable work on the philology, religion and philosophy of the Orient that sought to break the hold of Eurocentric perspectives. Levels and modes of engagement with Marxism among such scholars varied considerably, but they were encouraged to teach, research and publish throughout the 1920s and they played important roles in the policy of decolonization that came to be known as *korenizatsiia* ('indigenization' or 'nativization'), through which local languages, cultures and cadre were promoted. Although the emerging 'new', Marxist oriental studies aimed to bring cultural factors within its orbit, this long-established and well-developed base in Leningrad led these scholars to exert a greater influence than might be expected.

The 'New' Oriental Studies

Attempts to forge a new network of Marxist orientologists formally began with the formation of the All-Russian Scientific Association of Oriental Studies (*Vserossiiskaia nauchnaia assotsiatsiia vostokovedeniia*, VNAV) within the Commissariat of Nationalities (*Narkomnats*) in December 1921. Leading figures included the Bolshevik Mikhail Pavlovich-Vel′tman, a member of the collegium of *Narkomnats,* and the non-Party Vladimir Gurko-Kriazhin, who drafted many of the statutes of the Association. It aimed to pursue 'purely scientific-laboratory work on developing the correct methods for the study of the socio-economic structure of the countries of the East (imperialism)' (cited in Tamazishvili 2008, p. 63). VNAV

recognized the variety of 'political, economic and social relations' across Asia, but given that imperialism is not confined to Asia, it must study 'the entire world on whose exploitation the power of the capitalist society in Europe and the United States rests' (Pavlovich 1922, p. 9). The whole of Africa and much of Latin America was included in this field. 'The East' thus ceased to have a cultural-geographic unity and became primarily a category of economic geography. Such a definition of the 'East' remained unstable, however, since, as Bartol′d had shown, 'the Russian historian of the "ancient East" understands this term to mean the space from the Caucasus and Central Asia to the Indian Ocean and the countries of the African Lakes, from the borders between Iran and India to Gibraltar; the ancient history of this entire space "represents a fully finalized whole"' (2012 [1918], pp. 4-5). The 'old' and 'new' orientology thus appeared to have different objects in mind, and given that the young, 'new' orientologists were largely reliant on the 'old' orientology for much of their information, if not their interpretive apparatus, the substratum exerted a powerful, finally irresistible influence.

One of the earliest attempts to define a new approach was the monograph *Problemy Vostoka* (Problems of the East) published by director of the Eastern section of the Comintern, Georgii Safarov (1891-1942), in 1922.[1] In 1921 Safarov had organized the removal of Russian, mainly Cossack, colonists who had been granted land that straddles the borders of present-day Kazakhstan and Kirgizia from 1907 to 1917, at the expense of the mainly nomadic indigenous population. This represented one of the attempts to redress the legacy of Russian imperialism, which Lenin insisted upon and which Stalin opposed (Genis 1998).[2] For Lenin, as for most of the Bolshevik leadership, formal equality between nations was insufficient to demonstrate a

commitment to national liberation, and as members of the former dominant nationality, Russians must place themselves in a less advantageous position to those of the former colonies in order to establish trust. Concessions to formerly oppressed nationalities were thus fundamental to the hegemony of the proletariat. Safarov's 1922 book was a generalisation of questions raised in his 1921 book *Kolonial'naia revoliutsiia (Opyt Turkestana)* (The Colonial Revolution [The Turkestan Experience]), which was based in his experiences trying to consolidate Soviet power in central Asia. For Safarov, the 'question of the East', was the most significant dimension of the national question, and not an abstract question of equality or discursive forms. It was defined directly by the realities of imperialism and the state of the class struggle. The 'aristocratic-bureaucratic and commercial diplomacy' of the nineteenth century posed the 'Eastern question' as one of 'the military seizure and political subjugation of the backward countries', while the twentieth century had begun with an attempt to re-divide colonial possessions among imperial powers through combat. Imperial politics now posed the 'Eastern question' as the 'ways and means through which the backward countries of the East would be incorporated into the global capitalist economic system', and it 'elevated this question to the status of a matter of *principle*'. Without a proletarian revolution the development of world capitalism would lead to more war and devastation, and it was the task of the international proletariat to help the labouring masses of the East shorten their path from pre-capitalist means of production to communism and so avoid the suffering inflicted by capitalist development (Safarov 1922, pp. 25-26).

