

Standard of Civilization, Nomadism and Territoriality in Nineteenth Century International Society

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Introduction

This chapter intends to examine the role that nomadism and nomads played in the formation and definition of a standard of civilization in the nineteenth century as Europe's, and specifically Russia's 'Other'. To do so, it relies on an English School approach to international relations (hereafter ES). The reason behind this lies in the fact that at the end of the eighteenth century and at the beginning of the nineteenth, Europe constituted an international society that was based not just on the institutions of diplomacy, sovereignty, territoriality, international law, balance of power, great power management and colonialism, but also on a specific idea of progress and civilization that created an ontological dichotomy between 'civilized nations' and 'savages', or 'barbarians' (Anghie 2005; Dunne and Reus-Smit 2017; Buzan and Lawson 2015; O'Hagan 2017; Linklater 2017a). Therefore, the theoretical toolkit of the ES, based on the notions of international society and institutions, as well as the whole idea of a standard of civilization that can be well explored through the School's constructivist epistemology, made possible and indeed valuable this choice.

It should be noticed from the very beginning that the ES has so far been particularly silent with respect to nomads in international society. Scattered references to them can be found in 'The Expansion of International Society' (Bull and Watson 1984), in Buzan's and Little's *magnum opus* on historical state systems (Buzan and Little 2000) and in the recent, welcome contribution by Neumann and Wigen (2018).¹ Yet, a broader theorization of nomads' position in international society (either in history or in contemporary times) is still lacking. Therefore, this chapter, with all its limitations, intends to be a humble contribution to the literature on ES and nomads.

Furthermore, this chapter seeks to discuss more in depth the institution of territoriality in ES thought, still underexplored despite the perplexity of some authors already, writing immediately after the Cold War, in front of the lack of theorization thereof (for an overview, see Ruggie 1993).² Although some institutions have constituted the basis for grand theorizing within the ES (Mayall on nationalism, Little on the balance of power, Buzan and Cui on Great Power management), the institution of territoriality has been largely neglected in ES studies (for an exception, see Holsti 2004, pp.73-111 and, more recently, Goettlich 2018; Schulz 2018), both on contemporary as well as historical international societies. Filling this gap is important for the purpose of this chapter and, indeed, for this volume

¹ Another partial exception is Paul Keal's work on colonialism in nineteenth century international society (2003). Yet, in that book, Keal focuses on indigenous peoples *in general* (and hence not just nomads), and 'nomad/nomadism' is not even featured in the index at the end of the book.

² For this chapter, the ES meaning of 'institution' is adopted. It refers to a durable practice, or set of practices, which inform and guide the behaviour of actors in a specific social context, while at the same time defining them (Buzan, 2004).

overall, as by definition nomads do not abide by the institution of territoriality, and thus radically challenge several state- and territory-centric assumptions on which most IR theories rest. Therefore, in this paper, territoriality will be historicized and analysed within the context of nineteenth century international society and put in direct relation with nomads. More specifically, the status of territoriality within the narrative of standard of civilization is yet to be explored. As the section below shows, while there seems to be a unanimous understanding that a standard of civilization was in play in Europe and beyond during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the role played by territoriality in it is markedly unresearched. Fixed territory and fixed boundaries provided states with international legal recognition, diplomatic personality, the ability to initiate inter-state trade, the monopoly of violence, centralized political rule, and domestic pacification—as opposed to ‘the chaos of the late Middle Ages’ (Linklater 2017a, p.187). Territoriality became ‘a European standard’ over the centuries, in which a ‘Franco-English territorial society within an encompassing European strategic and diplomatic arena’ evolved and consolidated (Linklater 2017a, p.191).

The specific historical context that sets the scene for the present paper is that of European imperial expansion in the late eighteenth century and early and middle nineteenth century. At that time, European powers were expanding their territories and were conquering foreign lands not simply for economic reasons, but also for matters of ‘duty’, which would then confer prestige, grandeur, and spread ‘civilization’ (Buzan and Lawson 2015; Burbank and Cooper 2011). Yet, the literature in International Relations, and in particular the ES, has so far neglected *how* and *why* nomadism was part of this narrative. To do so, this chapter will look at the Russian penetration in the Eurasian steppe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and at the processes, discourses, policies and justifications that drove this enterprise.

The chapter is structured as follows. The first section discusses the standard of civilization from a theoretical perspective. The second section examines nomads and nomadism in the Eurasian steppe in the nineteenth century, and outlines the occupation carried out by the Russian empire. The third section looks at Russian narratives on conquest of the steppe, at descriptions of nomads in contemporary international society, and at how a specific discourse of territoriality informed the Russian version of the standard of civilization. The conclusions summarize the argument and suggests further research on the topic.

