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2.2 Soviet Orientalism and Subaltern Linguistics
The Rise and Fall of Marr's Japhetic Theory

Michiel Leezenberg

One of the attractions of the park surrounding the Villa Borghese in Rome is a group of statues of national poets. Included among them are such obvious examples as the Persian Abulqasim Firdowsi, author of the *Shahnâmeh* or *Book of Kings*; the Georgian Shota Rustaveli, who wrote *The Man in the Panther Skin* (*Vepkhistqaosani*); and the Montenegran Petar Njegos, writer of *The Mountain Wreath* (*Gorski Vijenac*). More surprising, however, is the presence of a statue, unveiled in 2012, of the 'Azerbaijani poet' Nizami Genjewi. Nizami composed all of his poems in Persian, but now he is claimed as the national poet of a country that cultivates an Azeri Turkish rather than a Persian identity. This nationalist reappropriation of a classical poet points to some of the questions to be treated in the present paper: the rise of nationalist ideas in non-European contexts, in this case, the Soviet Caucasus; and the role of the humanities in the creation of these new nationalisms. As will appear below, it was a Georgian-born scholar, the famous linguist and archeologist Nikolaj Marr, who first claimed Nizami as an Azerbaijani poet. Marr will loom large in the following pages, not only in connection with his notorious Japhetic theory, but also in connection with early Soviet nationality policies.

The universalization of the philological humanities

It has long been claimed that there is an intimate link between the modern humanities and modern nationalism. These modern notions are generally traced to philosophers like Herder and Fichte, linguists and folklore scholars like Wilhelm von Humboldt and the Grimm brothers, and historians like Ranke.[1] Another line of argumentation, famously introduced by Edward Said, argues that modern Western Orientalism, i.e., modern philological knowledge of the non-Western world, is a function of the colonizing projects of imperialist Western states.[2] In

short, the modern humanities are claimed to be implicated not only in the rise of nationalism or the nation-state, but also in imperialism and modern empires. Here, my main intention is not to appraise or criticize these two theses, but to explore an important if underinvestigated link between them.

To all appearances, the categories of Romantic nationalism and of the philological humanities (like those of the nation and national identity, and the concepts of language and culture, tradition and history in terms of which they are articulated) appear to have gained a virtually worldwide currency. One question to be discussed below is exactly how this vocabulary spread beyond its initial linguistic and cultural confines. For the natural sciences, some plausible suggestions have recently been made: famously, authors like Latour and Shapin and Scheffer have argued that the universalization of the modern Western natural sciences crucially involved the exportation of new instruments like the vacuum pump, and of new facilities like the laboratory. For the modern humanities, however, a similar argument can hardly be given: these generally worked without instruments or laboratory equipment. It can be, and has been, argued that novel forms of education like the seminar and novel spaces like the seminar room – both pioneered by Ranke – contributed to the expansion of modern ways of practicing the humanities across Europe (cf. Jo Tollebeek in this volume, Chapter 3.1); but such accounts do not yet explain how and why modern humanities knowledge reached areas outside Europe, where modern institutions like state-led schools and universities – let alone seminar rooms – were rather slower to materialize.

It is tempting but, as I hope to show, misguided to see the spread of the Romantic-nationalist vocabulary of the philological humanities in terms of the creation of an ideological hegemony of Western concepts; in doing so, one risks ignoring or downplaying both non-Western forms of agency and resistance, and alternative or subaltern forms of Western knowledge. Many accounts of the worldwide effects of the philological humanities, in particular, those standing in the tradition of Said's *Orientalism*, do in fact proceed from an implicitly or explicitly Gramscian notion of Western ideological or discursive hegemony over non-Western actors; but in doing so, they risk reducing non-Western actors to mere passive recipients of Western ideologies, and thus depriving them of all agency.[3] Further, they fail to explore the exact processes or mechanisms by which particular Western notions acquired this allegedly hegemonic status.

The intimate if not inherent link between the modern philological humanities and Romantic nationalism is by now well known in the literature; but the link between nationalism and Orientalism has not been explored in comparable detail. As will become clear below, however, the themes of nationalism and empire, and of philology and Orientalism, merge in the case of non-Western national movements. Recently, Stathis Gourgouris and Marc Nichanian have explored