Safarov nevertheless accepted Bartol′d's definition of the 'East' and stressed the importance of understanding the climatic, geographical and demographic

particularities of the region. While Western feudalism arose on the basis of the peasant agrarian subsistence economy, 'eastern feudalism' arose on the basis of both nomadic cattle-herding and settled agriculture, between which there was a protracted struggle. This led eastern feudalism to persist for an extended period of time and when these societies clashed with rising capitalism, they were bound to fall to colonial conquest, which compounded their backwardness. Cultural factors such as the rise of Islam needed to be understood as corresponding to the particularities of Eastern feudalism just as Catholicism corresponded to those of feudalism in Western Europe (Safarov 1922, p. 32). The international proletarian revolution had become a decisive factor in world politics just as the 'working masses themselves' were 'beginning to cast off the chains of colonial slavery, the rotting remnants of the feudal-patriarchal heritage' and were laying 'a solid foundation for their alliance with the proletariat of the advanced countries'.

For the early Soviet regime, emerging from war and economic devastation, the 'nodal point' of the Eastern question now became 'the search for ways and means for the gradual transformation of backward economic, political and cultural forms in the direction of communism':

> In order to lead them forward, we need to know their history; not only abstractly, but concretely and to understand their interests. Here communist policy confronts Marxist theory with a specific task: to understand the historical development of the oppressed peoples of the colonial East, and on the basis of the acquired knowledge to indicate the path of revolutionary development (Safarov 1922, p. 32).

The 'Eastern question' was thus something posed by world capitalism, to which Marxists had to respond. Instead of how to integrate 'backward' societies into world

capitalism and subordinate them to the interests of imperial powers, the question must become how to understand and advance the interests of the laboring masses of the colonies themselves and in so doing to win leadership in the common struggle. Fundamentally there was, at this time, no difference in approach to the Soviet and colonial East, even if there were practical and tactical differences. The task was to win hegemony over the oppressed, just as the proletariat had won hegemony over Russian and non-Russian peasants in the liberation movement against the Russian autocracy. The goal was to achieve something approximating a *smychka* (alliance or union) between the proletariat of industrialised countries and the labouring masses of the colonial world against the common enemy: international capitalism.

The major works of the new Oriental studies such as Gurko-Kriazhin's work on Turkey, Sultan-Zade's work on Persia or Safarov's work on Turkestan and (later) on China tended towards being curious hybrids of scholarship and *publitsistika* (political journalism). The 'popular-scientific' (*nauchno-populiarnyi*) genre was a characteristic result, and was especially prevalent in the publications of Party institutions, reflecting the two objectives common to Marxist theory of the period. Reflecting on his time in Moscow working with the Comintern in 1922-3, Antonio Gramsci noted that Marxists sought a) to 'combat modern ideologies in their most refined form, in order to be able to constitute its own group of independent intellectuals' and b) 'to educate the popular masses', whose culture was marked by 'residues of the pre-capitalist world that still exist among the popular masses, especially in the field of religion.' The 'second task, which was fundamental, given the character of the new philosophy… absorbed all its strength' and led Marxists to form intellectual alliances with 'extraneous tendencies' (Gramsci 1971, p. 392). Marxism thus 'combined into a form of culture which was a

little higher than the popular average (which was very low) but was absolutely inadequate to combat the ideologies of the educated classes' (Gramsci 1971, p. 392-93). VNAV was a particularly clear example of this dual orientation and herein lay its instability, especially as the political situation shifted decisively at the end of the 1920s.

While Marxists relied on the 'old' historico-philological studies located in non-Party, state institutions, younger scholars in particular assimilated aspects of Marxism that gave their work a new character. Nikolai Konrad's studies of Japanese history, language and literature was one clear example of a certain Marxist *perestroika* that took place among what Gramsci called 'traditional intellectuals', while a new generation of linguists involved in the codification and standardization of the languages of the peoples of the East made crucial contributions not only to the study of individual languages, but also in the development of sociological linguistics. Marxist linguists like Evgenyi Polivanov and Nikolai Iakovlev and fellow-traveller linguists like Rozalia Shor, who strove to break out of the Eurocentric straightjacket of contemporary Indo-European philology, while seeking to retain its valid empirical data, should be numbered among the most important linguists of the century. More broadly, the funding made available for the study and development of the cultures of the peoples of the East led to the development of new institutions across the USSR, facilitating new, sociological and historical approaches to cultures that had long been marginalized in scholarship. A new generation of researchers from the Caucasus and Central Asia flourished in these conditions.

