

Exploring Terra Incognita: a reading on the pre-history of Central Asian Studies

Cengiz Sürücü*

The history of the Inner Asia began at some unspecified time when the differentiation between various occupational groups and their respective levels of prosperity became sufficiently marked to call for the defense of the erection of physical and moral barriers for the defense of the more prosperous. With sudden outburst of activity and with lulls, mostly due to exhaustion, these conflicts have continued until modern times, perhaps in some aspects, even to our day. It could hardly be otherwise, since the barbarian and the civilized are opposed and complimentary, neither can be defined without an understanding of the other and the gap between the two has proved unbridgeable “What peace can there be between a rich man and a poor?”... Inner Asia is the antithesis to our civilized world, its history is that of the Barbarian.¹

In his “*The Cambridge History of Inner Asia*”, Denis Sinor, the dean of the Eurasian Studies in the English-speaking world, draws a thick, impenetrable boundary between the peoples of Central Eurasia and the “civilized world.” His notion of Inner Asia reflects more of a temporal and cultural distinctiveness than an analytically constructed geographical area. He invokes a veiled nevertheless omnipresent image of the Orient in his readers’ mind. That image is a shadowy, mysterious menace, a timeless and spaceless danger coming out of the mere existence of the Oriental. The ‘barbarian’ has always been envious of the peace, prosperity and tranquility of the ‘civilized’. The

ultimate mission of history and of the historian is to uncover the eternal, incessant conflict between these two worlds; to awaken the ‘civilized world’ to the imminent threat posed by the ‘Oriental.’ Beyond the boundary of civilization lives a permanent danger, an outer darkness, an enigma threatening the very existence of the ‘civilized man’; ‘*The foremost duty of the Civilized is the banishment of the Barbarian beyond the borders of the oikoumene, the prevention of further intrusions.*’²

Saving rare moments of history, change is and always has been a child of negotiation. The date circa 1989, when the Soviet Union started to crumble, will be remembered as a time of incredible velocity. Yet, a dissident reading of a large portion of new scholarship on Central Asia reveals how *old* the *new* could get. How do apparently sweeping changes reproduce same old dispositions. After almost a century of scholarly engagement with the ‘Russian Central Asia’, the region is still perceived through the lenses of great power rivalries; from Anglo-British Great Game (Bolshoya Igra), to the Cold War (Khalodnaya Vayna), and the latest round of oil and pipeline bonanza.³ No doubt since the onset of the Great Power rivalry much has changed, yet a sublime subtext that Central Asia is a *terra incognita*, a realm of difference; mysterious, exotic, enigmatic and attractive, has remained as an intellectual legacy. A considerable portion of scholarly works on strategic studies depicts an image of absence; inner Asia is externally constituted through international competition for oil and pipeline routes.⁴ Inner Asians are denied a voice, an independent existence, and a status of being actors rather than subjects. Central Asia was and to a large extent still is a ‘contested terrain,’ a ‘no man’s land.’

The emergence and development of Central Asian Studies field owes much of its dynamics to the infamous “Great Game” played by Britain and Russia throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries. The 19th century Great Game or the colonial rivalry for domination over the ‘heart of Asia’ animated the earliest known ‘scientific’ incursions into Central Asia. The Anglo-Russian rivalry not only saw the seeds of curiosity over the region, but also led to the institutionalization of the Central Asian studies in Europe.

In this article I will describe the context of Anglo-British colonial rivalry and the formation of the area studies as a byproduct of the colonial competition. I will discuss a latent but often concealed connection between the colonial rivalry and the representations of the Central Asian communities. It is in this period that Central Asia became a subject of systematic knowledge production. For a long time, the 19th century studies of the region and its inhabitants have been regarded as distinct and independent from the intense colonial competition played in the background. The ‘lonely,’ ‘high spirited’ and ‘brave’ travelers and explorers were in fact mostly the field officers and agents of the two colonial rivals. In the subsequent sections, I will try to show how colonial powers legitimized their mission by constructing particular images of the native peoples in the region. These representations are not only substantively culture-bound, hostile and even fictive, but they are also a testimony to the nature of the colonial politics played by the Russian and British powers in the region. Throughout the narratives of 19th century ‘Great Game’, one can detect a subtle politics played by constantly revising the boundaries of the realms of ‘tranquility’ and ‘anarchy’ between the conquered peoples and those resisting colonial domination. I will also argue that there is a substantial level of textual reproductions in those overarching discourses representing local peoples as

‘savages’ and ‘predators.’ Consequently, my aim is to demonstrate that the logic of colonial politics is deeply embedded in the political subtext representing the colonized people.

Of Being Friends and Enemies

Edward Said defines Orientalism as a “corporate institution for dealing with the Orient-dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.”⁵ Orient, claims Said, is not a mere geographical distinction from the Occident but a politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively constructed discourse during the post-Enlightenment era. The relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony.⁶ In a Foucauldian vein, Said perceives an inevitable association between the motivation to produce knowledge or the knowable categories of others and the desire to dominate and to colonize. Consequently, deconstruction of Orientalism as a political discourse refutes the claims of ‘universal truth’ and ‘scholarly objectivity or innocence’ that the representations of Orient claim to have. Postulating objectivity of the representations essentially conceals the power, which defines, represents and speaks for the Orient.

