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Groom and Govern: Nineteenth-Century Native Interlocutors on Russian Colonial Frontiers

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Elitenwandel in der Moderne
Elites and Modernity

Herausgegeben von / Edited by
Gabriele B. Clemens, Dietlind Hüchtker, Martin Kohl-
rausch, Stephan Malinowski und Malte Rolf

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Eliten im
Vielvölkerreich
Elites and Empire

Imperiale Biographien in Russland
und Österreich-Ungarn (1850–1918)

Imperial Biographies in Russia and
Austria-Hungary (1850–1918)

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DE GRUYTER
OLDENBOURG

Michael Khodarkovsky

Groom and Govern

Nineteenth-Century Native Interlocutors on Russia's
Colonial Frontiers



Fig. 4: Russian General and Ottoman Pasha, Musa Kundukh (1818–1889), in the Ottoman uniform and with the Ottoman and Russian decorations

This essay focuses on one particular aspect of the imperial conquest and colonization—a group of the indispensable intermediaries, who provided the first crucial link between the imperial government and indigenous societies in Asiatic Russia. Whether they served as interpreters, government officials, or military officers, they shared a similar background. They were the native sons who, for various but mostly coercive reasons, found themselves in Russia, where they were schooled in Russian and sent back to the regions of their origin. They were a focal point of contact between the Russian authorities and different cultures and societies that Russia encountered during its ceaseless expansion. The native interlocutors became a critical conduit for information that flowed between the Russian authorities and native societies. Such

individuals existed in the history of all empires, and without them the imperial conquest and rule would have been impossible.

Below I will discuss the lives of a few such individuals. I will show how these new imperial subjects became agents of the empire among their own kin, how their own vision of their place in the empire collided with the vision of St. Petersburg, and how they became the embryonic carriers of the new ethno-national consciousness among their own peoples. I will also offer a brief comparison of the role played by the indigenous elite in the Russian empire and in British India.

Grooming the Colonial Elite

Throughout the centuries of Russia's colonial expansion, the Russian government's paramount concern was how best to achieve the loyalty of the indigenous non-Russian elite. In the initial stages of conquest and annexation, the native elites usually enjoyed their traditional independence, but their ultimate integration into the empire eventually implied their Russification and conversion to the Orthodox Christianity. For this reason, in the late eighteenth century, the Russian administrators increasingly called for founding the schools for the sons of the local elite. In the 1770s, the Astrakhan' governor Petr Krechetnikov suggested that this was the best way to introduce the natives to the Russian way of life and "then no longer there will be a need to take hostages and the natives will convert to Christianity."¹ In 1838 the commander of the Special Caucasus Corps, General E. A. Golovin recommended to the War Minister A. I. Chernyshev "to create as many Muslim schools as possible to be able to influence the [native] people," and thus to weaken the hold of Islam.²

Yet the opening of the regional schools was painfully slow. In 1841 Shora Nogma, a Kabardin scholar and at the time the Secretary of the Kabardin Provisional Court, petitioned the Russian military authorities in the Caucasus to open a school for children of the Kabardin nobles in Nalchik. The petition was circulated, and—with the exception of recommending that the teaching of Turkish and Arabic languages be excluded from the curriculum—had been quickly approved by various relevant military authorities including the War Minister Chernyshev. The petition only needed the approval of Nicholas I, but when it reached his desk, the emperor chose to kill the project. His argument was simple: the assimilation of the native youth is best achieved by placing them among the Russian school children and not by creating a special school for the natives. The native youth, Nicholas pointed out, should be

¹ Michael Khodarkovsky: *Russia's Steppe Frontier: The Making of a Colonial Empire*. Bloomington 2002, p. 60. In the Ottoman empire, a similar attempt was made through the *Mekteb-i Ashiret-i Hümayun* (The imperial Tribal School), which was founded in Istanbul in 1892 and closed its doors in 1907.