what they call a hegemonic national and colonial modernity from a Said-inspired postcolonial perspective. As is well known, Said's original thesis of an intimate link between Orientalist knowledge and the colonizing projects of Western states fails to account adequately for German Orientalism, which for most of the nineteenth century developed – and spread abroad – in the absence of any colonizing projects on the part of the German, or rather Prussian, state.[4] Instead, one might argue that these German orientalist categories were shaped by nationalism rather than colonialism. A question to be pursued further would then be if there are any systematic links between the philological constitution of national selves and the Orientalist constitution of colonial others. Gourgouris and Nichanian address the question of the relation between Orientalism and nationalism for non-Western European national movements (respectively, the modern Greek movement emerging in the Ottoman Empire, and Armenian nationalism arising in both the Ottoman Empire and imperial Russia).[5] Such an extension of Said's claims requires, first, that modern German philological Orientalism – despite initial appearances – actually *does* involve a form of colonialism, and second, that non-Western nationalisms rest on an internalization of these allegedly hegemonic and allegedly colonial categories. Both these claims can in fact be found in these authors. Thus, according to Gourgouris, Wilhelm von Humboldt's famous notion of *Bildung*, which is traditionally said to instrumentalize classical Greek educational and civilizational ideals for German nationalist purposes, involves not simply the appropriation but also the sublimation of classical Greek ideals. As such, he continues, 'classical Bildung is no less than an explicit and programmatic *colonization of the ideal*'.[6] Unfortunately, however, Gourgouris largely fails to back this provocative but tantalizingly condensed argument with detailed references or quotations, leaving the impression that the 'colonization' he claims to have found in Humboldt's writings is at best implicit, and rests on a rhetorical association between – or identification of – the notions of appropriation, sublimation and colonization rather than on a detailed textual analysis. Gourgouris' second claim, that the nationalist project of the modern Greeks emerging involved the internalization of this alleged German colonialist sublimation, receives a hardly more elaborate argumentation.

A more detailed development, which applies of Gourgouris's claims, to the creation of a modern Armenian literature and national identity appears in Marc Nichanian's *Le deuil de la philologie*. Earlier, Nichanian had traced the rise of a modern Armenian literature written in the spoken vernacular, or *Ashkharhabar*, as opposed both to the written classical language or *Grabar* which until the early nineteenth century had been the dominant medium for works of literature and learning, and to what he calls the 'civil language', a supraregional variant spoken by eighteenth-century Armenian merchants and, on occasion, printed by the

Mekhitarist monks in Venice. In his later work, he claims that this linguistic change, and more generally the rise of Armenian nationalism, involves the Orientalist creation of the Armenians as a 'native people', and, as such, an 'internalized Orientalism'.[7] Extending an argument first made by Foucault, Nichanian argues not only that the invention of the category of literature in the nineteenth century is coeval with the emergence of modern philology, but also that the deployment of modern philology is accompanied by the emergence of the nation as an imaginary form of collective perception, that is, an imagined community in Benedict Anderson's sense.[8] This claim implies that the process of becoming a nation is less a political than an aesthetic process, as it crucially involves the creation of a modern, national literature. Nichanian adds to this general point that the nationalization of non-European peoples like the Armenians involves the internalization of the categories of European Orientalist philology, in particular that of the native.[9] Thus, both Gourgouris and Nichanian argue that nationalism among peoples living outside of Western Europe, like the Neohellenism pioneered by Adamantios Korais and the Armenian neo-archeology created by Khatchatur Abovian and Karekin Servantsdiants, involves the interiorization of an 'Orientalist gaze': they involve a perception of the self as 'native', that is, in terms of primitive or primordial (pagan) cultures or traditions that are more typically applied to an Oriental other.

Gourgouris and Nichanian certainly formulate a radical extension of Said's original argument: they wind up virtually identifying Orientalism with philology, and the German national educational ideal of *Bildung* with a colonizing project. At first blush, this may seem like a *reductio ad absurdum* of Said's – already contentious – main thesis: taken to its logical conclusions, it would imply that Humboldt is a colonizing imperialist as much as a nationalist, and that the Grimm brothers, in their attempts at recovering and transcribing their own native German culture, were in fact engaged in a colonial project. This claim, however, though extreme, is less far-fetched than it seems: it raises questions concerning the precise relation between nation and empire, and concerning the universalization of (German) Romantic nationalist categories and the role of the various philological disciplines in this process. More specifically, it forces us to look more closely at the relation between the philological construction of a national self and the Orientalist construction of a colonial or domestic other.

Russian and Soviet Orientalism: Marr and Trubetzkoy

Russia forms a particularly complex case for the nationalism-Orientalism thematic as commonly known. Even in so far as one can qualify the nineteenth-century Russian Empire as imperialist, it complicates the Saidian thesis because of

the rise of a new Russian self-perception as in important respects non-Western (and thus 'Oriental') during this period; and the Soviet Union that replaced it was explicitly committed to the emancipation of the peoples living in its territories, and supported anti-colonial struggles worldwide. Obviously, I cannot do justice to this vast theme; here, I will only discuss whether and to what extent the philological theories produced in imperial and Soviet times reproduced hegemonic Western categories or can be called an alternative or 'subaltern' form of knowledge.