No ‘discovery’, Tzveton Todorov says, takes place in an empty cognitive frame. The encounter of the colonizer and the colonized is a process of self-construction; ‘the discovery self makes of the other.’⁷ The colonized is not simply out there awaiting ‘discovery’, but the ‘contact’ is a process of negotiating pre-constructed images of the ‘other’. Encounter is indeed not a starting point of the adventure; it is a final act of a long

course that only at the final stage brings agents, their intentions, interests, and preconceptions into actual contact. The motivation that drives the colonial agent into the land of ‘strangers’ ultimately unleashes impulses to convert difference into ‘inferiority’: into a desire for control, domination and assimilation. Difference becomes a threat upon which exercise of power, destruction and assimilation are justified by colonialist discourses.

The triangular relationship between two colonial powers competing for mastery over a territory and its inhabitants presents an intriguing instance of how colonial contenders construct each other and the colonized people.⁸ The representations of Central Asian communities by the 19th century British and Russian intellectuals who traveled into the region provide us with stark examples of a colonial subtext embedded in the intellectual representations. They signify the will to domination that has been concealed in apparently “objective and indifferent” observations of the travelers. These travel books, written mostly by the political officers and agents of the two imperial powers, describe ‘the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration.’⁹

Heroes of the Time: Adventurers and Explorers in the ‘Wilderness’ of Central Asia

Central Asia is that portion of Asia, which intervenes between the English and Russian frontiers wherever they now are, or wherever they in the future may be. It is consequently a variable tract of country in accordance as those frontiers advance or recede. Khokand and the districts of Amou Darya and Trans Caspiania are by definition no longer in Central Asia; but Bokhara, Khiva, the Turkoman country, and Afghanistan remain included in it, and these countries, with Persia and the Pamir Khanates, actually constitute the whole of what may be called Central Asia...¹⁰

The Great Game has been the subject of an extensive literature from military, geostrategic and political perspectives.¹¹ The origin of the “Great Game” is traced back to Napoleons’ Tilsit agreement to divide Asia between France and Russia. Although Napoleon’s grand strategy was decisively frustrated by a British-led conservative coalition of the European powers, it should have left the imprints of vulnerability in the British imperial establishment in India. Throughout the following decades, British India dispatched several political agents to Afghanistan and Central Asia to monitor Russian activities in the region. The initial known British intelligence-gathering activities were conducted by the political agents based in Calcutta, Kandahar, Kabul, Tehran and Herat. Apparently, these activities were *ad hoc* and disorganized, initiated by the personal efforts of the low-ranking field officers. The forerunner of such activities was that of William Moorecroft’s mission to Bukhara in 1820-25, which coincided with Captain Nikolay Muraviev’s military expedition to the east coast of the Caspian in order to determine a location for the erection of a military fort. Muraviev’s mission was marking the opening of the stage as the last known Russian campaign, the Cherkasskiy campaign, was more than a century old.¹² It was not until General Perovski’s military campaign in 1839-40 to depose Khivan Khan Allah Khuli on behalf of a pro-Russian Kazakh sultan, that Britain and Russia intensified information-gathering activities in the region.¹³ The term “Great Game” is believed to be coined sometime in that time frame. In a correspondence with Henry Rawlinson, the famous British hawk was then serving as a political agent in Kandahar, Arthur Conolly, a British captain, used the term to express the ‘beauty’ of the mission the two Christian nations had undertaken to ‘civilize the Asian races.’¹⁴

British involvement in the lands north of India came to a turning point with the appointment of Lord Palmerston, a sincere Russophobe, as the Foreign Secretary in 1837. Palmerston, and Lord Aucland, the governor of India, interpreting the attempt of Persia to capture Herat in 1837, then a semi-independent city of Afghanistan, as a St. Petersburg backed plot, decided to oust Afghan ruler Dost Muhammad on behalf of a pro-British contender to the throne, named Shah Shuja.¹⁵ At the time, the rivalry became so intense that every major settlement across the region had one or more resident intelligence officer. In 1835, Dost Muhammad, suspecting that Britain had plans to support Ranjit Singh, his southern enemies, against him, demanded representatives from St. Petersburg. The Russian envoy, led by cont Vitkevich, en route to Kabul came across Henry Rawlinson in the outskirts of Herat. As Rawlinson rushed to Herat to inform Lieutenant Eldred Pottinger, another notorious intelligence officer, about the Vitkevich envoy, he found Herat surrounded by Persian army; the army was led by a Russian officer and the city defense was organized by Pottinger. In 1839, the same year with General Perovski's campaign on Khiva, Shah Shuja, supported by Britain, captured Kabul, only to hand the throne back to Dost Muhammad two years later amidst a popular uprising. In the uprising, one of the "legendary" spies of the time, Alexander Burns, was found dead in his *harem* which was said to be second only to that of Amir.

As the rivalry gradually mounted, the turning point in Russia's penetration into the region came with St. Petersburg's defeat in the Crimean war of 1856. After the Crimean war, General Cherniayev was dispatched to the region to capture Tashkent. He indeed temporarily occupied Tashkent in 1865, but Emir Sayyid Muzaffer of Bukhara made an alliance with Khivan Alim Kul Khan and recaptured the city. After Cherniayev's

failure, another powerful military unit, under General Romanovski, decisively occupied Tashkent in 1867.¹⁶ The next year, Kokand and Samarkand were incorporated into the empire while the rest of Bukharan Emirate became a *de facto* protectorate. After the occupation of much of today's Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, Russian forces intensified military campaigns into the west of Amu Darya. The last quarter of the century witnessed bloody clashes between Russian forces and the Turkmen tribes. Russian occupation of Khiva in 1873 was completed after a cruel mass murder of Yamud Turkmens.¹⁷ In one of the battles in 1879, Nur Verdi Khan, who managed to form a confederation of Akhal and Merv Turkmens, dealt a heavy blow to the much stronger forces of General Lomakin in Gok Tepe. Nevertheless, Nur Verdi Khan died the next year and the Russian army overwhelmed over much weakened Teke Turkmens in the battle of Gok Tepe in 1881. The Russian conquest of Central Asia was completed by 1894 with the occupation of Merv. Meanwhile, Kokand Khanate was incorporated into Russia in 1876, while the Khivan and Bukharan Emirates remained as protectorates of the Russian Empire until the Bolshevik revolution.

