

dwindled. But Baranov also knew that the company's existence depended on such coercion, and thus never made any substantial changes to the Alaskans' situation, this despite a long and apparently happy marriage to a local woman. He remained a merchant first and an empire-maker second (despite the book's title) until the end.

Concerning the church, Owens and Petrov nicely explain a key moment in the Baranov regime when he saw off a challenge from monks who wanted to free the Alutiiq from company labor, though probably only to transfer them to direct imperial control. This book does not sanctify the Orthodox Church the way others have done, but the authors do note the remarkable rapprochement Baranov later achieved with some of the less-intolerant monks. So too did Baranov end on friendly terms with the Tlingit leader K'alyaan (Katlian), whom he had defeated at Sitka in 1804. (Perhaps this was because the Tlingit had found triumph in survival after their retreat, as oral histories usefully employed by Owens and Petrov suggest.) Through gains and losses, moments of tenderness and hard-hearted pursuit of profit, the Baranov in this excellent biography displayed just the flexibility and determination necessary to eke out the Russians' ever precarious existence on the farthest margins of their vast empire.

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Bornet, Philippe, and Svetlana Gorshenina, eds. *L'orientalisme des marges: Éclairages à partir de l'Inde et de la Russie*. Lausanne: Études de lettres, 2014. 414 pp. \$31.19. ISBN 978-2-940331-35-2.

The debates that have emerged about the critique of Edward Said's orientalism have not ceased to move the "tectonic plates" of this same theme. Philippe Bornet and Svetlana Gorshenina, both based in Lausanne, Switzerland, have added their stone to the edifice by bringing their respective fields of competence into dialogue: India and Central Asia, and the gazes of Westerners and of Russians on these two regions, which were the targets of many of Europe's identity projections from the eighteenth century on. The introductory article by David Schimmelpennick van der Oye, on why Said has been largely ignored in Russia, whets the reader's appetite for some future work that one hopes will resolve this question, already partially addressed by the works of Vera Tolz and Alexander Etkind.

This volume's driving question is to look into how knowledge is constituted in colonial situations: which directions do borrowings of knowledge take? How is the imported knowledge appropriated locally, and vice versa? Who is at the margins of whose knowledge? The latter is a fundamental question in that it helps to challenge the simplistic conception that knowledge travels in one direction, from colonizer to colonized.

In the first section, several articles inquire into the constitution of Western and Russian knowledge in what was then perceived as the fringes, or peripheries, of the great empires of the time: a French military expert circulates through Russian Turkestan, European visitors of all persuasions went to the Buryat regions of Transbaikalia at the periphery of the Russian Empire, but also of the Tibetan world then dominated by the English and the Chinese; German and Russian researchers collaborated and competed on archeological digs in Turfan, Xinjiang, and so on. Till Mostowlansky draws a fascinating parallel between Tajikistan's Gorno-Badakhshan and Gilgit-Baltistan in today's Pakistan, which makes it possible to understand more clearly the constitution of knowledge in the colonial period and its continuity in the Cold War decades. In the works of European scholars, this "Central Eurasia" has been systematically grasped both as a center and as a periphery, a core and a fringe, and has been a target of virulent academic rivalry, directly reflecting the geopolitical stakes of the era of the "Great Game," and thus squarely meeting Peter van der Veer's definition of a "mess of encounters."

The second part of the volume focuses on the impact of Western knowledge on the societies studied and in particular on their role in shaping new collective, and potentially national, identities. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the institutionalization of Urdu and English as India's

governmental languages, utilized in new literary productions, contributed to marginalizing Persian and cutting links with the Iranian-speaking eucumene. Protestant missionaries revalorized Tamil Shaivist texts in order to defend the Tamil Shaivist religious heritage against sanskritized Hinduism. Stalin played a key role in molding the linguistic debate about the origins of Georgian language as part of both the cult of personality of the Soviet leader, but also of the nationalities policy of the Soviet Union and the need to demonstrate the uniqueness of each Soviet nation. European influences did not come only through academic works on local language and cultures, but also by bringing new “social languages,” such as architecture as a symbol of a modernity which had both been imposed from the outside and deeply interiorized.

The third part of the work explores the transgression of the peripheries and the numerous cases in which European debates were themselves transformed by the colonial experience and in which the “colonized” refused the boxes in which they had been confined. Hence, “Eastern” religious and philosophical forms of knowledge played a major role in the evolution of European societies, such as via theosophism, for example. More recently, the work of Russian writer Viktor Pelevin provides a good example of the projection of a supposedly Buddhist quest in Russian postmodernism. In reply to this exoticizing glorification of the “spiritual heritage” of the Orient, several figures such as the Bengali Manabendra Nath Roy (1887–1954) rejected this orientalizing and militated within the communist international to exit from the status of a passive periphery of history. Likewise, the poet Geetanjali Shree transgressed, in her specific style, the traditional boundaries of British and Hindi social norms.

One can only be delighted at the fact that Russian orientalist studies on Central Eurasia, which are often marginal, are finally re-entering the European “core” curriculum and can be put in parallel with the classicism of the Europe-India relationship. The Russian case is indeed paradoxical, since in many respects Russia was also the target of orientalizing and exoticization on the part of the West, and simultaneously produced its own, “interior,” Orient, namely its colonies in the Caucasus, in Central Asia, and in the Far East. This volume thus helps to go beyond the binary model of colonizer/colonized and to open new research pathways on the geographies of power and the projections of fixed boundaries between what was deemed the “West” and what, the “rest.”

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Kefeli, Agnès Nilüfer. *Becoming Muslim in Imperial Russia: Conversion, Apostasy, and Literacy*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014. 312 pp. \$52.00. ISBN 978-0-8014-5231-4.

Agnès Kefeli’s book vividly recreates the dynamic cultural world of the indigenous people of the Middle Volga region on the eve of the advent of modern education, and it places the nineteenth-century Kräshen apostasy movements within the context of ethnic and religious diversity and multiplicity of available identities. The Russian Empire’s confessional politics in the region has been a long-standing subject of Western scholarship, yet no earlier study has offered such a nuanced analysis of the apostasies among the Kräshen—descendants of Muslim and animist Volga Tatars who converted to Orthodox Christianity in the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. Drawing on a rich variety of primary sources, which include archival documents, Sufi Turkic literature, Russian and Kräshen missionary writings and ethnographic studies, Kräshen petitions, and diaries by apostate women, Kefeli demonstrates that Kräshens’ decisions to leave the Church and join the community of Islam constituted a genuine process of conversion rather than a return to their presumably “historical” faith or a peasant rebellion against the state—the more familiar scholarly narratives. *Becoming Muslim* argues that, more than economic and legal factors, it was the dynamism and accessibility of popular Islamic discourse, and its thaumaturgical and eschatological narratives, that helped to expand Islam’s reach in the region, thereby elucidating the instrumentality of cultural symbols in the process of identity formation.

Early in her book, Kefeli demonstrates the hybridity of the Kräshen religious world, which incorporated Islamic, Christian, and native animist beliefs. She discusses in great detail the specific