It is well known that the Soviet humanities claimed to reject the categories of Western 'bourgeois' scholarship; it is less well known, however, that similar criticisms were already voiced well before the 1917 revolution, by authors who hardly qualify as bolshevists. Thus, Vera Tolz has argued that already in imperial Russia, one can find a critique of Eurocentrism and of the nexus between Orientalist knowledge and imperial power that antedates Edward Said's far more famous *Orientalism* (1978) by half a century. Tolz adds that Said's work is in fact indirectly indebted to this critique, especially through Soviet-educated intellectuals like the Egyptian Anouar Abdel-Malek.[10] Russian intellectual life already witnessed important reactions against German cultural influence in the nineteenth century, and more explicitly during the so-called Silver Age (spanning, roughly, the first two decades of the twentieth century); more importantly for the present discussion, this culturally anti-German and Russian nationalist attitude was explicitly linked to a methodological critique of the philological methods that underpinned historical-comparative linguistics as originating in German academia. We find such methodological critiques in two of the most influential linguists of late imperial Russia, Nikolai Trubetzkoy (1890-1938) and Nikolai Jakowlewitch Marr (1865-1934). Surprisingly, these criticisms are not discussed by Nichanian, who generally presents a picture of a smooth and largely uncontested German Romantic-*cum*-Orientalist hegemony over Armenian national self-awareness; but Marr's work is crucial not only for the Russian and more specifically Soviet experience, but also for the Armenian case: thus, he conducted excavations on the Armenian site of Ani, and published an Old Armenian grammar in 1903.

Trubetzkoy has, of course, become famous as the founder of modern phonology and areal linguistics; but it is less well known that he was also one of the main propagators of Eurasianism, i.e., the idea that Russia occupies a unique cultural space between East and West, and can be reduced to neither. Thus, in 'Europe and Mankind', published in 1920 but already written before World War I and the Russian Revolution, he criticizes Western European or, as he calls it, 'Romano-German' chauvinism, for presenting its cultural particularities as features of universal civilization.[11] This kind of criticism may seem primitive or outdated in comparison with Trubetzkoy's sophisticated linguistic work, but one wonders to what extent

the notion of a vast nonnational Eurasian space of common cultural experience has shaped Trubetzkoy's more famous ideas about linguistic *Sprachbund* or areal convergence, which suggest that two geographically adjacent languages may come to share structural features over time. There are indications that these linguistic doctrines have indeed been shaped and informed by a critique of the German chauvinism Trubetzkoy sees implicit in historical-comparative linguistics. Thus, he argues that the hypothetical Proto-Indo-European Ur-language should be treated as a purely linguistic construct, and should not be extrapolated to ethnic or racial developments, as is all too easily done by many of his contemporaries (and, in fact, by many a later author) working on historical comparative linguistics. Moreover, he argues that one should not treat the Indo-European languages in exclusively genetic terms: over time, he argues, languages may start sharing important structural features and thus *become* members of the same language family.[12]

Marr is as notorious as Trubetzkoy is famous, in particular because of his so-called Japhetic theory, which argues that all of the languages of the Caucasus, whether or not Indo-European, share traces of a distinct family of languages called 'Japhetic'.[13] Marr's linguistic doctrines are usually dismissed as crackpot science, or as a linguistic equivalent of Lysenko's attempts to create a truly materialistic genetics, with equally disastrous results. But it would be too easy merely to reject Marr's work as pseudo-scientific, or as just a political abuse of scholarship. Not only should we not project back standards of scientific truth and objectivity that at the time were fiercely contested, it also closes off more radical questions concerning the constitutive role of the philological humanities in the shaping of modern nationalism and the – possibly inherently political category of such apparently neutral analytical concepts like 'language', 'culture', or 'tradition'. Some of Marr's criticisms of German philology were in fact founded. Famously, on his first visit to Europe in 1894, Marr met – and soon quarreled with – one of the most famous German scholars of Armenian, Heinrich Hübschmann.[14] The details of their argument are not known, but it is tempting to see in this confrontation between a German scholar and an unknown native from the fringes of the Russian Empire a clash between a hegemonic German learning and a subaltern non-Western knowledge; in any case, Marr soon after started raising increasingly vocal criticisms of the German chauvinist arrogance and even racism that he found hidden in historical-comparative linguistics. He certainly had a point: as Trubetzkoy had argued independently, late-nineteenth-century German philologists projected linguistic findings onto speculations about the migrations and conquests of an Indo-Germanic *Herrenvolk* and about the supremacy of the Aryan race.[15]

But there were equally cogent theoretical reasons for criticism. Marr developed his Japhetic theory especially on the basis of research into the Georgian and Armenian languages, both of which were problem cases for comparative linguis-

tics. Thus, the historical-comparative linguistic classification of Armenian as a separate branch of the Indo-European languages left many questions open, and many etymologies unexplained. As an alternative explanation, Marr had argued in his 1903 grammar that the very core of the Armenian language, which arose 'on the soil of historical Armenia', is mixed or, as he calls it, 'bigenetic'.[16] Further, he argued, anticipating his later claims as to the class character of language, that already in classical times, Armenian was divided into a written form used by the (religious) elites and a 'secular', spoken vernacular, and that the modern written language (Askharhabar) was just as old and venerable as the classical Grabar.[17]