The same year that the Tsarist army assaulted on Teke Turkmens, Britain replaced Dost Muhammad's son Sher Ali with Yakub Khan who abandoned Afghan foreign policy to Britain.¹⁸ Yet, Yakub Khan failed to galvanize support from Patan tribes and another pro-British ruler, Amir Abdurrahman was installed on the throne.¹⁹ In his long reign, Amir Abdurrahman signed the treaty of *Durand* with Britain demarcating today's Pakistani-Afghan border. Another agreement signed between Russia and Britain after Russia's defeat to Japan in 1905 settled the northern borders of Anglo-Russian competition.²⁰

Anglo-Russian rivalry in the region was carried out through an intensive intelligence campaign that had no precedence in the history of Central Asia. If anything, colonial politics was a competition of intelligence-gathering. For the first time in its history, physical and social formations in the region truly became a 'subject' of systematic study. Countless of British and Russian military officials, spies, journalists, strategists, scientists, linguists were dispatched to investigate geographical, economic, political, military, sociocultural structures in Central Asia. Most of them in disguise, these 'explorers and adventurers' were literally the pioneers of colonial penetration into the 'no man's lands' lying between the two colonial powers. Intelligence gathering was motivated with the desire to fill the 'blank spaces' in the region, to make the physical and cultural geography of Inner Asia accessible to the colonial powers. 'Heroes of the time' created a web of information through scientific journals, books, reading circles, diaries, letters, sketches, memories, reports, maps, charts and travelogues, which provided the foundations of the Central Asian Studies. Over a span of a century hundreds of books, articles and other printed material were devoted to various aspects of Central Asia and its inhabitants.

Although both powers closely watched strategic movements of each other, agents and pundits of two colonial powers also had an impressive level of communication and exchange of information through a pool of information-sharing networks. One of these circles was the *Royal British Geographical Society*, where British and Russian pundits had meetings and shared information on each other's explorations in the region. The counterpart of this office in Russia was the *Russian Geographical Society*, which essentially served the same functions for St. Petersburg.²¹ Much of the data on

geography, ethnography, economy and politics in the region was easily available to the interested parties through the proceedings, journals, and meetings of these societies as well as through a wide-range of public newspapers, travel books, diaries, geographical and military maps published in London, St. Petersburg, Paris and other European centers.

These sources of information, easily accessible to any interested person, show highly similar, if not identical, observations, judgments, interpretations, stereotypes and prejudices about the peoples and cultures of Central Asia. That is because almost without exception, most if not all of the Russian and British travelers were already familiar with much of the available information on the region. Their writings were in fact a dialog with the previously published material.²² Consequently, they already had strong views when they arrived in the region.²³

A discourse analysis of these texts reveals a complex and multidimensional knowledge production process whereby multifaceted colonial politics was deeply etched into what was reported and not reported.²⁴ It is almost impossible to deconstruct every single variable in this process. However, there are a few features common to many of the travelers that should be pointed out. First and foremost, the majority of travels made into the region during 19th century was military-political in nature and carried out by secret imperial agents. Again, most of these travelers, including well-known Captain Murayev, Captain Connolly, Major Lazarof, Armenious Vambery traveled in disguise either as a Persian horse dealer, as a dervish, or an Armenian merchant.²⁵ Thus, a paramount feeling of secrecy, insecurity and danger prevail in their narratives. As these travelers were in a secret mission on a dangerous soil, intrinsically they positioned the people they encountered as enemies. Another feature of the colonial knowledge production process

was that few of the explorers possessed linguistic capacity to engage in direct relationship with the people in the region. A very few indeed was able to communicate in one of the local languages. Typically, British agents usually possessed either Persian or Russian languages. If the mission was not secret, the traveler had to go St. Petersburg first to obtain necessary permissions and security guarantees from Tsarist authorities. Then, the route the traveler followed was either from north through Kazakh steps or from west through Caspian Sea. In the first instance he had to employ a Tatar guide who preferably possessed both Russian and one of the Turkish dialects spoken in the region. If the route was through Caspian and the traveler had sufficient knowledge of Persian, he had to find a Persian guide. These guides were to decorate the travel books as 'lazy servants.' Yet, by all means the first recourse of the traveler on many issues was his 'lazy servant.'

Another natural source of information for the traveler was the military and civil servants of Russian colonial establishment in the region. It was a custom that when a European traveler arrived in one of the colonial posts, he was honored by a royal dinner, which served as a routine channel of information exchange and provisions of logistics and guidance. Moreover, establishing communication with the settled local communities, like Persians, Uzbeks and Tajiks, was much easier than with the nomads. These elements added a dimension of local politics to the knowledge production process. Persians, for example, had centuries of quarrels with Turkmen tribes and settled Uzbeks were hardly at ease with the nomads. To give an example, a close reading of a travel book will reveal that the primary sources of information for the traveler were basically previously published books and articles in British and Russian press, colonial officials working in

the region, his Persian, Tatar or Kazakh-Kyrgyz servants, or at most informants from the already subjugated communities.