² S. Sh. Gadzhieva: *Kumyki*. Moscow 1961, p. 142.

recruited into the Russian military and educated there just as the cantonists were, or sent to the schools founded at the Cossack regiments stationed along the frontier.³

While the pace of educational activity was slow, hampered by the usual lack of resources and shortage of teachers, the number of the native children enrolled in the Russian schools continued to grow steadily. In the years of 1850–1887, out of 7,181 graduates of the Stavropol gymnasium, nearly a quarter or 1,739 students were from among the indigenous population.⁴

By the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the regional schools were producing the new educated class from among the natives. But in the early nineteenth century, the acculturated indigenous elite was forged in the imperial capital. While constituting different degrees of Russification, acculturation was not always synonymous with assimilation. After all, a fully assimilated native—typically a young convert to Christianity, educated in Russian who also looked and acted like one—could have commanded little authority in his native society. While the assimilation was always preferred, in the beginning of the nineteenth century the Russian authorities became increasingly interested in a different type of an acculturated native—the one who could represent Russian interests and remained influential in his own society. He might have worn a Russian military uniform or a civilian dress of a Russian administrator but he would remain a part of his native society, speaking the local language and practicing Islam. In other words, the Russian empire needed a greater number of the cultural interlocutors, who could serve as the conduit for transferring the Russian legal, political, and cultural idioms into the indigenous environment.

Let us have a look at several such individuals in the North Caucasus. Shora Bek-Mirza Nogma (Nogmov) was born in 1794 at a small Kabardin aul near Piatigorsk (Beshtau). Shora was prepared to be a mullah, and after studying at a local *mekteb* (an Islamic primary school), he was sent to pursue the religious learning at the prestigious *medrese* at Enderi in Central Daghestan. After graduating from the medrese in 1813, he returned to his native aul to work as a mullah. Several years later, the Russian military authorities appointed him an official interpreter stationed with the first Volga Cossack regiment.⁵

At this time, he already had a good command of five languages apart from his native Kabardin: Arabic, Kumyk, Abaza, Persian, and Russian, and was working to create an alphabet for the Kabardin language. Eager to reach the imperial capital where he could expand his interests in languages and history, in 1828 Nogma petitioned to join the newly formed Circassian Guard in the capital.

As a new member of the Circassian Guard, Shora Nogma found himself under the command of a prominent Adyge prince, Khan-Giray. Some time in the early 1800s,

³ Sufian Zhemukhov: *Zhizn Shory Nogma*. Nalchik 2002, pp. 137–143.

⁴ I. Kh. Kalmykov: *Cherkesy*. Cherkessk 1974, pp. 243–248.

⁵ Sh. B. Nogmov: *Istoriia Adygeiskogo naroda*. Nalchik 1958, pp. 11–12; S. N. Zhemukhov: *Zhizn' Shora Nogmy*. Nalchik 2002, pp. 103–108.

Khan-Giray's father, Muhammed-Giray, attracted by the offers from the Russian authorities, decided to cross the Kuban River, which separated the Ottoman from the Russian borderlands, and settle on the Russian side. Following the established practice among the native peoples of the North Caucasus, Khan-Giray was sent to his father's native village to spend his adolescent years there. In January 1830, Khan-Giray joined the Circassian Guard as a highly decorated lieutenant of the Russian army who had already distinguished himself in Russia's wars against the Persians and Ottomans 1826–1829. An impeccable officer and well-educated charming socialite, Khan-Giray was welcomed in the literary salons of the capital where he became personally acquainted with many Russian men of letters, including Alexander Pushkin. Shora Nogma too had vigorously pursued his intellectual interests: establishing close ties with several professors at the St. Petersburg University, studying languages, and devoting much of his time to the writing of the first Kabardin grammar. Upon his return to Kabarda in 1838, he was appointed the Secretary (*defterdar*) of the Kabardin Provisional Court and was in a position to choose the native candidates for studies at the military institutions in the imperial capital, the Stavropol gymnasium, and the Circassian Guards. Throughout this time Nogma continued to work on the Kabardin grammar and alphabet based on the Cyrillic as well as collecting and translating the Adyge legends and tales. While his grammar remained incomplete, his collection of Adyge tales was published in Russian in 1861 under the title "A History of the Adyge People."⁶