Throughout the 1920s, therefore, one sees a complex interaction between Marxist and

non-Marxist approaches to the study of the Orient, with influence flowing in both directions. Extracting specific works or debates from this wider field of engagement inevitably does them violence. To study this complex field adequately requires an approach that draws more from Mikhail Bakhtin's ideas about modes of dialogue, Gramsci's work on 'traditional' and 'organic' intellectuals in the apparatus of hegemony, and Pierre Bourdieu's ideas about the shifting power of scientific and statutory authority in the 'scientific field' than Foucault's 'closed circle' of power/knowledge.

Closing the circle

While debates about approaches to the study of the East abounded in the 1920s, there were attempts to close the circle. Belligerent advocates of 'proletarian culture' had opportunistically lodged themselves in parts of the burgeoning cultural bureaucracy at the beginning of the New Economic Policy and sought to evaluate perspectives according to the genealogy of their ideas and the sociological origin of this or that thinker.[3] Sophisticated engagement with other perspectives was here replaced by an attempt simply to 'unmask' the social and political orientation camouflaged by intellectual language, and to judge a work purely according to this criterion. Much has been written about the struggle by specific groups to achieve Party support under the slogan of 'proletarian hegemony' in the sphere of artistic literature, and how the Stalin regime gave them free reign to shift the balance of power in the cultural sphere. Some such figures participated in institutions such as the Communist University of the Toilers of the East (KUTV), a Party institution designed simultaneously to train indigenous cadre from the national regions and Communists in the anti-colonial

movement abroad. This influence was strengthened by the influx of careerists into the Party in the so-called 'Lenin Levy' of 1924, though they remained of marginal importance until the end of the 1920s when Stalin effectively eliminated the distinction between Party and State institutions, subordinating the latter to the former.

Another impulse toward closure came from within the realm of state institutions and derived from the pre-revolutionary orientology. By the mid 1920s Nikolai Marr had established a firm institutional base in Leningrad, controlling institutions in which important work in oriental studies took place.[4] The institutes also had branches in the Caucasus, and Marr sat on a number of influential committees within the state educational and research apparatus, where he sought to advance his own perspectives. Marr had made his reputation in archaeology and Caucasian philology before the Revolution, but is best known for his controversial work in linguistics, which achieved official recognition as 'Marxism in Linguistics' from 1932 until 1950, despite the fact that his work had little in common with Marxism. Generally speaking, Marr developed an ideology critique of Indo-European philology in which he demonstrated the way in which colonial assumptions among linguists led to a marginalization of languages and cultures without a sustained written culture, assumed the identity of a single language and a single people and assumed the special place of Aryan peoples in world history. There were clearly important insights here, and they have recently found support in scholarship inspired by Said's contention that was 'the extraordinarily rich and celebrated cultural position' of philology that 'endowed orientalism with its most important technical characteristics' (1995 [1978], p. 131).[5] Contemporary scholars were inspired by certain of Marr's ideas about functional and palaeontological semantics to develop valuable studies of literature and

folklore, which broke decisively with Indo-European methods of tracing the ancestry of narratives. Other aspects of Marr's linguistic work remain either highly contentious (such as the kinship of Basque, Etruscan, Caucasian and Semitic languages) or discredited (the most obvious being the derivation of all languages from four primordial phonemes *sal*, *ber*, *ion* and *rosh*).