In the midst of Great-Game, those who managed to travel across Central Asia were inclined to narrate their travels as an incredible and trying adventure to be glorified by the reading circles back in their cosmopolitan centers. For the traveler, fame, status and promotion were conditional on the color and contrasts he depicted in his travel books. Literary techniques in the geographical descriptions, like picturesque portrayals of haunting memories, inaccessible landscapes, unbearable climate, strange, colorful and exotic peoples, served to cultivate curiosity and interest. The more color, danger, agony and exaggeration added to the travelogues, the braver and heroic the explorer became. The sharper the contrast between the noble, high-spirited adventurer and the 'barbaric, savage and fanatic natives' was depicted, the more celebrated the mission was. Moreover, portrayals of extremes served as a textual strategy to create an image of the people, 'savage, barbarian, cruel, merciless,' associated with the extraordinary geography.²⁶

Added to these individual level motives, British policy-making circles and pundits were sharply divided on the issue of Russia's role in the society of European states. The so-called hawks, led by Rawlinson, the two time chairman of the British Royal Geographical Society, were highly suspicious of Russian intentions on India, while those who were identified as Russophiles were more sympathetic to colonization of Central Asia to the extent that it did not pose an immediate threat to British possessions in Asia. They were busy to cultivate a sympathetic image of Imperial Russia in London.²⁷ In St. Petersburg, a similar positioning was at work between those who advocated a Eurasian image for Russia, and those who aligned themselves with the old status-quo orientation of

Catherine II.²⁸ Consequently, metropolitan, individual as well as local politics was deeply embedded in the knowledge production process.

Intelligence activities in the region did not only intend to gather information for further military intrusions, but also served as a principal means for justification of colonial expansion into the region. For that purpose, particular images of Central Asian societies were constructed and circulated in the intellectual circles. The image of Turkmens as *'the most brutal and wild savages of the region'* or Kazakhs as *'childish subjects of Russians'* acquired a textual nature in those massive information dissemination channels. Eventually these discourses became standard references with such a power and authority that they conveyed a full umbrella of meanings and reflections surpassing the authority of anybody to challenge or reevaluate.²⁹ C. Boulger, a British military officer, succinctly exposed the textual nature of these representations; *'In the high opinion of English officers have formed of the personal characteristics of the Turkoman, an opinion not more favorably expressed by Conolly and Burnes more than forty years ago than by Butler and Napier the other day...'*³⁰

To quote some oft-cited representations by the well-known travelers;

*No! the Turkomans, who delight in the Alamans, are a most frightful set of men, and quite unworthy of our sympathy...Nomads of all times and all regions have been a plague to peaceable settlers in their vicinity.*³¹... *We must never forget that the Turkoman nomads, with all their reputation as cruel and ruthless plunderers, have many fine qualities in which they excel the neighbouring nomadic tribes, and especially the Kazakhs, with whom they are frequently compared. Whilst the mental quickness of the latter commonly degenerates into cunning and fraud, the Turkomans are known, even among their enemies, for their truthfulness and the rigid observance of the plighted word...What struck me most during my sojourn among the Turkomans was their love and tenderness for their family and the respect they show to females. I found that women were not only quite on an equality with men as regards family rights, but*

*that old matrons inherit the command over the clan and enjoy the obedience of the rudest warriors.*³²

*or The (Turkmen) men are generally tall, robust fierce and often wild looking...exceedingly brave and the life of plunder is the one that suits them. They are true their word, and their quest is sacred till he leaves their tent, and then they murder him if it suits them.*³³

The travel notes of Eugene Schuyler, first secretary of the United States representation in St. Petersburg, convey similar characteristics for Kirgiz nomads ‘*The Kirghiz, owing to the simplicity of their life, are far more children of nature than most other Asiatics, and have all the faults and virtues of children.*’³⁴ Similarity of the characteristics attributed to the different nomadic communities is striking. After almost half a century later a Russian officer, who was appointed to the region in 1908, described the then subjugated Turkmens as the ‘*naive and knightly children of the desert.*’³⁵ Another travelogue echoed the same ‘*childish*’ nature of nomads almost in the same structure;

*The Kirgiz are tireless, rough rider and occupy the saddle for days...they are hospitable, generous and amiable to those whom they consider friendly, but their promises are not to be depended on. They never fulfill a contract unless it is for their interest to do so...They are high hearted, fickle, easily influenced and affectionate...*³⁶

Against these umbrella associations, Macgahan presents a wholly different preconception from a different standing point. He compares Uzbeks and the Turkmens in a different conjecture and arrives at a different conclusion, which he recommends to the British government as a strategy;

For my part, I think Kaufmann was wrong. I think that of the two peoples, the Uzbeks and the Turkomans, it would have been better to conciliate the latter. They are a better, braver and nobler race. Almost free from Mohamedhan prejudices, and entirely exempt from the disgusting and degrading Mohamedhan vices, they would have made far more powerful and reliable allies than the degenerate, vice-stricken Uzbeks. Their bravery in the field and their fidelity to the Khan, should rather have been recommendations in their favor.

And it is a well known fact, that of all the peoples of Central Asia the Turcomans are the only ones who can be relied upon to their promises.³⁷

Upon a closer examination, one can detect a hidden yet latent colonial politics that underlines these seemingly ad hoc and overarching descriptions of local peoples. Three main factors determine the politics of constructing ‘friends’ and ‘enemies’ in the colonial setting. First and foremost is that colonial agents did not attach pejorative terms and stereotypes randomly. Russians associated the lands of resisting communities with ‘chaos and terror,’ while subjugated lands signified ‘peace, harmony and order.’ Consequently, throughout successive reports, the boundary that separated the realms of ‘order’ and ‘anarchy’ shifted gradually with the forward movement of the colonial power. As for the British the picture was more complex. On the one hand, they, to a certain extent, approved or at least remained silent to the forward movement of Russia as long as their immediate interests were not endangered. On the other hand, British intelligence employed counter information campaigns to challenge Russian narratives. MacGahan’s above cited interpretation reflects British interests in the region. He was reporting on behalf of Britain when Turkmen resistance was encouraged in the intellectual circles of London. The next excerpt this time from an agent, who reportedly worked for the Tsarist Empire, will clarify the ongoing communication between the colonial powers. He defends subjugated Uzbeks and Kazakhs, while at the same time laying the ground for further Russian expansion into Turkmen lands;