Material used for this paper is secondary literature on international relations and history, primary accounts of explorers and military officers during the campaign in the steppes of Eurasia as well as of prominent intellectuals and members of the European epistemic community at that time. For this reason, the paper offers an analysis of the discourses and narratives of those involved in the ‘expansion of international society’ at that time. While it was not possible to consult Russian archives as fieldwork was not carried out, the aim in this chapter is to use the material at my disposal to add a new dimension to the theoretical discussion on nomadism and standard of civilization in (historical) international relations, very much aware that deeper research based on more specific documents and accounts is needed.

The Standard of Civilization, Nomads and Territoriality

Between the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, European states added a new ideological dimension to the international society they were forming. Institutions such as sovereignty, international law, diplomacy, dynasticism and war had been already entrenched in the diplomatic, international political culture of Europe at that time. Yet, technological advancement and progress,

on the wave of modernization and industrial revolutions (Buzan and Lawson 2015), paired with the diffusion of progressive, liberal ideology that went hand in hand with scientific research and positivist philosophy at that time made possible the emergence of a new ontological category: that of the 'civilized state', which would regulate and indeed inform diplomatic, legal, commercial and bellicose intercourses between states for the whole period under examination and beyond (Suzuki 2009; Gong 1984; O'Hagan 2017).

In order to be considered part of the family of civilized nations, not only did a state have to conform to the most widely adopted institutions of international society at that time, but it also had to conform to a specific template of development, progress, to be carried out *internally* via political, economic and juridical reforms, as well as *externally*, with the conquest and control of territories deemed to be unable to govern themselves. Such was the centrifugal push of this European civilizing attitude that 'colonialism' rose as a new institution of international society and was fully legitimized by international law (Anghie 2004). A state had to prove its willingness to 'civilize' peoples that were deemed as 'backward' and 'barbarians' to be fully considered part of Europe, which at that time was often equated to 'modern, civilized society'. Most importantly, these categories were not simply rhetorical devices or linguistic sleights of hand to portray European states as 'better' and with a civilized identity. They were proper performative political tools that created, rather than described, specific ontological categories into which peoples, groups and polities were divided (and therefore treated) within international society. As Maria Todorova reminds us, 'there is a forceful mechanism of exclusion and exorcism of what is constructed as 'Other', and this process altogether constitutes an act of identity formation' (Todorova 2000, p.56).

In their books on the standard of civilization and international society, Gong (1984) and Suzuki (2009) list a series of characteristics that states *had* to possess (especially with respect to the nineteenth century) to be considered 'civilized nations', such as the adoption of international law, the respect for the laws of war and violent conduct, the commitment to a specific form of balance of power and institutional configuration within states (hence, for example, monarchies that had elements of constitutionalism were deemed to be 'more civilized' than absolute autocracies), abolition of serfdom, the ability to embark on a path of technological progress (both from a civilian and a military perspective), a progressive movement from mercantilism to capitalism, and, as has been argued elsewhere, the willingness to be a civilizer itself (Costa Buranelli 2014): that is to say, not just the ability to embark on a process of civilization internally, but also to export the elements of civilization externally to less civilized polities, populations inhabiting what was known in international law at that time as 'terra nullius', and 'not fully civilized states' via trade, colonialism, and war.

In my opinion there is a crucial element of the standard of civilization narrative that is missing both from the account provided by Gong and that provided by Suzuki, which is *territoriality*. In other words, the fact that a civilized state had to be territorially fixed with stable and well-demarcated borders was so obvious in their minds that it was ignored as an element of civilization. Territory allowed for the collection of taxes, the formation of a standing army, social control over the population, and as an identity- and community-marker. In addition, a bounded, governed territory would ensure that travellers and merchants would enjoy protection and safety. As Linklater has put it, it was the aim of European rulers "to preserve oases of security and civility that could only be found within the territorial state" (2017a, p.210). And yet, this element is not featured in the analyses of the standard of civilization discussed above. However, I argue this is a crucial element for the standard of civilization narrative from the perspective of this chapter, because it situates Russia, its history, and its relations with nomads in a normative, value-related framework to describe how a civilized state *should be*.

Russia has always had a complex relationship between its identity and its territory. Where does European Russia begin? Where does Asiatic Russia start? The absence of clear-cut borders on its western territory has always made its relationship with Europe unstable and constantly under negotiation (Neumann 1999, 2011; Bassin 2006). This is even more valid for Russia's south-eastern borders, which in the nineteenth century were undefined and barely non-existent. In the past, Russia had to share huge portions of territory close to its settlements and urban, commercial centres with the nomadic populations of the steppe, who constantly raided and assaulted caravans and commercial expeditions directed to the settled polities of the oases. As Brian Boeck maintains, "the state's entire southern perimeter lacked convenient 'natural' boundaries, making frontier defence costly and complicated" (Boeck 2007, pp.42-43). For Russia, therefore, securing the south-eastern frontier was a matter of economic security as much as a civilizational imperative: nomads, *qua* wanderers, had to be controlled and disciplined so that Russia could have stable borders, and prove its status as a civilizer.