Marr's criticism of comparative linguists' tendency to identify languages with nations, and language families with races, certainly makes sense; but as a comparison with Trubetzkoy's Eurasianist and areal views suggests, such criticisms are not necessarily more 'objective' but may themselves presuppose rival ideologies. An open question for further research is to what extent these linguistic and philological theories (including the allegedly neutral and theory-independent 'facts' uncovered by them) were shaped by changing ideologies and practices of language. Trubetzkoy's and Marr's critique of the categories of German-based historical comparative linguistics appears to be driven by an anti-Western Eurasian or Japhetic (and more specifically, anti-German) ideology.

But it was not just, or not simply, anti-comparativist or anti-German considerations that led Marr to develop his Japhetic theory. Basing himself on his archeological excavations as much as on his linguistic research, he criticized the work of more nationalistically inclined Georgian and Armenian scholars, who tended to depict the medieval history of the Caucasus as a purely Christian affair, depriving the contributions of the Muslim presence in the region. Already by the 1890s, he had adopted the slogan 'struggle for nationality and against nationalism'[18]; later, in a series of 1924 lectures delivered in Baku, Marr argued not only for a greater attention for the Muslim contributions to the history and cultures of the Caucasus, and against the near-exclusive focus on its Christian past by Armenian and Georgian scholars; also, and more specifically, he recommended the study of Nizami as an Azerbaijani rather than a Persian poet: not only was Nizami born in the Azerbaijani city of Genje, he argued, but his Persian-language poetry is also shot through with 'Azerbaijanisms' (*azerbaijdzhanizmy*); his work therefore merits study as part of the Azerbaijani national heritage.[19]

Despite their ideological affinity, however, the methodological differences between Marr and Trubetzkoy could hardly be greater. Trubetzkoy did not mince his words about Marr: in a letter dated November 6, 1924, he writes that 'a critical review of [Marr's latest] article ought to be done, not by a linguist but by a psychiatrist'.[20] Moreover, he categorically denies that Marr's doctrines mark any methodological innovation, writing that they actually block scientific and social progress:

> [Marr's] 'new linguistic doctrine' is not a bit different from so-called bourgeois linguistics. [...] As a result, Soviet linguistics [...] has lost touch with genuinely progressive and revolutionary trends that are fighting for recognition in Europe and America.[21]

This leaves us with the question to what extent Marr's theories, regardless of their apparent rejection of the concepts and methods of German comparative linguistics, in fact achieve a paradigmatic break with the latter. In its early stages, Marr's Japhetic theory could still be seen as parasitic on German philology, in that it presupposed some of its concepts or etymological methods. It was not until after the October Revolution that Marr explicitly and systematically rejected the identification of languages with ethnic groups, and the explanation of linguistic change in terms of migrations and conquests by peoples. In the same period, he equally discarded the historical-comparative notions of language families and of reconstructed protolanguages. It may be questioned, however, whether even these more radical claims really mark a break with existing philological methods: as noted above, other authors, most notably Trubetzkoy, also argued against the identification of (reconstructed) languages with peoples. Even Marr's apparently novel concepts, or imagery, of 'layers' and 'sediments' bears a close similarity to the more familiar historical-comparative notion of substrates or substrata.

The main problem with Marrian linguistics, and the main difference with, e.g., Trubetzkoy's views on language contact, is that Marr appears to push back all language mixture and pluralism to a hypothetical stage of linguistic origins (witness his view of Armenian as an *originally* hybrid language), and thus downplays all change in historic times –, a rather odd move for a theory that presents itself as wholly in agreement with the main tenets of historical materialism. In fact, most of Marr's Marxist ideas, e.g., his conviction that language is a merely superstructural phenomenon, are only late and nonessential additions, rather than supporting members, of his Japhetic theories.

Marr and early Soviet nationality policies

Marr's linguistic theories gained prominence against the background of early Bolshevik nationality policies. These policies centered on what was called *korenizatsiia*, or 'nativization', i.e., they aimed at creating new political and cultural elites from among the local populations.[22] As such, they systematically supported the emancipation of the 'smaller nations' of the Soviet Union, i.e., the communities speaking languages that did not have a long-standing literary civilization. *Korenizatsiia* policies were directed not only against any Russian chauvinism dis-

guised as bolshevism, but also against any local chauvinism on the part of the existing elites of the constituent Soviet republics. As such, they directly reflected Stalin's early writings on nationalism. In his famous 'Marxism and the National Question' (1913), Stalin defines nations as requiring, most importantly, a common language, a common territory and a common life.[23] The mere possession of a common 'philosophical make-up', 'national character' or *Volksgeist*, he argues against the Romantic-idealist definition of nationhood, is not enough for a group of people to constitute a nation; specifically and explicitly, it is the Jews he has in mind here. He then raises the question of whether one should, or even could, create or 'organize' nations, as some social democrats have proposed. In his opinion, national autonomy should not be based on 'bourgeois' principles of national identity, which he sees as leading to national segregation, and thus as undermining the international unity of the labor movement. Rather, following Lenin, Stalin upholds the right to self-determination as distinct from bourgeois 'national autonomy'; this right, he assumes rather than argues, does not undermine the unity of workers, and will not lead to separatism.