The Uzbeks are upon the whole good natured, hospitable and honest, at least as compared with the deceitful and cunny character which usually forms the prevalent attribute of oriental civilization... The characteristics of the Kirghiz-Kaisaks are a lavish hospitality, a certain natural cordiality, veracity and the faithful execution of

*promises and contracts on the part of these simple nomads. The Orenburg Kirghiz are of a quite disposition, their character being in the main peaceful...never taking seriously to arms unless the security of their families and property be endangered by predatory hostile nomads. In this way they differ essentially from the nomads of Iranian lowlands, for the Tekke and Yamud Turkomans live exclusively on plunder, and are noted for their daring dexterity in fighting and love of strife.*³⁸

In the Russian accounts, Kazakh nomads were portrayed as peaceful, self-defensive communities, while all Turkmens were ‘relentless plunderers’. As will be expected, after the occupation of Khiva in 1873, Russian colonialist discourse started to construct a differential treatment of Turkmen tribes. In the above cited descriptions by Hugo Stumm, who followed and reported the occupation of Khiva in 1873, the realm of anarchy is projected not for all Turkmens but ‘*for the Tekke and Yamud Turkomans* (emphasis added) *live exclusively on plunder, and are noted for their daring dexterity in fighting and love of strife.*’³⁹ Needless to say that at the time of Hugo Stumm’s writing Tekke and Yamud Turkmens were fighting against Russia. Salor and Goklen tribes had already been subjugated, and thus, were carefully omitted in his report.

The revision of the image of Yamud Turkmens is another good example here. E. Schuyler narrates the story of Khiva’s conquest in 1872-73. According to his report, which was reportedly based on Russian sources, Russian conquest of Khiva became inevitable because the Khivan Khan was providing military assistance to the rebellious Kirgiz (Kazakh) nomads.⁴⁰ This story also appears in the pages of Boulger’s ‘England and Russia in Central Asia’;

*She (Khiva), ravaged the borders, she stirred up the Kirghiz, she gave sanctuary to several of the most proclaimed of Russia’s foes, and whenever the chance offered she carried off Russian subjects into captivity...*⁴¹

Same story this time from a Russian source;

*At a time when the frontier posts of Russian territory still stood on the Ural it was already Khiva that by instigating the Kirghiz tribes to revolt, by raids and plundering expeditions, continually disturbed the peace and order of the Russian subjects on the border. Neither by peaceful nor by forcible measures had Russia succeeded since the beginning of the 18th century in bringing to an end these practices of the hostile Khivans.*⁴²

Given the obvious impossibility that these three travelers could have personally witnessed Khivan Khan's instigation of the Kazakh nomads, there is only one possible explanation; the same story was shared from a common pool of information network. Yet at the same time, a dissident Russian commander, General Cherniayev, who had served in the region until his failure to capture Tashkent in 1867, was harshly criticizing construction of an unwarranted connection between the Kazakh uprising and the Khivan Khanate in the columns of a Russian daily, *Ruski Mir*.⁴³

Reportedly, after the surrender of the Khivan Khanate, General Kaufman imposed a penalty of 300,000 rubles on the Yamud tribe. Yamuds, unable to pay the tribute, evacuated their settlements and started to raid on Russian forces. The response of Russian Governor General, Kaufmann, was tough; he ordered General Golovatchief 'to give over the settlement of the Yamuds and their families to complete destruction, and their herds and property to confiscation.'⁴⁴ Consequently, Yamuds were harshly subjugated by the Russian troops. After a while, Russian sources started to depict Yamud settlements and the Khivan Khanate as the lands of security, peace and order, while the realm of darkness and anarchy moved to the territories of Merv and Tekke tribes.⁴⁵ Fred Burnaby, in his 1875, 'Ride to Khiva', sheds light onto the colonial politics behind these representations;

Formerly the Kirgiz and Turkomans lived in a continual state of war. The Kirgiz made marauding expeditions into their neighbors' territory, and carried off horses and cattle. Their foe, in his turn,

frequently crossed the Oxus in armed bands of from fifty to sixty horsemen, plundered the Kirgiz kubitkas and carried away the spoil. At the present moment, from Russian sources, we only hear of the marauding disposition of the Turkomans, and of the peaceful disposition of the Kirgiz. The Turkoman raids are purposefully exaggerated, in the same way as previously the Khivans were maligned. This is done as an excuse for a subsequent advance upon Merv."⁴⁶

After the fall of Khiva, the focus of the intelligence campaigns shifted to Tekke Turkmens. The military report of a Russian spy, Lieutenant Alikhanov, who was disguised as a clerk of a Russian trading company and dispatched to Merv for military reconnoitering after the fall of Gok Tepe in 1882, is an exemplary case here;

*Besides being cruel, **the Merv Tekkes** never keep a promise or an oath if it suits their purpose to break it. Neither relationship nor friendship keeps them from pilfering and stealing...In excess of this, they are liars and gluttons...They are frightfully envious; they have no notion of decency and shame.*⁴⁷

More than mere coincidence, the sharp contrast drawn between the subjugated and resisting Turkmen tribes accompanied further military campaigns. His derogatory portrayal of Merv Turkmens evokes an imminent desire to break this last vestige of Turkmen resistance;