Territory was, in fact, becoming a fundamental attribute of nation-states, empires, and aspiring great powers such as Russia in the nineteenth century. The sovereign, bounded territory demarcated by clearly defined and lawfully (both domestically and internationally) regulated borders was a defining feature not just of civilized states but, more broadly speaking, of *modernity*. As John Ruggie has argued, "the central attribute of modernity in international politics has been a peculiar and historically unique configuration of territorial space" (1993, p.144). For Russia, this was especially important, both from a security perspective as well as from an ideational, civilizational one: to have a border which was not defined—a frontier, a portion of unspecified territory over which nomadic tribes could raid and endanger travellers, traders and state representatives—was akin to be outside civilization, out of sync with modern European powers, for 'the notion of firm boundary lines between the major territorial formations did not take hold until the thirteenth century; prior to that date, there were only "frontiers," or large zones of transition' (Ruggie 1993, p.150).

In addition, legally defined borders and political control over a specific territory became the pivotal element of sovereign polities recognised *as such* by international law. To be sure, this is not to say that Russia was not considered a sovereign country by other European states. Yet, not having full control on one of its borders and sharing portions of territory with Asiatic nomadic tribes diminished its standing within the international community, and endangered trade relations with the settled populations of the Central Asian oases (Costa Buranelli 2014). A closer look at the epistemic transformation of society in the nineteenth century may be of help in understanding this.

In the nineteenth century, going hand in hand with the development of ideologies of progress and scientific racism made possible by new anthropological and archaeological discoveries (Buzan and Lawson 2015, pp.97-101), international public law shifted from *naturalistic* conceptions of rights as applicable to all peoples and polities to a *positivist* reading emphasizing right only for those people and polities that possessed specific attributes. For scholars working in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, sovereignty was defined as *control over a specific territory*. Prominent international lawyers and intellectuals such as Henry Wheaton and Thomas Lawrence voiced these theories within the contemporary epistemic legal community. For Lawrence, for example, "international Law regards states as political units possessed of proprietary rights over definite portions of the earth's surface. So entirely is its conception of a state bound up with the notion of territorial possession that *it would be impossible for a nomadic tribe, even if highly organised and civilized, to come under its provisions*" (Lawrence, quoted in Anghie 1999, p.27, emphasis added). He also stressed the role of territory even more, *de facto* depriving nomads with international legal personality and considering their steppes as *terra nullius*, when saying that "the rules of modern International Law are so permeated from end to end with the idea of territorial sovereignty that *they*

would be entirely inapplicable to any body politic that was nor permanently settled upon a portion of the earth's surface which in its collective capacity it owned" (quoted in Anghie 1999, p.27, fn.88, emphasis added). Accordingly, therefore, "wandering tribes could not be sovereign because they failed the territorial requirement; they were not in sole occupation of a particular area of land" (Anghie 1999, p.27; see also Linklater 2017b, p.291). At the same time, another prominent international lawyer of that time, John Westlake, defended territorial expansion in the steppe arguing that nomadic tribes "may have so slight a connection with any land in particular as to share but little, if at all, the ideas which [Europeans] connect with property and the soil" (quoted in Keal 2003, p.107).

The nomads of the Eurasian steppe were therefore 'othered' according to two strongly intertwined logics: that of territory, and that of civilization. And this, as argued above, was made possible by the proliferation of research and scientific projects that constituted the *Zeitgeist* of Europe at that time, with disciplines such as international law and anthropology (as well as evolutionary sociology) that were often combined to explain the current state of world affairs and make them more progressive and enlightened. As a matter of fact, Anghie tells us how "it was possible for jurists to draw upon disciplines such as anthropology to elaborate on the characteristics of the uncivilized. [In the eighteenth century], the constitution of sovereignty doctrine itself is based on this fundamental distinction because positivist definitions of sovereignty rely on the premise that civilized states are sovereign and uncivilized states are not" (1999, p.32). From an ES perspective, it was exactly this 'progressive', 'modern' and 'rational' interpretation of specific institutions of international society such as borders, territoriality, sovereignty and international law that objectified nomads as 'the Other', 'the barbarian', and 'the savage'. It was the adoption of such institutions that legitimised state borders and 'presented the outside world as an alien space. Imperial expansion into these alien spaces "went hand-in-hand with the emergence of the sovereign nation state. Both were seen as the "progressive" hallmarks of 'civilized' states" (Buzan and Lawson 2015, p.35).

Albeit not directly concerned with elements of the standard of civilization, also Malcom Anderson puts in relation borders, progress, and identity in his magisterial work on frontiers in international relations. For him, "emotions aroused by state frontiers became more widely shared and obsessive with the sacralisation of homelands by nineteenth-century nationalism" (Anderson 1997, p.3). Furthermore, he is aware of the particular significance that borders and territoriality represented for the Russian empire in history, when arguing that

in certain circumstances the frontier acquired a mythic significance in building nations and political identities, becoming the mythomoteur of a whole society [...] The nature of the Russian sense of identity and Russian imperialism can be understood only by reference to the steppe experience, in which the Russians successfully defined themselves against invaders from the east, and developed a tragic sense of history (1997, p.4).