What is most significant here, however, is that Marr sought to discredit Indo-European philology as a whole on the grounds that it is 'flesh and bone the expression of moribund bourgeois sociality' that had been 'built on the oppression of the peoples of the East by the murderous colonial policies of European nations' (Marr 1934a [1924], p. 1). Marr's critique had much in common with that of Foucault decades later. Both collapsed the distinction between factual accuracy and methodological rigor on the one hand and interpretation, generalization or conceptualization on the other. Thus, the formal methods that the comparativists, developed solely to establish genetic relationships between languages, were *themselves* rejected *because* linguists assumed the idea of the proto-language and limited their attention to Indo-European languages and those with a written 'culture.' For Marr, as for Nietzsche before him, and for Foucault after him, evidence is simply a ploy to establish a 'truth' that is to one's advantage. It was undoubtedly important to identify the ideological and institutional factors behind biases in selection and in generalization –for instance, that linguists had generated a large amount of factual data on Sanskrit but much less on Dravidian or Kartvelian languages (Marr 1934a [1924], p. 1). Yet instead of highlighting the qualitative importance of the limited data available in the latter cases, or providing new data based on those languages by means of the comparative methods, and arguing that this required a paradigm shift, Marr sought to find other

methods to establish the genetic relationships that he wanted to prove.

The majority of Soviet linguists shared Marr's dissatisfaction with the formal method in linguistics as excessively abstract and narrow, cutting language off from its wider social conditions and so gravitating towards a concern with dead over living languages. Marr's most talented critic, Polivanov, also criticized linguists for their mechanical application of categories designed to describe European languages to very different non-European languages such as Vietnamese.[6] New perspectives based on different methodologies needed to be developed. Polivanov could not, however, support Marr's rejection of Indo-Europeanism in its entirety. By ruling out the comparative method *tout court* rather than seeking to criticize its shortcomings or improve it, Marr had to develop his own *ad hoc* comparative methods to answer the same genetic questions that Indo-European linguists had raised. Immanent factors of development were now replaced by environmental ones, through which language, as an organism 'begins as a multitude of "mollusc-like embryo languages" and… develops by "crossing," '"hybridization" and "mutation," in a constantly upward direction until a perfect, single language will be achieved' (Thomas 1957, p. 143). This 'single glottogonic process' through which languages develop from polygenetic origins, converge and finally merge cleared away all *linguistic* barriers to the full participation of colonial peoples in the process of social evolution. Hybridity did not now stop with the creation of a pan-Russian identity, but became what is today called the project of globalization. Marr's narrative of convergence, merger and mixture bears striking resemblance to the postcolonial theorists' valorization of migration, decentering and 'hybridity' as a positive value in and of itself. The same processes may, however, serve and be promoted by the metropolitan centre as much as the

colonized periphery.

For Marr a ‘post-colonial’ age had dawned. The ‘distinction’ (*gran'*) between East and West as an economic and cultural reality, as well as an intellectual construct, was seen to be ‘melting away’, to be replaced by a ‘distinction between social layers’ (Marr 1926, p. iv). The legitimacy of such a perspective within the USSR itself depended on the overcoming of real economic and political disparities between Russia and its former colonies, but this did not concern Marr. In the 1920s the structures of the USSR facilitated a significant inflow of capital from the centre to the regions, establishing an anti-imperial relationship, but once the central bureaucracy decisively seized control of the economy through forced collectivization and other coercive measures, and marshaled all resources in the cause of military competition with hostile imperial powers, this changed fundamentally. By the criteria of the Marxist definition of imperialism (Lenin 1964 [1916]; Bukharin 1929 [1917]), which fundamentally involved the extraction of capital, the Soviet state became an imperial power. While directly *colonial* relations did not return as a general trend *imperial* relations were very clearly established, while Marrist ‘discourse’ deflected attention away from these realities.[7]

The political nullification that accompanied the radical rhetoric of Marrism was the focus of the second challenge to its claim to official status as ‘Marxism in linguistics’, which came from the group of young linguists called *Iazykfront* (Language-front). While crediting Marr with revealing the political agenda underlying Indo-Europeanism and with ‘correctly’ positing language as part of the superstructure,[8] the group complained that the exclusive focus on the *longue durée* of linguistic and