*Eternal quarrels exist between the branches of various clans and there is utter absence of any organization to keep a check upon disorder. Free caravan intercourse and regular trade with the oasis will not be possible until **Merv rests at the foot of Akhal.***⁴⁸

Eugene Schuyler's travel accounts present a completely different picture. According to him Tekke Turkmens were the victims rather than the wolves; '*They all feel themselves as menaced on one side by Russia, on another by the Persian Kurds and Khivan Yamuds. They felt the necessity of the unity... at the end of January 1875 a council was held, they elected Berdy Murat Khan, the son of the Khan Nur Verdy...*'⁴⁹

Captain Napier's notes of his journey in 1876 can be taken as another clue of how Persian, Russian and British interests could coincide in establishing a hegemonic discourse on Turkmen nomads;

The Turcoman nomad is not by any means the mere plundering savage that his Persian neighbor paints him. From what I have seen and heard, I would describe the average Turcoman as exceedingly intelligent, shrewd, and alive to his own interests. Accustomed from childhood to a free, roving life, anything like restraint would be at first irksome to him, but he does not appear to incapable of discipline.”⁵⁰

Another feature of colonial politics was the manipulation of local feuds and disputes for the interests of colonial powers. In particular, Russians successfully manipulated the segmented lineage system between conquered Turkmen tribes, like Salors and Yamuds, against the Tekkes.⁵¹ Reportedly, Russians had known segmentary feuds since the subjugation of Kazakhs;

Securing the co-operation now of one and again another tribe against some of the hostile nomads themselves, withal a very effective strategem, for it was this system of cleverly utilizing the internal disputes among tribes and auls by means of which the Kirghiz steppe was gradually subjugated through the agency of its own inhabitants.⁵²

Similarly, British travelers seem to have discovered a similar envy between settled communities and the nomads in the region and constructed their colonial politics around those local feuds. In its proceedings, the Royal Geographical Society consistently advocated the establishment of a colonial rule over nomads not only for the benefit of ‘the civilized world,’ but also for ‘the emancipation of the neighboring countries from the permanent threat of the nomads.’⁵³ Consequently, knowledge produced by colonial agents ultimately was functional in converging the interests of the colonial powers with the particularistic interests of the local peoples.

Lastly, what is especially striking in the 19th century ‘Great Game’ is that, far from being ‘enemies’, Russian and British intelligentsia projected themselves as ‘noble’ peoples serving the common interests of the ‘civilized world’ by bringing order and tranquility to the chaos and terror-ridden lands of Central Asia. For instance, colonial expansion of Russia in Central Asia was frequently defended by an analogy with the ‘noble mission of Britain’ in India. In this regard a statement issued by the chancellor of the Russian Empire, Prince Gortchakov in 1864 deserves quoting at length:

‘The position of Russia in Central Asia is that of all civilized states which came into contact with half-savage, roving populations devoid of any solid social organization...If action is limited to punishing the plunderers and is followed by withdrawal, the lesson is soon forgotten and the retrogression is attributed to weakness. Asiatic people especially care for nothing but visible and sensible force, the moral force of right, and of the interests of the civilization has no weight whatever with them. Thus the Imperial Government has against its will been reduced to the alternative which we have explained, viz, either of allowing that perpetual condition of disorder to remain, whereby all security and all progress was impeded, or to condemn itself to costly and remote expeditions, which would have no practical result but must ever be begun over again, or finally to enter upon the immeasurable path of conquest and annexations, which has conducted England to the dominion of India, while endeavoring by force of arms to reduce in succession the small independent states whose predatory habits, disorderly customs and continual insurrection left no peace or quite to their neighbors...No agent has been found more apt for the progress of civilization than commercial relations. Their development requires everywhere order and stability, but in Asia it demands a complete transformation of the habits of the people...The imperial Cabinet, in assuming this task, takes as its guide the interests of Russia. But it believes that at the same time it is promoting the interests of humanity and civilization. It has a right to expect that the line of conduct it pursues, and the principles, which guide it, will meet with a just and candid appreciation.’⁵⁴

As if responding to Chancellor Gortchakov, the chairman of the Royal British Geographical Society, “ *acting for the interests of human kind and not mere British interests*” approves and celebrates Russian occupation of the Turkmen lands;

*It should be remembered that the real rivalry between us and Russia in Central Asia is in commerce, not politics. The Russian advance could not be in any way detrimental to our great Indian empire. Both nations by advancing their frontier approximately to each other, only tended to civilize barbarous regions, and bring savage nations under a regular system of government.*⁵⁵

Commenting after another joint meeting of Russian and British pundits, he appeals to the civilized peoples;

*After hearing the most interesting account given by Colonel Stewart, and acting upon the Christian principle of doing unto others as we would they should do unto us, the best thing we could wish for all their neighbors is that the Turkomans should be removed into a country where they have no neighbors. They must be improved, and if it could not be done in any other way, it would be for the benefit of humanity if they were removed off the face of the earth.*⁵⁶

Russian colonialism did undertake the disciplining. Merv’s occupation firmly settled Russia in the region. Although subsequent Russian movements farther South on the Afghan and Kashmir borders stirred up some concern in London, in retrospect it seems that neither power had an interest in a direct confrontation. British government protested the occupation of Merv in 1884 and subsequently agreed on a delimitation of borders along the Afghan border in 1887.⁵⁷

Conclusion

Central Asia became a subject of modern social sciences thanks to the 19th century Anglo-Russian rivalry. Colonialism has had lasting imprints on the destiny of Central Asians not only in terms of economic, political, military and social impact of

colonial presence, but also in terms of how the histories of the local peoples have been constructed by outsiders. 19th century history of Central Asia is a product of intensive colonial war of knowledge production and utilization. Knowledge production by the colonial servants did serve two primary functions; travelers and explorers were not only the pioneers of colonial penetration, but they were also primary agents to whitewash it.