To better understand how nomads fit within the discourses of standards of civilization, it is of utmost importance to keep in mind that such narratives, political projects, territorial conquests and military operations did not happen in a vacuum, but took place within a very specific scientific, philosophical and sociological context. In other words, *science* and *travel*, what Anthony Padgen calls 'cognitive travel' (quoted in Keal 2003, p.62), played a crucial part in the definition of the standard of civilization. Science was seen as a cosmopolitan glue holding together civilized nations, and as a powerful tool to study, analyse and eventually incorporate less civilized and backward polities (Pratt 1992). This had of course a profound impact on how orientalist and Eurocentric epistemological modes of reasoning underpinned contemporary depictions of nomadic life, inserting mobility and nomadism within a

mode of reasoning that placed it in a lower, subordinate position on the road to progress and development.

In the preface to letters written by the explorer William Bateson, for example, his sister argues that

from boyhood onward the problems covered by the general theory of evolution held him in thrall. [...] In such a spirit of fundamental curiosity must he have planned this expedition to the Steppes of Central Asia. Crudely expressed, he wanted to see the processes of evolution in action (Bateson 1928 [1886], pp.v-vi).

In the same way, Captain Mikhail Venyukof, dispatching military notes from the steppe, subtly marked the scientific study of nomads and their civilization to the approval of the English public, implicitly deemed to be the 'arbiter' of progress: "In the meanwhile, and apart from all political considerations, the continued efforts of Russian men of science to throw light on a region of the world so little known and so highly interesting, cannot but meet the sympathy of the English public, and merit its warm approval" (Valikhanov and Venyukof 1865, p.vii).

This was part of a new wave in scientific thinking, based on a shift from maritime explorations to terrestrial ones, in an effort to create what Mary Louise Pratt defined as "Europe's planetary consciousness, a version marked by an orientation toward interior exploration and the construction of global-scale meaning through the descriptive apparatuses of natural history" (Pratt 1992, p.15) which "is a basic element constructing modern Eurocentrism" (p.23). In the second half of the eighteenth century and in the first half of the nineteenth century, scientific exploration

was to become a magnet for the energies and resources of intricate alliances of intellectual and commercial elites all over Europe. ... [There was] a new orientation toward exploring and documenting continental interiors, in contrast with the maritime paradigm that had held center stage for three hundred years...Interior explorations had become the major object of expansionist energies and imaginings (p.23).

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw the production of a specific form of scientific knowledge: that of order, taxonomy, and precision in defining both territories and peoples. In 'The Order of Things', Michel Foucault describes the nature of such scientific development with the following statement: "by virtue of structure, the great proliferation of beings occupying the surface of the globe is able to enter both into the sequence of a descriptive language and into the field of a mathesis that would also be a general science of order" (Foucault 2001, p.149). The improvement of sciences was the common benefit of all nations, and it clearly became an institution of the European international society of those times—specifically an element of the standard of civilization described above.

This, of course, was inherently linked to the imperial expansionism of European powers, as "science came to articulate Europe's contacts with the imperial frontier, and to be articulated by them" (Pratt 1992, p.20). In light of such discourses, the space, that is the steppe and its nomads, was seen and evaluated as a function of time, of modernity. And a specific way of living (nomadism) was paired with geography (the Orient) in what resulted in an ontological hierarchy of progress. Agreeing with what is argued above, and writing on internal colonization and encounters with 'less civilized populations', Steven Sabol maintains that in fact Americans and Russians "shared with their European contemporaries the same philosophies, science, ethnologies, and agrarian motivations prevalent in the nineteenth-century imperial vision." These mutually held beliefs "shaped the relationships and policies between the colonial frontier and the metropole, between the central government and local administrations, and between colonizer and colonized" (2017, p.32).

This meant also that not just territory, but especially *peoples inhabiting them* were now subjected to scrutiny and scientific analysis. And, perhaps not surprisingly, such analyses were often based on racist (based on Linnaeus's work) and later evolutionary (based on the works of Darwin and Spencer) discourses. Linnaeus, for example, compiled a 'hierarchy of races' that had a profound impact on how the nomads, *qua* Asiatic, were approached and described by the Russian establishment: "European: Fair, sanguine, brawny; hair yellow, brown, flowing; eyes blue; gentle, acute, inventive. Covered with close vestments. Governed by laws. – Asiatic: Sooty, melancholy, rigid. Hair black; eyes dark; severe, haughty, covetous. Covered with loose garments. Governed by opinions" (quoted in Sabol 2017, p.32).