cultural development (semantic palaeontology), along with the mechanical nature of Marr's formulations rendered the theory politically inadequate. Instead they proposed a focus on 'the study of the language of the collective farmer, of the worker, the problems of planned influence on linguistic processes and the verification of theory by practice.'[9] They also proposed a whole range of ways in which linguists might intervene in the education of school children (Lomtev 1931, p. 161). While these tasks were directly linked to the Stalinist agenda, Marrism had indeed proven itself peripheral in the anti-colonial policies of the early Revolutionary period such as the codification of the languages of the national minorities, the development of their print culture and educational processes.[10] Moreover, Marrism remained largely irrelevant to studies of the social bases and institutional functions of language, the development of a new, democratized, public discourse, the development of a revolutionary press to link together the cities and the countryside, and techniques in overcoming the pervasive illiteracy that had been bequeathed by the Tsarist state. Indeed, it was participation by linguists, orientalists and philologists more generally in these very tasks that led to path-breaking developments in linguistic and cultural theory in the early USSR. Marrism's focus on convergence made it compatible with the centralizing policies of the Stalin regime, while linguists with a greater appreciation of socioeconomic and political dimensions of power fell out of favour.[11] A new generation of dilettantes was now able to supplant established scholars by echoing Marrist formulations and presenting a distinctly caricatured account of the history of linguistic thought. Rather like 'orientalism' today, 'Indo-Europeanism' and 'comparativism' became terms of scholarly abuse.

None of this would have been decisive had Stalin's 'revolution from above' at the end

of the decade not brought together the Marrists and advocates of proletarian culture as a single institutional force hostile to the critical processes at work within both philology and oriental studies. The misleading proletarian rhetoric was employed to justify fundamental changes in policy that transformed the nature of the state and the tasks set for the Communist Parties in the colonial world. They now needed to orient fully on establishing governments supportive of the USSR in any conflagration rather than prioritizing social transformation. The exploratory works produced by VNAV did not serve this imperative any more than the new critical approaches emerging from the various research institutes working on languages and cultures. Thus leading members of the Association came under attack in the pages of a number of prominent journals and, dangerously, were even accused of concealed Trotskyism (Mamet 1930; Tamazishvili 2008, pp. 102-03, 112-23). In 1930 VNAV lost its autonomy as it was incorporated into the Communist Academy. To confirm the ubiquity of the shift, Safarov, seeking rehabilitation after the defeat of the Leningrad opposition in 1927, published a directly Stalinist assessment of the 'position on the oriental studies front' in 1931 (Safarov 1931). The harassment of orientologists coincided with the appearance of notorious hatchet-men such as Valerian Aptekar′ and Sergei Bykovskii establishing the institutional dominance of Marrism in linguistics.

Many representatives of both the 'old' and 'new' oriental studies, along with many of the old revolutionaries, were eliminated in the Stalinist purges of the late 1930s. After this, as Alpatov notes 'there was a conscious restoration of the tradition of Russian pre-revolutionary science (and not only science)', symptomatic of which was Stalin's 1950 intervention in linguistics, which denounced Marr's 'quasi-Marxism' and called for a return to 'the tradition of Russian science of the end of the 19th and beginning of

the 20th centuries, positivist in spirit' (Alpatov 1997, p. 17). As in the pre-Revolutionary period, what was required was a type of oriental studies that rejected the orientalist dichotomies of the Western powers and promoted the 'peaceful convergence' of the peoples of the East with Russia.

From 'Soviet Orientalism' to postcolonialism

During the Cold War a rhetorical dichotomy of 'Soviet' and 'Bourgeois Orientalism' crystallized, as newly independent states turned to the USSR to lessen their dependence on trade with their old colonial masters and the USSR sought to establish a network of allied states to offset the power of the United States. At the very moment that the Cold War began, the journal *Voprosy istorii* published the programmatic text 'Urgent Tasks of Soviet Orientalist-Historians', which presented 'bourgeois oriental studies' as 'serving imperialism in an extraordinarily vigorous manner', striving '"to prove" the historical inevitability and even the "necessity" of the rule of the western colonial powers over the multi-million masses, who are lagging behind in their progress and, therefore, "incapable" of independently deciding the fate of the East themselves' (Anon 1949, p. 5). Such scholars produce 'false, pseudo-historical "theories" and "conceptions,"' which may 'differ in details and on particular points but they bear a testimony to a complete unity on the principal and fundamental question' (1949, p. 5). This involves the propagation of a particular type of exoticism about 'the special type of "Eastern soul"', relishing 'unimportant details of the religious cults or repeat entertaining palace-anecdotes about dynastic histories' (1949, p. 6).