Texts left from those days are a testimony to the nature of knowledge production praxis by the servants of the colonial powers. They reveal that due to language limitations, perceived dangers, accommodation problems and other barriers, British and Russian travelers relied more on each other or on “friendly informants” as a source of information than on the natives. Travel books demonstrate that travelers had extensively consulted previously published works in English and Russian languages and borrowed authority from each other’s ‘observations.’ As a result, there is an impressive level of textual reproductions in successive books and articles. Natives were to play little role in those narratives except being demonized.

Colonial rivals had an unprecedented level of information sharing, through which the rivalry was kept under control. Information sharing enabled them to communicate their strategies and hence to avoid escalation of the rivalry into an undesired war. In contrast to the conventional wisdom, colonial rivalry did not entail construction of a discourse of hostility and antagonism between British and Russian pundits. They projected each other as ‘friends’ acting on behalf of the civilized world by subjugating the ‘barbarian enemies.’

* Department of International Relations, Middle East Technical University

Notes

1 Sinor, D. Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p.18.

2 Ibid, p.17.

3 For interesting accounts see, Hopkirk, P. The Great Game, On Secret Service in High Asia, London: John Murray, 1990; Meyer, K. E. & Brysac, S.B. Tournament of Shadows, The Great Game and the Race for Empire in Central Asia, Washington D.C.: Counterpoint, 1999.

4 See for example; G. H. Fuller, Central Asia: The New Geopolitics, (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation Publications, 1992); S. T. Hunter, Central Asia since Independence, (Washington D.C. The Center For Strategic and International Studies, 1996); R.Z. Sagdeev, & S. Eisenhower, Conflict, Resolution and Change, (Maryland: CPSS Press), pp. 155-168.

5 Said, E. Orientalism, (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), p.3.

6 Ibid, p.5.

7 Todorov, T. The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other, (New York: Harper and Row 1984), p.3.

8 Who is projected as the enemy? The distinction between friend and enemy, according to Carl Schmitt, is essentially at the root of 'the political'. The political enemy is 'plainly' the other, the 'alien' and 'to describe his essence' it suffices 'that he is in an especially intensive sense existentially something other and alien, so that in case of conflict he signifies the negation of one's own kind of existence and therefore is fended off or fought in battle in order to preserve one's own, proper kind of life.' Schmitt's distinction between 'friends' and 'enemies' refers to a long held conviction war takes place only between natural enemies, Hellenes and Barbarians. See, Schmitt, C. Der Begriff Des Politischen. Text von 1932 mit einem Vorword und drei Corollarien, quoted from Meier, H. Carl Schmitt and Leo Strauss, The Hidden Dialogue, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1995), p.4.

9 Bhabha, H. The Location of Culture, (London: Routledge, 1997), p.70

10 Lord Curzon's statement quoted from Boulger, C. D. England and Russia in Central Asia, (London: W.H. Allen & Co, 1879), p. 2.

11 The newest comer is a superb study on the "invisible heroes" of the Great Game. See, Meyer, K.E. and Brysac, S.B. "Tournament of Shadows".

12 Colonel Bekovich Cherkasskiy expedition to Khiva in 1717-18 was a failure. Soucek, S. A History of Inner Asia, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 197. Captain Muraviev crossed the Caspian Sea in 1819-20. He met with the Khan of Khiva and negotiated a trade concession. Nikolay Murayev's "Journey to Khiva Through Turkoman Country" was first published in Moscow by Avgust Semyon Printing House in 1822, it was subsequently translated into other languages. Murov'yev N. "Murov'yov's Journey to Khiva through the Turkoman Country, (London: Oguz Press), 1977.

13 According to official Russian position at that time, the objective of the expedition on Khiva was to liberate Russian slaves held in the city and to end the hostile activities of the Khan. A British officer negotiated an agreement between Russia and Khiva. J. Abbott, Narrative of a journey from Herat to Khiva, Moscow, and St. Petersburg, during the late Russian invasion of Khiva : with some account of the court of Khiva and the kingdom of Khaurism, (London: J. Madden, 1856), p. 119.

14 Arthur Conolly and another soldier, Colonel Stoddart, were killed in Bukhara in 1842. Morgan, G. Anglo-Russian Rivalry in Central Asia:1810-1895, (London: Frank Cass, 1981), p. 15.

15 Shah Shuja, had been a protégé of British East India Company since he had been ousted by Dost Muhammad in 1826.

16 Stumm, H. The Russian Campaign Against Khiva in 1873, (Calcutta: Foreign Department Press, 1876), p.57.

17 Schuyler, E. Notes of a Journey in Russian Turkestan: Kokand, Bukhara and Khudja, (New York: Scriber, Armstrong & Co, 1876), p.330-33.

18 Grigorian, V. The Emergence of Modern Afghanistan: Politics of Reform and Modernization, 1880-1946, (Stanford California: Stanford University Press, 1969), p. 112.

19 Ibid, p.115-116.

20 Magnus, R., Naby E., Afghanistan: Mullah, Marx, and Mujahid, (Boulder Colorado: Westview Press, 1998), s.36

21 The British Royal Geographical Society, founded in 1830, subsequently became one of the principal intellectual circles in the service of British imperial policies. In this period, the Asiatic Journal, previously an outlet on British rule in India started to publish articles on Central Asia. Russian Geographical Society was founded in 1845. It was born in an atmosphere of rising Russian nationalism among Russian intellectuals. The society had many German subjects of the Empire from Baltic republics, including Von Lutke who was the founder and vice-chairman of the Society. Riasanovsky, N. V. A history of Russia, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969) p. 139 & Bassin, M. The Russian Geographical Society, the "Amur Epoch" and the Great Siberian Expedition, 1855-63, Annals of the Association of American Geographers, 73-2, June 1983, pp.240-256.