In the late 1830s Khan-Giray completed his treatise "The Notes on the Circassia," compiled the Circassian alphabet on the basis of the Cyrillic script, and began to write down the Adyge folklore, stories, and history. Nicholas I called Khan-Giray "the Karamzin of Circassia" which later did not prevent him from banning "The Notes on the Circassia" from publication. Shortly after Khan-Giray's premature death at the age of 34, his collection of historical tales appeared in publication under the title "The Circassian Legends and Tales."⁷

In the late imperial and the early Soviet period in particular, when the Soviet government was engaged in the ethnicity and nation building projects within the former Russian empire, Khan-Giray was construed as a founder of the historical and literary tradition of the Western Adyge, the Circassians, while Shora Nogma of that of the Eastern Adyge, the Kabardins. It is not as if other options in constructing local traditions and identities did not exist. For instance, the first attempts to compile the Adyge alphabet and to translate the Quran into the Adyge were made in the early 1820s by the Efendi Muhammed Shapsugov and Notauk Sheretluk. But any such efforts were firmly opposed by the *ulema*—Muslim legal scholars—, for whom the only written lan-

⁶ Sh. B. Nogmov: *Istoriia Adykeiskogo naroda, sostavlennaia Ad. Berzhe*. Tiflis 1861.

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guage was Arabic—the sacred language of the sacred book.⁸ Likewise, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, several prominent Muslim jurists in northern Daghestan made important contributions to the study of the Sharia and Islamic discourse, but made no attempt to create alphabets for local languages or to consider the issues of local history and culture.⁹

The task of constructing ethnic identities fell on the Russified local elite and Russian scholarly and government officials. After all, ethnicity was a Western concept brought through and from Russia. The authors of the first historiography or philological studies were the members of the non-Christian elite, who later became critical in constructing the new ethnic identities among the empire's non-Christian peoples. This new colonial elite, consisting of men raised in their indigenous societies and then educated in St. Petersburg and other Russian towns, became a conduit for the modern ideas of ethnicity and nationalism. At different time, various representatives of this elite created the alphabets for the indigenous languages, collected and wrote down the local folk tales, compiled the codes of the customary law, and authored the embryonic history of their people. Among those who created the historiographic and literary tradition for their own peoples were Shora Nogma and Khan Giray for the Adyges of the North Caucasus, Mirza Fath Ali Akhundov for the Azeris, Dorzhi Banzarov for the Buriats, Chokan Valikhanov for the Kazakhs, and Mirza Kazem Bek, Russia's first professor of the Oriental studies. Their accounts of the non-Christian peoples in time developed into a separate field of study and eventually laid the foundation for Russia's Orientalism.¹⁰

The ironies of the empire were often inescapable, as in a case of Shora Nogma, who was greatly influenced by A. J. Sjögren, an ethnic Finn educated at a Swedish gymnasium at the time when his homeland was part of Sweden and who later continued to write in Swedish. Shortly after Finland became annexed to the Russian empire in 1809, Sjögren became a conduit of the Western ideas in the Russian imperial periphery and was bestowed with the membership in the Russian Academy of Sciences. It was a Russified Swedish Finn who brought the modern ideas of ethnicity, philology, and historiography to the North Caucasus! In other words, modernity arrived in a form of ethnicity nurtured within the Russian colonial empire. It seems

⁸ *Istoriia Narodov Severnogo Kavkaza, konets 18go veka-1917g*. Moscow 1988, pp. 236–237; Zhemudov, Zhizn Shory Nogma (see footnote 5), pp. 33–37. For a brief discussion of the Russian efforts to study and transcribe the local languages in the second half of the nineteenth century, see Austen Iersild: *Orientalism and Empire: North Caucasus Mountain Peoples and the Georgian Frontier, 1845–1917*. Montreal 2002, pp. 80–84.

⁹ V. S. Bobrovnikov: *Musulmane Severnogo Kavkaza: obychai, pravo, nasilie*. Moscow 2002, p. 111; Michael Kemper: *Herrschaft, Recht und Islam in Daghestan. Von den Khanaten und Gemeindebünden zum gihad-Staat*. Wiesbaden 2005, pp. 359–366, pp. 382–392.