Next, Stalin specifically addresses the nationality question in the Caucasus. The cultural-national autonomy claimed for this region, he argues, *presumes* developed nationalities with a developed culture and (presumably, written) literature; but how then, should this cultural-national autonomy apply to the smaller nationalities of the Caucasus, like the Mingrelians, the Abkhazians, and the Adjarians, who, as he writes, possess a 'primitive culture' and have no literature of their own? Against the social-democratic propagation of the bourgeois project of national autonomy, he then proposes what he calls the only genuinely progressive solution to the nationality question in the Caucasus: equal rights for all nations regarding schooling and communication, and the prohibition of all national privileges; these, however, can only be achieved by the complete democratization of the country.

In proposing this solution, Stalin not only crucially relies on state power to solve the nationality question; he also explicitly reframes the nationality question within a bolshevist *mission civilisatrice*. Regional autonomy, he claims, will draw the 'belated nations' into 'the common cultural development' and by allowing them the benefits of 'higher culture', and helps them to avoid small-nation insularity. Note that Stalin employs both 'cultural development' and 'higher culture' in the singular here, apparently assuming that neither has a specifically national, local or otherwise particular character, and tacitly identifying them with a universalist notion of 'civilization' or 'modernity'.

The contradictory character of these views on nationality has often been noted; even more striking, however, is Stalin's relapsing into an idealist vocabulary of 'cultural development' and 'higher culture'. But whatever its intellectual merits,

Stalin's solution to the nationality question cannot be brushed aside, not only because of its enormous influence on (post)colonial third world nationalisms, but also, and especially, because Stalin got the chance to implement and institutionalize his views in the Soviet Union of the 1920s and 1930s, once Lenin had appointed him People's Commissar for Nationalities Affairs.

Thus, early Soviet *korenizatsiia* policies tied in well with Marr's struggle for nationality and against nationalism; but were they actually shaped by it? There is no evidence that Stalin was familiar with the theories of his fellow Georgian Marr before the 1920s; but the resemblance with Marr's attitude to nationalism, and the concern with the smaller, non-Christian nationalities of the Caucasus, is striking. Conversely, as noted, it was only in the 1920s that Marr rephrased his theories in explicitly dialectical terms of class struggle, base and superstructure; but even before this reformulation, Marr's theories had been germane to the emancipation, or creation, of the smaller Muslim nations of the Caucasus, such as the Abkhaz, the Chechens, the Kurds, and to some extent even the Azeris, against the locally dominant Christian Armenian and Georgian nationalities (which, it should be kept in mind, were themselves relatively recent formations shaped in interaction with the rise of Russian nationalism in the nineteenth century).

Marr was certainly not alone in his efforts to create a genuinely Marxist linguistics. Despite the violent power struggle between the bolshevists and their opponents, both the arts and the humanities – not yet as constrained by state power as they would become in subsequent decades – showed a creative outburst during the 1920s, with exciting and provocative new ideas developed by both scholars and artists, witness students of literature and folklore like Bakhtin and Propp, and modernist dramaturges, poets and filmmakers like Meyerhold, Mayakovsky and Eisenstein. In linguistics, the 1920s saw a significant paradigmatic shift from more historically oriented approaches to language inspired by authors like Wilhelm von Humboldt to the synchronic, structural approach proposed by, in particular, Ferdinand de Saussure; at the same time, various authors started the search for a Marxist alternative to such 'bourgeois' approaches to the study of language. Thus, one Soviet scholar, V.N. Voloshinov, developed a framework that emphasized the materiality of the sign and its priority over consciousness, and formulated a concept of language as class-bound and dialectical in character. Another talented linguist, E.D. Polivanov, called for the creation of a Marxist linguistics that studied language as a collective work activity rather than an individual possession, parallel to (and possibly reducible to) processes of material production. And in a way, the early writings of Volosinov's friend and colleague Mikhail Bakhtin also reflect this wider search for a new account of language and literature that escapes the confines of both German idealism and French structuralism.[24] In the acerbic polemics of the late 1920s and early 1930s, however,

claims to Marxist orthodoxy already started to overshadow questions of methodology or empirical adequacy. Thus, for example, Polivanov's cogent, if rather condescending, criticisms of Marr's work were largely ignored.