The same sentiments appear in countless programmatic statements of the 1950s and 1960s, boosted by the victory of the Communist Party in the Chinese Civil War in 1950 and by the April 1955 Bandung Conference which eventually led, in 1961, to the formation of the Non-Aligned Movement. As the USSR attempted to utilise decolonisation for its own ends, the characterisation of 'bourgeois orientalism' was taught to generations of intellectuals from the decolonizing parts of the word at institutes like as the Patrice Lumumba Peoples Friendship University in Moscow, founded in 1960, the same year that the USSR hosted the 25th International Congress of Orientalists. At the opening of the congress senior Politburo member Anastas Mikoian (1960, pp. 3-6) declared that henceforth the peoples of the East will be transformed from the objects to the creators of their own history, culture and economy. Meanwhile, the loosening of the intellectual environment after Stalin's death led to a greater pluralism in Soviet oriental studies, perhaps best exemplified in the later work of Konrad (1967) that was even published in English translation.

As Vera Tolz (2006, p. 127) has shown, this exerted a formative influence on Said's *Orientalism* via the work of the Egyptian Marxist Anouar Abdel-Malek (1963), the main difference being Said's alienation from pro-Soviet Communist Parties because of their attempts to subordinate liberation movements to Soviet interests and to impose Moscow's schema on all theories of domestic social and economic development. Said integrated these perspectives, along with selected ideas from Foucault, Gramsci and many others into what Brennan calls the 'patented eclectic amalgam' (2006, p. 111) that became *Orientalism*. While Said's relationship to Marxism was complex and became more nuanced over time, some among the post-1968 generation of postcolonial theorists decisively rejected it and turned instead to

Nietzsche and Heidegger, perhaps the most anti-democratic and Eurocentric of modern European philosophers, to rationalize their withdrawal from collective politics. They now closed the circle of a unitary orientalist discourse, and employed Foucault 'to justify political quietism with sophisticated intellectualism, at the same time wishing to appear realistic, in touch with the world of power and reality' (Said 1983, p. 245). What was forgotten was that the postcolonial critique remained rooted in the very principles they sought to expose.

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[1] Safarov, like a number of oppositionists, has been subject to very little direct study, even though their influence in these and other key debates was substantial. The absence of an intellectual and political biography of the head of the Comintern Grigorii Zinoviev is a particularly clear example of these lacunae in scholarship.

[2] Safarov was rebuked for the 'extreme' position he adopted on the question in Bukhara and was removed from his post in Turkestan in October 1921 in order that the central government could establish a compromise between the different sectors of the population (Smith 1999: 99-101).

[3] One such figure was the prominent member of the belligerent literary group 'Onguard' (*Na postu!*), Il'ia Vardin, who engaged in attacks on 'fellow-traveller' orientologists under the pseudonym of I. Visanov (Tamazishvili 2008: 92-94)

[4] These included the State Academy for the History of Material Culture (GAIMK) and the Institute of Language and Thinking (IIaM).

[5] Among such work see, for instance, Olender (1992 [1989]) and Benes (2008).

[6] For an overview, see Leont′ev 1983, pp. 31–45.

[7] After Marr's death in 1934, however, the Soviet annexation of the Baltic States, and the deportation of nationalities at the end of World War 2 provided conspicuous counter-examples.

[8] This was a controversial formulation that Marr adopted from a textbook of Marxism by Nikolai Bukharin and had no basis in Marx's own writings.

[9] 'Iz stenogrammy torzhestvennogo sobraniia v NIIaZe, posviashchennogo godovshchine ego sushchestvovaniia, 2 marta, 1932g: Vystuplenie direktora instituta M.N. Bochachera' [From the stenograph of the gala meeting in The Institute of Linguistics dedicated to the anniversary of its existence 2 March 1932: The director's presentation by M.N. Bochacher], GARF A-2307/17/84.

[10] For instance, Marr's convoluted 'analytic alphabet', which aimed to accommodate the phonetic variations of all languages, proved largely unsuitable for the grandiose tasks he set for it.

[11] Marr was not alone among the older generation of Orientologists to present his ideas with a Marxist gloss at this time. See, for instance the late articles of Ol′denburg (1931) in which a dichotomy of Soviet and Western Oriental Studies is already posed quite clearly.