22 Footnotes and quotation marks in these publications underline a remarkable degree of mediation between travelers.

- 23 To give an example, Charles Boulger widely cites geographical explorations of the Russians into the region in the last decade, such as that of a certain Captain Antipov, Captain Borszov, Colonel Stalyekov, Captain Ivaschintsov and Nicholas Von Kharikov, and compares their findings with that of British investigations. See Boulger, "England and Russia in Central Asia", pp. 1-36. General Anenkov, who participated General Skobelev's campaign on Gok Tepe in 1881, also refers to an extensive bulk of writings in the English language; such as that of Charles Marvin, Captain Butler, Captain Burnaby, E. Schuyler, MacGahan and Lieutenant Burnes, see translation of his Akhal-Tekinski Oazis i Pooti v Indiyou, in Marvin, C. The Russians at Merv and Herat, (London: W.H. Allen & Co, 1883). See also, L.F. Kostenko, Toorkestanski Kri, (St. Petersburg, 1880), p. 41-98.
- 24 For a good discussion see Brower D. R. and Lazzarini E. J. Russia's Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700-1917, (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1997).
- 25 Lieutenant Alikhanov visited Merv Turkmens as an Armenian horse dealer. Armenious Vambery was disguised as a dervish from Istanbul. See Vambery, A. Travels into Central Asia, (New York: Arno Press, 1970). Russia usually employed native officers in the campaigns. One of the first Russian travelers into Khiva at the beginning of the 19th century, for example was Captain Nikolay Murayev, a Caucasian in origin having a Turkish name. Britain also frequently used Pashtun or Indian colonial servants since they had Muslim names.
- 26 Polovtsov, A. The Land of Timur: Recollections of Russian Turkestan, (London: Methuen & co. 1932), pp. 80, 105, 186, See also Marvin, C. The Eye-Witness' Account of the Disastrous Russian Campaign Against the Akhal Tekke Turkomans: Describing the March Across the Burning Desert, the Storming of Dengeel Tepe and the Disastrous Retreat to the Caspian (London: W. H. Allen, 1880), p. 39-40, 7-8.
- 27 Charles Marvin, a journalist, was a leading advocate of Russophiles, who repeatedly advanced various assurances that Russia did not have any design to expand towards Afghanistan and India.
- 28 For a detailed review of the intellectual debates in 19th century Russia, see, Riasanovsky, "A history of Russia."
- 29 Said, "Orientalism," p. 205.
- 30 Boulger, "England and Russia in Central Asia," p.226.
- 31 Vambery, A. 'The Turkomans Between the Caspian and Merv,' Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, Vol.9, (1880), pp. 337-344.
- 32 Vambery, "Travels into Central Asia," p. 18, 120.
- 33 Lansdell, H. Russian Central Asia, (New York, Arno Press, 1970), vol.1, p. 444.
- 34 Schuyler, "Notes of a Journey in Russian," p. 38-39.
- 35 Pahlen, K. K. Mission to Turkestan: Being the Memoirs of Count K.K. Pahlen, 1908-1909, ed. Richard A. Pierce, trans. N. J. Couriss (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), p.152.
- 36 Curtis, W. Turkestan the Heart of Asia, (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1911), p.157
- 37 Macgahan, J. A. Campaigning on the Oxus and the Fall of Khiva, (New York: Arno Press & New York Times, 1970), p.354.
- 38 Stumm, The Russian Campaign, pp. 266, 194-195.
- 39 Ibid. p.1.
- 40 Schuyler, "Notes of a Journey in Russian Turkestan," p.331.
- 41 Boulger, "England and Russia in Central Asia," p. 151.
- 42 Stumm, "The Russian Campaign," p. 97.
- 43 Ibid, p.151.
- 44 Schuyler, "Notes of a Journey in Russian Turkestan," p. 357
- 45 See the discussions of the members of Royal Geographical Society on O'Donovan's, Lessar's and Alikhanov's travels, in Cumming, S. D. (edit), The Country of the Turkomans : an anthology of exploration from the Royal Geographical Society / with an introduction by Cumming, (London : Oguz Press [for] the Society, 1977).
- 46 Burnaby, F. A Ride To Khiva., Travels and Adventures in Central Asia, (London: Century Publishing, 1983), p. 248.
- 47 Quoted from Marvin, "The Russians at Merv and Heart," p.198
- 48 Alikhanov's journey to Merv quoted from Marvin, "The Russians at Merv and Heart," p.199.
- 49 Schuyler, "Notes of a Journey in Russian Turkestan," p. 383.
- 50 Napier's notes on his journey is quoted from, Boulger, "England and Russia in Central Asia," p.249.
- 51 A British traveler, "Mr. Lessar's" Journey From Sarakhs to the Outposts of Heart quoted from Marvin, "The Russians at Merv and Heart," p.256.
- 52 Stumm, "The Russian Campaign," p.192.
- 53 See the remarks of the president of the Royal Geographical Society on the political situation in the region in Cumming, "The Country of the Turcomans," p. 157-8
- 54 Quoted from Boulger, "England and Russia in Central Asia," pp. 318-325.
- 55 See the discussion on Vambery's paper, in Cumming, "The Country of the Turkomans," p. 59.

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