There is also a third aspect of the story, aside from the legal/territorial and the scientific/civilizational ones, that, albeit being heavily materialist and interest-based, is still crucially linked to the wider understanding of the standard of civilization discussed above. Economic development, with increasing elements of liberalism and competition within global trade, was considered as being part of the standard of civilization (Buzan and Lawson 2015). For Russia, territoriality was inherently correlated to it. In the economic dimension, strategic as well as normative considerations were intertwined. Economic competition and opening markets were considered to be ways to increase nations' relative power in the international system (by making them wealthier) as well as the right way for nations to develop. This understanding of the standard of civilization situates the whole normative narrative of the standard within the wider framework of economic, capitalist and technological development that the international system was undergoing in the nineteenth century (Buzan and Lawson 2015; Schulz and Flores 2017). For Russia, this was even more important if we think of how important land and agriculture were for the creation of the nation's identity (more on this in the third section). For Russia, agriculture, inherently linked to sedentarization, functioned both as a source of prosperity as well as an identity-maker that elicited dichotomic, binary categorizations with respect to nomads.³ The next sections will show how the framework and background outlined here informed Russo-nomad interactions in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The settlement of the steppe

Contacts between the nomadic population of the Kazakh and Kyrgyz steppe certainly preceded the second half of the eighteenth century and the nineteenth century, but in those two centuries became more frequent and sustained. From the second decade of the eighteenth century, the Russian Empire gradually increased its physical presence in the Kazakh steppe and brought with it new laws, norms, and practices for the development of nomadic lands and control of nomadic populations (for an overview, see Martin 2001, ch.3). Beginning with the erection of forts along key Western Siberian river routes in the 1710s and continuing in the 1820s with the establishment of administrative units and promotion of agricultural practices meant to 'civilize' the Kazakhs, the Empire profoundly challenged traditional Kazakh political relations and land use practices (Martin 2010, p.81).

These territories were inhabited by two nomadic populations, called 'Kirghiz' (modern-day Kazakhs) and 'Kara-Kirghiz' (modern-day Kyrgyz). These populations inhabited the northern and south-eastern part of Central Asia, corresponding to present-day Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and the mountainous Pamir region now part of Tajikistan, and were characterised by a nomadic lifestyle and a vertical social structure underpinned by tribal customary law, called *Adat*. As Paul Geiss stresses, tribal communities were mostly based on principles of peace, friendship and seniority, while "collective responsibilities

³ For 'proper nomadism' as characterized by the absence of agriculture, see Khazanov (1994, p.19).

and low standards of property protection represented basic principles' of their customary law" (2003, p.38).⁴

The idea of territoriality among these populations was indeed weak. For peoples not accustomed to sedentary ways of life and whose life was regulated by the cycle of seasons and the cattle's pastures, the boundary represented the exact opposite of their way of life. Indeed, the nomadic tribes did not share this territorial commitment almost by definition. Their way of breeding cattle, their management of pastures according to seasonal periods and their need to move from one place to another cyclically to find better living conditions was a huge hurdle for the fixation of the institution of territoriality, and it was considered not only as a sign of laziness and weakness, but also of poverty (Meyendorff 1826, p.9). However, this picture is much more complex than it may look at a first sight. Even if boundaries and territoriality among the tribes were not highly institutionalised, Yuri Bregel shows how there were already border patrols in the steppe among different tribes (2003). It was not in the interest of the sovereign to delimit clear-cut and visible borders, but they had a certain idea of limited territoriality. As Buzan and Little tell us, "although mobile, [nomadic tribes] never lacked a sense of territoriality. The bands moved regularly from one campsite to another, but they did so around an estate with which they were familiar" (2000, p.117).

Therefore, it may be said that in Central Asia there was a soft sense of territoriality, albeit present in various degree, from the nomadic tribes to the semi-nomadic tribes under the suzerainty of the khan and the bulk of the khanate itself. Meyendorff (1826, p.9), while passing through the steppe inhabited by the Kyrgyz, refers to 'pillars' to delineate some boundaries, posited by tribal chiefs and meant to be meaningful for other tribes and peoples from the oases. Nonetheless, the institutionalization of fixed territoriality and borders was very much distant from the European experience, both conceptually and in practice. This is in line with what was argued in the opening of the present book, and specifically that nomadism is a social order for which territoriality is important, but not geographically fixed. Movement between various territories, rather than fixed territorial order, is what exemplifies the nomadic order. The non-permanent attachment to a specific territory, rather than continuous movement, is the qualifying attribute of nomadism as a way of living (MacKay et al. 2014). In fact, pastoralist or hunters, people who practiced a nomadic economy do not 'wander': they have adapted to settings of limited resources (water, grass, game) by developing practices of food preservation and transport in harmony with their environments (Kollmann 2017).