These increasingly violent debates in linguistics coincided with an acerbic phase of Soviet agrarian policies. In Armenia as elsewhere in the Soviet Union, the collectivization of agriculture met with fierce resistance, and could only be imposed after the forcible intervention of the Red Army. Paired with the *korenizatsiia* policy, it involved a redefinition of the regional population as a collective of workers and peasants distinguished by 'national cultures', conceived of in terms of primarily oral folkloric traditions. One of the smaller 'folkloric' nations thus created in the 1920s was that of the Kurds, in particular in Soviet Armenia. In the 1920s, the Soviet Kurds were briefly granted an autonomous region called 'Red Kurdistan' (*Kurdistana Sor*) in the Laçîn region between Armenia and Azerbaijan; but this region was abolished in 1929. In the same year, a systematic, and quickly successful, alphabetization campaign was mounted among the Kurds of Soviet Armenia, for which a new alphabet was specifically created using the Latin script, and new Kurdish-language textbooks for adult education and elementary schools were published at an astonishing pace, thanks primarily to the indefatigable efforts of the local Kurdish scholar Haciyê Cindî.

Soviet nativization and folklorization policies largely disregarded the earlier literate traditions that some of these peoples knew. Thus, as part of Kurdish nativization, local religious traditions of learning as they had been cultivated in Kurdish medreses were attacked as backward, and the classical Kurdish poetic tradition was largely ignored in the creation of a new, progressive national literature. Considerations of space preclude a fuller discussion, but early Soviet studies of the Kurds clearly aimed at the emancipation, and in a sense even the creation, of the Kurds as a distinct nation defined by its proper language and folkloric traditions.[25] It is difficult to gauge the actual influence of Marr's doctrines on the shaping of an early Soviet Kurdish national identity; but his ideas fit in well with official policies, and in the 1930s became an obligatory feature of scholarly work on Kurdish language and folklore carried out in Leningrad and Moscow.[26]

Thus, early efforts at the nativization of the Soviet Kurds quickly yielded results. The mid-1930s, however, saw major shifts in Soviet nationality policies, which coincided with the start of the Great Terror. Tragically, precisely the loyal party members who had been active in realizing the *korenizatsiia* policies at the local level were now accused of 'bourgeois chauvinist sentiments', or even of espionage for foreign powers. Thus, in Soviet Armenia, cultural activists like the two pioneers of Kurdish alphabetization, Ereb Shemo and Haciyê Cindî, were imprisoned or deported; elsewhere, Polivanov was arrested and subsequently executed on charges of spying for Japan.

But although the policy of encouraging smaller nations was replaced by a new Russian-chauvinist policy, Marr's theories maintained their officially sanctioned status. In the 1930s and 1940s, few if any criticisms of Marr's Japhetic theories were heard, until Josef Stalin personally intervened in the matter in 1950.[27] Stalin's famous – or notorious – 'Marxism and Problems of Linguistics' may or may not have been written by Stalin himself, but it certainly is not a substantial intervention at the level of linguistic theorizing: it merely offers a number of lay observations about the postrevolutionary Russian language. Remarkably, Stalin's view on language boils down to a form of bourgeois common sense: not only is it idealist, in wholly downplaying or ignoring any material aspects of the linguistic sign; it is also decidedly nondialectical, emphasizing the idea of harmonious language communities over class conflict. Thus, these views actually mark a significant step back with respect to the more innovative Marxist authors of the 1920s, like Voloshinov and Polivanov. However, given the personality cult surrounding Stalin and the renewed campaign of intimidation and persecution of artists and intellectuals, which had regained pace after World War II, Stalin's remarks were hailed as a major breakthrough in both the popular and the academic media of the Soviet Union. Countless scholars working in linguistics, ethnography, and archeology joined in the chorus against Marr. The fact that such criticism continued well after Stalin's death in 1953, however, suggests that they did not simply write out of fear of, or political loyalty to, the Soviet leaders.[28]

Some Gramscian conclusions

The above discussion of Marr's anti-philological theories and of the Soviet nativization of the Kurds considerably complicate Gourgouris's and Nichanian's identification of philology and Orientalism, as well as their claim that the creation of non-Western native peoples involves an internalized Orientalism. At the very least, it forces us to explore 'subaltern' forms of knowledge like Marr's and Trubetzkoy's theories alongside the allegedly hegemonic German historical-comparative philology, and to focus on local agency and resistance rather than on the passive 'internalization' of Orientalist ideologies. Thus, the case of the Russian and Soviet humanities – which merits a far more extended and systematic descriptive treatment than I could give here – also raises issues of a more general theoretical interest.