¹⁰ Cf. Vera Tolz: *Russia's Own Orient: The Politics of Identity and Oriental Studies in the late Imperial and Early Soviet Periods*. Oxford 2011. For a general discussion of Russia's elites see Andreas Kappeler: *Russland als Vielvölkerreich. Entstehung, Geschichte, Zerfall*. Munich 1992.

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that the affirmative-action empire had been born long before the Soviet policies of indigenization were put into practice.

The British Experience

At different times the government officials suggested to consider the Russian imperial experience in comparison with those of the British in India and French in Algeria. In 1842, the supreme commander of the Russian troop in the Caucasus, E. A. Golovin, and the War Minister A. I. Chernyshev were both suggesting to the emperor that the British and French experiences in India and Algeria might be usefully applied in the Caucasus.

They were not! The British in particular had different concerns and priorities in India. The British East India Co. was content to rely on the British residents at the courts of the largely autonomous maharajas, use wealthy Indian agents as intermediaries, and rely on the local courts in order to retain its control over commerce and taxes. There were simply too few British in India to do anything else. Unlike the Russians, the British early on set out to collect knowledge, to create laws, to found local schools and colleges, to translate from Sanskrit into the local vernaculars and English, and to develop local expertise among the British. After all, when in 1888, Gandhi arrived to study at the University College in London, he came to study the Indian law.

Sanskrit Colleges in Delhi, Benares, and other places were employing local pundits on government payroll who were translating scientific texts from English, while the British were studying Sanskrit and Hindu laws at Oxbridge. In 1834, the British politician and historian Thomas Babington Macaulay suggested a new approach to promote the British interests in India: "It is impossible for us, with our limited means, to educate the body of the people. We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect."¹¹ Indeed, as a result of the new policies articulated by Macaulay between 1830s–1850s, a new type of the *munshi*—a title of a native secretary, clerk—had emerged in India. They were well educated and spoke and read English. Many of them were educated at the English department of the Delhi College and were fluent in Persian, Hindi, Sanskrit, and English.

¹¹ T. B. Macaulay: Minute of 2 February 1835 on Indian Education. In: G. M. Young (Ed.): T. B. Macaulay: Prose and Poetry. Boston 1952, pp. 721–729.

Governing through the Colonial Elite

But if Russia was far behind in collecting knowledge, developing expertise, and training its own Slavic Orientalists, it was ahead of Britain in specific policies and tools of governing. By the time Macaulay was calling upon a greater reliance on the British-educated Indian elite to govern India, the Russians had already a long experience on integrating and using the local elite to promote the imperial agenda. Above were mentioned two of them, Shora Nogma and Khan-Giray in the North Caucasus. But there were hundreds of similar acculturated natives in the service of the Russian empire.

Among the more visible figures was a Kazakh noble, Chokan Valikhanov (Muhammed Khanafi Vali Khan (Chokan Chingissovich Valikhanov)). His father Chingis was educated at the school of the Siberian Frontier Cossack Host, reached the rank of a major, and became an indispensable aid to the Russian scholars interested in Kazakh folklore and customary laws. At the age of 12 Chokan was sent to study at the Omsk Cadet corps. After his graduation in 1853 at the age of 18, Chokan became an expert on Central Asia serving in Russia's Asiatic Department in St. Petersburg as well as collecting information about the region and its peoples.¹²

Another example was Katti Giray, a Circassian descendent of the royal Crimean lineage, who grew up at the Scottish Mission in the North Caucasus, traveled to Scotland to study theology, married an English woman, and returned to Russia to become an active Presbyterian missionary and educator in the Crimea.¹³ Muhammed Ali Kazem-Bek, later known as Aleksandr Kasimovich Kazem-Bek, was another such neophyte. An offspring of the noble and learned Azeri family from Derbend, an erudite and a brilliant scholar, Kazem-Bek became the pride of the Scottish Mission in Astrakhan. But much to their chagrin, the Russian government was determined to extricate him from the influence of the Scottish missionaries. He was banned from traveling to Scotland and was inducted into the Russian service. In 1825, Kazem-Bek was sent to Siberia to become a teacher at the Omsk Asiatic School. In the end, Kazem-Bek's enormous talents proved to be so obvious that instead of becoming another exile in Siberia, he went on to become a professor at Kazan and St. Petersburg Universities and Russia's first and foremost Orientalist.¹⁴