Once the Russians started occupying the territory, they initiated processes of reorganization of the territory along European rational administrative lines. To begin with, borders were exogenously imposed. Furthermore, the creation of *oblasts*, *uezds*, and *volosts*⁵ forced the nomadic and semi-nomadic populations of Central Asia to adapt to a new political reality made of legally delimited spaces (Martin 2001). In particular, six main territorially-fixed administrative areas, called provinces, were created: Semipalatinsk, Akmolinsk, Ural, Turgai, Semirechinsk and Syr Darya (Clarke 1874). From a legal perspective, the Rules for the Siberia Kyrgyz were published in 1822. Two years later those for the Orenburg Kazakhs were adopted. In an attempt to modernize the steppe, these two documents

⁴ Interestingly, this reliance on customary law and tradition was seen as an additional element to exclude nomads from civilized peoples. As Tylor put it when writing his study on primitive cultures at the end of the eighteenth century, "admitted that civilized law requires its key from barbaric law; it must be borne in mind that the barbarian lawgiver too was guided in judgement not so much by first principles, as by a reverent and often stupidly reverent adherence to the tradition of earlier and yet ruder ages" (Tylor 1871, p.449). The emphasis on 'first principles' also reflects the shift to positive law, which was dealt with in the previous section.

⁵ These were the concentric levels of territorial administration (from the biggest to the smallest) imported from imperial Russia.

abolished the khan and the horde as political units, and entrenched fixed territorial units where the nomads were supposed to live. In particular, article 171 of these regulations allowed for nomads to get a piece of land to start farming or found a settled homestead (Geiss 2003; Khodarkovsky 2004; Malia 2000; Sunderland 2006). At the same time, the settlement of the steppe led to 'the propagation of purely Russian *grazhdanstvennost'* [civilization] among half-savage natives poisoned by Muslim fanaticism' (Nikolai Aristov, Semirechie's military governor, quoted in Brower 2003, p.134). The officials thus gave colonialism a nationalist content that excluded the nomads.

All these changes affected the epistemological nature of the settlement. Russian personnel in the newly occupied steppe were actively seeking 'the order of things', and shedding the 'light' of science on the 'darkness' of the new, unexplored territory. As a proof of what said above in regard to cognitive travel and to how science informed imperialism, now there were military escorts "sworn to uphold the highest standards of accuracy and integrity, and dispatched around the steppe provinces. The result was estate maps, district maps, provincial atlases, and accompanying economic notes" (Sunderland 2006, p.80). The crucial link between borders, territoriality, settlement, and civilization is visible in the following quote by a Russian military officer, writing in 1872, and commenting on the conquest of the steppe:

After the translation of our boundaries from the Ural and Irtysh more than 1,000 versts into the depths of Asia, and in particular after the formation of the Turkestan General Government, the Kirgiz steppe, at one time forming the frontier territory of Russia, became the interior of the Empire, and attention had now to be turned to gradually identifying this region with Russia. This object *could only be attained by the introduction of a settled administration*, similar in its main principles to the institutions of the Empire, with such differences as were demanded by the character of the nation, their degree of developments, and lastly the economical [sic] and political conditions under which the Kirgiz population existed (Clarke 1874, emphasis added).

In the light of this, the mass migration of peasants whose way of life was drastically different from that of Siberian Cossacks and Kazakhs turned the region into an agricultural one. The government apparatus became sufficiently strong to regulate the relations between incoming and aboriginal populations, and the ideas of ethnically centred nationalism began to penetrate the consciousness of the Russian frontiersmen, leading them to view the Kazakhs as irrevocably 'other'. These developments effectively 'closed' the frontier and transformed these regions of modern-day Kazakhstan into Russian provinces (Malikov 2011).

Russian Oriental discourses around nomadism, territoriality, and civilization

Now that the settlement of the steppe has been described, the analysis goes back to the framework outlined in the first section to see how it operated in practice. The most important thing to keep in mind when analysing how nomads and nomadism were juxtaposed to the narrative of civilization presented by the Russian territorial conquest (and, in fact, transformation) is that 'typologies' and 'imagology,' defined as "the act of creating durable stereotypes and fixed images of a given social group by stressing specific physical, moral and intellectual characteristics," constituted conventionalized processes that placed value on social constructions and identities (Ziolkowski quoted in Sabol 2017, p.140). What this means is that the adjectives, names, descriptions, and objectifications of nomads were intrinsically normative and related to the objective, of the Russian empire, to build a

European, civilized identity through the disciplining of them and their sedentarization, seen *in itself* as an element of civilization.

The most recurring elements in the general depiction of the nomads in European and, specifically, Russian discourses at that time may be summarised in three main categories aimed at marginalizing, subjugating, and orientalising them. These three categories, the reader will notice, are derived from the tripartite standard of civilization framework outlined above.⁶ The first category, which we may call *civilizational*, is that of ‘backwardness’, ‘childishness’, ‘violence’ and ‘antiquity’; the second category, the *scientific* one, is that of ‘limited abstract intellect’; the third one, *economic*, is that of ‘uselessness’, with specific reference to how the territory they inhabited was left uncultivated. One may observe that all three categories are based on the ‘lack’ of something: ‘progress’ in the first case; ‘culture’ or ‘intelligence’ in the second case; ‘utility’ in the third case. Thanks to this imagology, therefore, Russia could create a hierarchy of status based on territoriality and the civilization attached to it, placing the nomads at the outskirts of Europe and therefore of progress and history. As Adeeb Khalid has argued, ‘The Orient is defined largely in terms of absences: of change, progress, liberty, reason, and so on, which dialectically then define (affirm) the West. This essentialized Orient then stands outside of History, which becomes synonymous with Europe. Orientalism is intertwined with the self-affirmation of Europe as the seat of history’ (2008, p.699). The Orientalist tone is visible, for example, in the following words by a local Russian military official, commenting on the state of the nomads, arguing that

