

Contemporary Russia: Post-imperial and Neo-colonial or Post-colonial and Neo-imperial?

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In contemporary public and scientific debates, Russia foreign policy conduct is often characterized with various, mostly negative labels, especially after the crisis that unfolded in 2014. Historians especially, called on to comment on Russia's past and present, tend to ad nauseam repeat the tale of Russia's post-imperial character. In their eyes, this means various things. On the one hand, this can imply a tolerant past, in which the Empire guaranteed diversity and respected all minorities. On the other hand and most often, however, especially when projected to interpret contemporary developments, the imperial heritage translates, according to these interpretations, into an aggressive behaviour against the Near abroad. Thus, in this line of argument, Russia, with its imperial and hence inherently violent past, turns into a potentially violent neighbour and neo-colonial force. The flip-side to this coin is to see Russia as a post-colonial political subject, in the sense that it has been (and possibly still is) colonized by Western concepts, unable to disentangle itself from the grip of a Western normative force. The aim of this contribution is to displace both readings of contemporary Russia. Neither, is Russia a neo-imperial power and potential or actual «aggressor», neither is Russia the «victim» of Western hegemony. Rather, I will try to demonstrate how contemporary Russia, by virtue of its past (and present) as global power has to come to terms with its colonial role in a post-colonial world. The point of departure will, firstly, be to sketch both positions and discuss the main tenets of their respective argument. Secondly, I will advance an understanding of «Orientalism» not as a derogatory misconception of other places and peoples but rather as synonymous for a power relationship and a knowledge gap. Thirdly, I will show how the Soviet past represented such a power/knowledge-gap and how this gap still shapes contemporary Russian relations to the outer world today. Thus, this paper addresses two areas of discussion of the 2016 «October readings»: the changing principles of global politics and Russia's foreign policy.

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Personal information

Year of birth: 1977
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Education

10/ 2007 – 09/ 2011 Ph.D. in Sociology, University of Basel
Doctoral thesis on *Political and national identities in Putin's Russia. A post-structuralist analysis of the political discourse*, Final grade: 5.5/6.0
(*insigni cum laude* – very good)

Work experience

Since 2016 SNF “advanced post-doc mobility” fellow (Moscow & Manchester)
01/2013 – 12/2015 Post-doctoral researcher, Department of History, University of Zurich
03/2015 – 05/2015 Affiliate Scholar, Harvard University, Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies
03/ 2014 – 06/2014 Visiting Scholar, Stanford University, Center for Russian East European and Eurasian Studies (CREEES)
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List of Publications

Books

- *Hegemonie und Populismus in Putins Russland*. Bielefeld: transcript, 2012.

Edited books

- with Perovic, J. (eds.): *Identities and Politics During the Putin Presidency*. Stuttgart: Ibidem, 2009.

Journal articles

- “Le Olimpiadi di Soçi: specchio del nazionalismo e multiculturalismo russi”, in *Nazioni e Regioni: Studi e ricerche sulla comunità immaginata* 5/2015: 7-26 (peer reviewed).
- “Between 'Ethnocide' and 'Genocide': Violence and Otherness in the Coverage of the Afghanistan and Chechnya Wars”, in *Nationalities Papers* 43 (5) 2015: 700-718 (peer reviewed).

- “Five Days of War and Olympus Inferno: The 2008 South Ossetia War in Russian and Western Popular Culture”, in *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema* 9 (2) 2015: 110-125 (peer reviewed).
- “Russia’s and Europe’s borderlands: between sovereign intervention and security management”, in *Problems of Post-Communism* 61 (6) 2014: 6-17 (peer reviewed).
- “Populismus bei Ernesto Laclau: Konzepte zur Analyse der nationalistischen Renaissance in Europa”, in *Widerspruch* 65/2014: 179-188.
- “Souveräne Demokratie, Populismus und Depolitisierung: Der russische politische Diskurs unter Putin“, in *Berliner Debatte Initial* 24 (3) 2013: 108-117 (peer reviewed).
- “Sovereign Democracy, Populism and Depoliticization in Russia“, in *Problems of Post-Communism* 60 (3) 2013: 3-15. (peer reviewed).
- “Primacy in Your Face: Changing Discourses of National Identity and National Interest in the United States and Russia”, in *Ab Imperio* 3/2010: 245-272 (peer reviewed).

Contributions to edited books

- “Normal Games in Soči? Russian Nationalism and the 2014 Winter Olympics Bid Book” (erscheint 2016 in einem Sammelband zu *Megaevents in Russia*, London: Routledge, 2016, Andrey Makarychev, Aleksandra Yatsik eds.).
- “Razdelennoe gosudarstvo: federalizm kak agonizm naciï“, 13-32 in Zacharov, A. et al. eds.: *K novoj modeli rossijskogo federalisma*. Moskau: Ves’ mir, 2013.
- with Malinova, O.: “Nationalism and Democracy in Russia”, in Moreno, L. & Lecours, A. eds.: *Nationalism and Democracy: Dichotomies, Complementarities, Oppositions*. London: Routledge, 2010.

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