One striking example was Musa Kundukh (Kundukhov). Born to a family of the Ossetin nobles, he joined the Russian army as an officer and rose through the ranks to become a highly decorated major general. After Shamil had been defeated, however,

¹² Ch. Ch. Valikhanov: *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh*. Vol. 1. Alma-Aty 1984.

¹³ Hakan Kirimli: Crimean Tatars, Nogays, and Scottish Missionaries. In: *Cahiers du Monde Russe* 45 (2004), pp. 62–107.

¹⁴ K. Rzaev, Muhammed Ali Mirza Kazem-Bek. Baku 1965, pp. 22–44. The Russian writer, Leo Tolstoy studied Arabic and Turkish languages with Kazem-Bek at Kazan University in the early 1840s. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

Kundukh's disgust with Russia's policies toward the local population led him to organize a massive immigration to the Ottoman empire. In 1865, his ship with hundreds of fellow highlanders docked at an Ottoman port on the Black Sea. Later, Musa Kundukh was given the Ottoman title of pasha-general, and served with distinction in the Ottoman wars against the Russians.¹⁵

The Colonial Empire

The Russian empire in Asia included a vast expanse of land populated by very different peoples and societies, inevitably resulting in different regional dynamics of the imperial rule. Despite the differences between the regions of Asiatic Russia, what Russia's Asian territories had in common was a lack of sovereign monarchies and states with defined boundaries. The reality was somewhat more complex than Moscow assumed, but this was how Moscow perceived the world east and south of its capital, and the perceptions, of course, are known to create a reality of their own.

If the lack of sovereign states and monarchs in Asiatic Russia helped to articulate Russia's civilizing mission, it did not explain how to rule different regions, peoples, and religions. The Russian authorities refused to concede that theirs too was a colonial empire. Instead, the imperial sub-consciousness continued to revolve around the ideas of a universal monarch and civilization, and a belief that some day the non-Russians would become Russian. The myth and reality could not be easily reconciled, however, and resulted in that particular Russian hybrid of the hyper accentuated empire and underemphasized colonialism.¹⁶

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the grand imperial ambition demanded an ultimate integration of the empire's diverse human landscape into the Russian Christian imperial identity. But the reality on the ground defied this long-term vision, requiring instead the tactics and policies that could be adapted to the specific circumstances. The imperial authorities preferred to rely on the local secular elite, and, when necessary, religious as well. Economic and political carrots and sticks were intended to ensure the cooperation and loyalty of the elite, while the courts, administration, schools, and missionary work were meant to pave the road towards a broader integration of the non-Russians into the empire.

Among the variety of the specific policy tools used in ruling Russia's non-Russian subjects, one remained constant throughout the time: to govern the multitudes of the empire's peoples, tongues, and religions, Russia depended on the individuals who possessed an intimate knowledge of both Russian and their own society and were

¹⁵ Memuary generala Musa-pashi Kundukhova (1837–1865). In: *Zvezda* 8 (2001), pp. 100–123.

¹⁶ Michael Khodarkovsky: *Bitter Choices: Loyalty and Betrayal in the Russian Conquest of the North Caucasus*. Ithaca 2011, pp. 164–171.

thus able to serve as intermediaries between the imperial authorities and the native peoples.

In the Muscovite empire, such go-betweens were usually employed as the interpreters. Some of them were the new converts, but most were former Slavic captives who claimed to have learned the native language and mores during their long captivity. But because almost all of them were illiterate, they knew little of the language and culture in which they claimed the expertise.