men of science have long since perceived the importance for Ethnography of a study of such relics of national literature, as most truthfully illustrate national morals, manners, and customs. Now it so happens that profound regard for antiquity and an abundance of traditions forms a marked and characteristic heritage of the nomadic races of Central Asia. These traditions are devoutly preserved by the elders of the tribes, either in the form of ancestral reminiscences and genealogical legends, or in ballads which are perpetuated by a special class of bards (Valikhanov and Venyukof 1865, p.95).

In contemporary accounts, the nomads, are tellingly deemed to be a ‘race’ on their own (Valikhanov and Venyukof 1865, p.95). They are described as extremely stupid and proud of their beastly habits’ (Bateson 1928 [1886], p.60); ‘enfant de la nature’ (Moser 1885, p.19), or ‘immature [lacking] proper morals and manners’ (as stated by the governor of Orenburg, D. V. Volkov, in a letter written to Catherine II about the Kazakhs, quoted in Sabol 2017, p.159); people whose intellect ‘is not high’, and whose life is ‘simply an exact counterpart of the most patriarchal times’, permitting ‘like all Asiatic ... every possible fraud, artifice, and perfidy to be practised on their enemies’ (Clarke 1874, p.15); violent ‘like packs of hungry wolves’ (Usov quoted in Malikov 2011, p.7) and so on. As mentioned above, they were also without past, without history, stuck in pre-modern times, de-temporalized. For the Russian poet Alexander Pushkin, as with many of his contemporaries, peoples of the East had no sense of history, which he regarded as necessary for a civilized people. He wrote that a ‘respect for the past is a characteristic that distinguishes the educated person from the savage; nomadic tribes have neither a history nor a nobility’ (quoted in Sabol 2017, p.146).

⁶ Not everyone in Russia shared the idea that nomads were necessarily ‘savage’ and ‘inferior’ ‘Others.’ Eurasianists, for example, saw them as part of Russia’s past, when Russian territory was ruled by the Mongols in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and therefore as part of the Empire’s Eurasian identity (Polunov and Zakharova 2005, p.5). Yet, since the purpose of this chapter is to analyse how territoriality constituted and informed the Russian understanding of the standard of civilization, the focus here is on those segments of the population (or rather, of the élite) who rejected this reading of nomadism, which was on the contrary deemed as a relic of barbarism.

Hence, nomadism becomes an essentialist ahistorical category that provides rational foundations for justifying Russia's civilizational status, its scientific contribution to Europe's knowledge, and economic needs to be satisfied by appropriating land, crucial for Russia's economic development. Nomadism, which is associated with chaos and rootlessness, is the perfect mirror image of modern law, which assumes and demands the ordering of populations within definite spatial and temporal boundaries. Nomadism becomes a deviance, the basic sanction for which is 'exclusion from the social realm and the positioning of the nomad on the side of nature' (Shamir 1996, p.237).

As far as the 'economic' characterization of nomads is concerned, it was evident in the fact that the concept of 'utility' was used, in official and personal accounts of the conquest of the steppe, in relation to land. The nomads, by wandering on an immense portion of potentially arable and cultivable land, showed their ignorance of the 'utility' of such land, and hence were primitive and backward as they lacked sense of economic development. Instead, a Russian way of life based on agriculture was indeed a 'gift of civilization' (Sunderland 2006, p.61). Such a civilizational reading of sedentarism and agriculture was part of the epistemic community of the time, especially since agriculture was seen as an element of civilization on the development from savage to civilized. Intellectuals like Edward Gibbon (2000 [1776]) and Antoine-Yves Goguet (2011 [1809]) made clear that agriculture and economic activities related to it had always gone hand in hand on the path to progress and civilization. In an era when agriculture and commerce were the foundations of wealth and internal economic development, the 'unimproved' steppe was redeemed by the prospects of importable productivity, that is to say the chance to transfer Russian people to uncultivated territories with the aim of increasing agricultural output. At the end of the eighteenth century, when the settlement of the steppe and of the nomads was starting, it was said that "given that [the nomads] were not Russian, not Orthodox...*by definition engaged in little or no agriculture*, and had a history...of inflicting Russia with insults, thievery, and destruction, nomads remained the antithesis of enlightenment and utility" (Levashov quoted in Sunderland 2006, p.62, emphasis added). The lack of agricultural knowledge, therefore, was linked inextricably with the 'antithesis of Enlightenment'. This economic reading of the nomadic way of life, which of course was based on a hierarchical reading of nomads, is also visible a few decades later in the words of a military officer that was sent in Central Asia at the time of the Russian penetration:

With regard in particular to the Kirghiz-Kaisak [sic] encampments, the degree of their productiveness and well-being depends chiefly on the state of order and security in the Steppe...The spread of agriculture among the Kirghizes would consequently be actually encouraged by the preservation and multiplication of cattle in the Steppe. Besides enriching the Kirghizes and civilizing their nature, it would produce a greater demand for Russian productions...By adopting measures for the security of the Kirghizes, and by encouraging agriculture among them, the Russian government will lay the foundations for the future prosperity of the inhabitants of the steppe (Valikhanov and Venyukof 1865, pp. 465; 483; 485).

With respect to how such an understanding of 'land' was linked to development, civilization and the construction of identity, it is worth noting that the Russian Empire aimed at creating its own narrative of the 'standard of civilization' based on territoriality as a defining component thereof, while paying attention at Western discourses, too. As a matter of fact, while the 'civilizational' and the 'scientific' descriptions of the nomads as reported above were in tune with how Western powers defined their 'Others', the Russian Empire was keen to define its 'Others' on the basis of estate and economic use of land, too (Etkind quoted in Sabol 2017, p.252). To be sure, all the descriptions analysed above find their *raison d'être* in the fact that Russia felt it was on a civilizing mission to fit the European ideal of

‘civilization’, and to demonstrate the right to be regarded as an equal in international society. Simply, the Russian version of such mission included, and indeed emphasised, replacing nomadic patterns of life with agricultural settlements and creating rationally planned urban spaces (Rieber 2007).

The inhabitants of the steppe were also expected to continue ‘improving’ by adopting ‘the Russian way’. In fact, their improvement became increasingly important because Russian elites were increasingly excited about what having a civilizing mission said about their own status as a civilized state. A very insightful description of how Russia aimed at linking the sedentarization of the nomads to the European civilizational framework can be found in the letters of a traveller in the steppe in the late nineteenth century. With specific reference to the steppe and the difficulties that the Russian empire had in assimilating the steppe into its imperial administration and agricultural way of living, this traveller argued that ‘it is just like America in that respect, that though everything is beastly, everybody insists on your praising it, and saying that it is *very European*. This is the untiring duty of a foreigner, to say that everything is *European*’ (Bateson 1928 [1886], p.38, emphasis added).

This last sentence is the concluding element of the dynamic identified in the first section. Russia, willing to be accepted as a fully European, Western civilized state, found in the orientalizing and the othering of the nomads its gateway to Europe, showing that Russian Orientalism has always been intimately related to the West, seen as a source of difference to reject as well as modernity to emulate.

Conclusions

This chapter explicated how nomads in the Central Asian steppe fit the wider socio-political context of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, thus contributing to the already rich ES literature on the expansion of international society. Rather than on ‘states’ and ‘expansion’, though, this study focused on ‘peoples’, ‘othering’, and ‘dispossession’ (Keal 2003). By relying on primary and secondary research, I examined how territoriality constituted a defining element of the ideology of progress and of the standard of civilization that found so much fertile ground in diplomatic, political and scientific audiences of that period. At the same time, the chapter discussed how nomads were constructed as an ‘Other’ by Russian elites and intellectuals, with the specific intent to locate Russia within the safe-haven of civilized, enlightened nations. Yet, for Russia, relations with nomads were problematic, both from a historical as well as a civilizational perspective: since nomads once ruled over Russian territory during the Mongol years (1223-1480 circa), they were part of Russia’s history and, therefore, identity.

This created a stigma in the country’s consciousness, which affected the way in which nomads were portrayed later. By linking discourses of territoriality and agriculture to contemporary tropes typical of the standard of civilization, Russian elites intended to create a distance between themselves and the nomads that was based on progress, enlightenment, civilization and development by drawing on already existing European discourses on civilization and scientific racism, as well as on a specific emphasis on agriculture as a marker of modernity. What this paper showed is that from the perspective of the Russian Empire, nomads were fully outside not just European international society, but also and especially from the group of civilized nations and peoples, and that territoriality, borders, and economic growth linked to agriculture and settlement all played a pivotal role in defining the standards that demarcated such divisions. While waiting for ‘discipline’ and ‘forceful assimilation,’ nomads were, in sum, forced to wander at the fringes of international society, in the same way they wandered through the steppes.

This research is certainly guilty of one-sidedness. In other words, the whole story presented here was from the perspective of the winner, of the more powerful, of 'the civilized'. In this respect, therefore, more research on nomads in international society and on encounters between nomads and settled polities from the perspective of nomads is strongly encouraged and much needed. What is important to remember, though, is that the evaluative binary categories reviewed in this paper were created in Europe, by Europeans, for Europeans. And exactly because of this, nomads found themselves on a ladder of progress and civilization without knowing it, and, perhaps more importantly, without wanting it.

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