First, it forces us to ask exactly how and why particular categories and theories gained a dominant or hegemonic status. To get an answer to such questions, one should also look at 'subaltern' doctrines like Marr's and at the reasons for their success or failure. Intriguingly, despite its vocal rejection of the main tenets of

German philological scholarship, Marr himself reproduced crucial conceptual and methodological assumptions of German philology; conversely and ironically, later critics of Marr's work, even when rejecting his Japhetic theories as nonsensical or at best purely speculative, tend to praise his philological work on the grammar of languages like Georgian and Armenian, as well as his archeological work in the Ani area, as valuable and largely correct, and as untainted by his linguistic speculations. In doing so, they tend to reproduce the philological assumption of a foundational and theory-free level of factuality that should precisely be an object of investigation. It is here that arguments like those of Foucault, Gourgouris and Nichanian, if used with caution, can perform valuable services.

Second, it raises questions about language, nationalism, and hegemony. Primarily, of course, the capricious development of Soviet linguistics and Orientalism reflects the destructive – and often murderous – vagaries of Stalin's policies; but theoretically one is led to the deeper problems of the precise role of language in the rise of Soviet and other nationalisms, and of the theoretical status of language in Marxist theory. Regarding the former, one may venture the hypothesis that the public use of vernacular languages, as seen in early Soviet educational campaigns and broadcasting policies, may itself be partly constitutive of national identities. Regarding the latter, one may ask anew exactly where language fits in within Marxist theory: should it be relegated to either the material base or the ideological superstructure, or does it require a more radical reformulation of Marxist cultural theory?

Third, in this context of language, linguistic theory and nationalism, Gramsci's writings on hegemony gain an unexpected relevance. Not only was Gramsci one of the first authors to suggest that a closer attention to cultural factors may force us to rethink the classical Marxist distinction between base and superstructure; but it is also worth recalling that his concept of hegemony is, in origin, inspired by specifically linguistic phenomena: thus, the creation of a hegemonic national language, i.e., a linguistic standard accepted by the population at large, reduces the spoken dialects to a substandard, or subaltern, status.[29]

The above not only suggests that a greater attention to language will affect the Marxist opposition between base and superstructure; it also invites a linguistic turn, so to speak, to questions of ideological hegemony, especially (but not exclusively) as they appear in discussions of Orientalism. The virtually universal spread of vocabularies and methods of the modern European humanities, and their persistence even among apparently rival frameworks like Marr's Japhetic theory, suggests that the kinds of knowledge articulated in the modern philological humanities rest on very particular, and particularly powerful, practices and ideologies of language, which may be implicated less in the spread of any allegedly hegemonic Western philological Orientalism than in the performative power ef-

fects of the wider patterns of vernacularization that occur during this period.[30] These power effects remain a topic for theoretical exploration.

Fourth and finally, the Soviet experience provides suggestive material for anyone wishing to study the role of the humanities in the articulation of nationalism and empire. If arguments like Gourgouris's and Nichanian's hold, the Orientalist creation of an (Oriental or domestic) Other may be crucially linked to the nationalist creation of a native self. Perhaps, then, a greater attention to cases like that of the Soviet Union may ultimately lead to a dissolution of 'Orientalism' as a distinct analytical category into a more general theoretical framework formulated in terms of more general analytical notions like new disciplines of philological learning, specifically modern forms of power, and changing practices and ideologies of language. As such, it might even help to explain both the formation and persistence of national identities and the rise and demise of colonial forms of rule.

Notes

1 Cf. R. Bauman & Ch. Briggs, *Voices of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Joep Leerssen, *National Thought in Europe* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007).

2 Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

3 To mention but two examples, both dealing with the alleged spread of hegemonic Western norms of sexuality in the Arab world, see Khalid al-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality in the Arab World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005) and Joseph Massad, *Desiring Arabs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); cf. my discussion of the latter, 'Der Import des westlichen Sexualitätsmodells', *Inamo* 52 (2008), 20-22.

4 For German Orientalism, see in particular Suzanne L. Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire: Religion, Race, and Scholarship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). For a brief discussion of earlier criticisms of Said's thesis along these lines, see also my 'The Oriental origins of Orientalism: The Case of Dimitrie Cantemir', in R. Bod et al. (eds.), *The Making of the Humanities, Vol. II: From Early Modern to Modern Disciplines* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), 243-263.

5 Stathis Gourgouris, *Dream Nation: Enlightenment, Colonization and the Institution of Modern Greece* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996); Marc Nichanian, *Entre l'art et le témoignage, Littératures arméniennes au xxe siècle, vol. 2: Le deuil de la philologie* (Geneva: MêtisPresses, 2007).