As Russia's involvement with the various non-Russian peoples deepened, the authorities increasingly relied on the natives who, for various reasons, became exposed to the Russian way of life. Only in the middle of the nineteenth century, a slowly modernizing Russia began to train its own small groups of Slavic experts, who studied the native languages, societies, and religions. Russia never had an equivalent of the British Colonial Service, but the Russian universities offered limited courses in the non-Russian languages of the empire for the benefit of scholars and future government officials alike.

Throughout the entire period of Russia's imperial past, the great majority of the empire's cultural interlocutors came from the native societies. From the late eighteenth century onward, the Russian authorities began to demand that the members of the native elite send their sons to the imperial capital to be educated at the emperor's court and later at Russia's prestigious military schools. The government's goal was to educate and acculturate the young men from the distinguished indigenous families who could become a conduit of the Russian influences after returning to their kin. In other words, the former hostages were to become a colonial elite.

Hundreds of them would come from the different parts of the empire and return to their own people different men: in Russian officer's uniform, with a strange accent in their native tongue, with the outlandish ideas in their heads, and often, with a tiny cross on their necklaces. They followed an uneasy path in negotiating the space of the indigenous societies within the Russian empire and by extension searching for their own place and identity. All of them remained liminal personalities, who remained torn between two different cultures and identities, the traditional society into which they were born and the modern society in which they were schooled.

In time, they came to realize that the empire they served left little room for them to reconcile their multiple identities. If they thought of themselves as being the intermediaries between the empire and their own peoples, they were bitterly disappointed. The imperial authorities were only interested in using them as a tool of the government policies. If they hoped to make the Russians more aware of the needs and practices of their own peoples, they quickly discovered that the information flow was a one-way street, from the center to the periphery. Khan-Giray's treatise on the Circassians was banned, Shora Nogma's recommendations ignored, and Chokan Valikhanov's calls for justice for the Kazakhs dismissed. The native elite had either to succumb to the imperial needs or get out of the way by retiring into anonymity or leaving the empire, as Musa Kundukh did.

These were the paths charted by these native interlocutors, who in different ways tried to bridge the space between the world of their homelands and that of imperial Russia. The push and pull between the two was a tormenting experience in all empires, but in contrast to British India, the Russian policies and expectations exerted far more pressure on the native intermediaries to take sides and left little room for a compromise.

Russia's newly formed indigenous elites were typical marginal social groups searching for their identity between the old and new, traditional and modern, Asia and Europe. Perhaps, in the end, they were not so different from the Russian elites, who uncertain of their own identity, had searched for centuries to locate Russia's own place between the modern and traditional, the nation-state and colonial empire.

Jörg Ganzenmüller Vom Modernisierer zum Russifizierer?

Michail N. Murav'ëv und die Polenpolitik des Russischen Reiches



М. Н. Муравьев
1810-1866

Abb. 5: Michail Nikolaevič Murav'ëv (1796–1866)

Michail Nikolaevič Murav'ëv war schon bei seinen Zeitgenossen umstritten. Den einen galt er als nationalistischer Polenfresser und intriganter Reformgegner, den anderen als Wahrer des Imperiums und Beschützer der Autokratie.¹ Von den zahlreichen anderen Murav'ëvs in der Geschichte Russlands unterscheidet man ihn durch einen wenig schmeichelhaften Beinamen, den er selbst nicht ohne Stolz trug. Nachdem er 1831 zum Gouverneur von Grodno ernannt worden war, fragte ihn ein Einheimischer, ob er denn mit dem hingerichteten Dekabristen Murav'ëv verwandt sei. Daraufhin antwortete er entrüstet, dass er nicht von jenen Murav'ëvs abstamme, die gehenkt würden, sondern von jenen, die andere aufhängen. Seitdem hieß er Murav'ëv „der Hänger“ [vešatel' – dt. auch „der Henker“].² Bei der Niederschlagung des Januaraufstandes

¹ Vgl. Anna A. Komzolova: *Politika samoderžavie i sudebnaja reforma 1864 goda v Rossii*. Voronež 1989.

² Vgl. Matthias Stadelmann: *Großfürst Konstantin Nikolaevič. Der persönliche Faktor und die Kultur des Wandels in der russischen Autokratie*. Wiesbaden 2012. S. 145.