6 Gourgouris, *Dream Nation*, 124; emphasis in original.

7 Nichanian, *Le deuil de la philologie*, ch. 3, esp. 110.

8 *Ibid.*, 15-17; see also Nichanian's earlier *Ages et usages de la langue arménienne* (Paris: Éditions entente, 1989). Foucault, astonishingly perhaps, nowhere in *Les mots et les choses* or elsewhere discusses either the nationalistic or the colonial projects in which philology in general, and Orientalism in particular, were implicated, except for a brief allusion on p. 303 of that work; I hope to discuss these matters in more detail on some future occasion. Benedict Anderson's oft-cited account of the rise of modern nationalism, *Imagined Communities*, 2nd ed. (New York and London: Verso Press, 1991), suffers from an overly

functionalist approach to language, and ignores the literary and philological dimensions of nationalist modernity. See in particular Michael Silverstein, 'Whorfianism and the Linguistic Imagination of Nationality', in Kroskrity (ed.), *Regimes of Language* (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 2000), 85-138.

9 Nichanian, *Le deuil de la philologie*, 19. For the sake of brevity, I ignore here Nichanian's point, crucial to his own arguments concerning twentieth-century Armenian literature, that the philological reconstruction of the past *as* irrevocably past is inherently linked to a sense of loss or mourning, but misrecognizes this mourning, in its nationalist project of constituting a native population and culture.

10 Vera Tolz, *Russia's Own Orient: The Politics of Identity and Oriental Studies in the Late Imperial and Early Soviet Periods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), esp. 100-101. Cf. David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Russian Orientalism: Asia in the Russian Mind from Peter the Great to the Emigration* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010). See also Anouar Abdel-Malek, 'Orientalism in Crisis', *Diogenes* 11 (1963), 103-140.

11 N.S. Trubetzkoy, *Grundzüge der Phonologie* (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977 [1939]); for Trubetzkoy's Eurasian views, see his 'Europe and Mankind', in *The Legacy of Genghis Khan* (Michigan Slavic Publications, 1991), 1-64.

12 N.S. Trubetzkoy, 'Thoughts on the Indo-European Problem', in *Studies in General Linguistics and Language Structure* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 87-98.

13 Relatively few of Marr's numerous writings have been translated into Western languages. For a brief statement of the Japhetic theory, see his *Der japhetische Kaukasus und das dritte etnische Element im Bildungsprozess der mittelländischen Kultur* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1923). For a – very critical – overview of Marr's academic merits as a linguist, see Lawrence Thomas, *The Linguistic Theories of N.Ja. Marr* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1957); see also Thomas Samuelian, *The Search for a Marxist Linguistics in the Soviet Union, 1917-1950* (PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1981).

14 Samuelian, *The Search for a Marxist Linguistics*, 114.

15 Cf., e.g., J.P. Mallory, *In Search of the Indo-Europeans: Language, Archaeology, and Myth* (London: Thames & Hudson 1989), esp. 266-270, for Hübschmann's assumptions about Aryan superiority; cf. Thomas, *The Linguistic Theories of N.Ja. Marr*, 18.

16 N. Ja. Marr, *Grammatika drevnearmjanskogo jazyka* [Grammar of the Ancient Armenian Language] (Petersburg, 1903), xxxi.

17 *Ibid*., xxx-xxxi. Nichanian, *Le deuil de la philologie*, 131, only mentions Marr in passing, erroneously identifying him as 'a Russian'; his overview of the Armenian language ignores Marr altogether, but does mention a likely source of some of Marr's doctrines, viz., Aydenian's thesis of a 'classical' and a 'vernacular' variety of Armenian existing alongside each other ever since the fifth century CE, a claim originally developed in the latter's 1866 *Critical Grammar of Modern Armenian* (cf. Nichanian, *Ages et usages de la langue arménienne*, 95).

18 Cf. Samuelian, *The Search for a Marxist Linguistics*, 120.

19 N.Ja. Marr, 'Ob izuchenii azerbaidzhana' (unpublished lectures, Baku 1924), quoted in Tolz, *Russia's Own Orient*, 152-153.

20 Quoted in Samuelian, *The Search for a Marxist Linguistics*, 106. See also Marr's later *La langue géorgienne* (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1931), which is completely free from any Japhetic speculation (reportedly, at the insistence of Marr's French hosts), and is praised as a valid contribution to Georgian philology even today.

21 Trubetzkoy, 'Thoughts on the Indo-European Problem', 266n.

22 Cf. Tolz, *Russia's Own Orient*, 165.

23 J. Stalin, 'Marksizm i natsional'nyy vopros', *Prosveshcheniye* 3-5 (March-May 1913). English translation available via URL: http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1913/03.htm.

24 V.N. Volosinov, *Marksizm i filosofija jazyk* (Leningrad, 1930), translated as *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (New York: Seminar Press, 1973); E.D. Polivanov, 'The Problem of Marxist Linguistics and the Japhetic Theory', in A.A. Leontov (ed.), *E.D. Polivanov: Selected Works: Articles on General Linguistics* (The Hague: Mouton, 1974).

25 For an initial overview of Russian and Soviet Kurdology, see my 'Soviet Kurdology and Kurdish Orientalism', in M. Kemper and S. Conemann (eds.), *The Heritage of Soviet Oriental Studies* (London: Routledge, 2011), 86-102; for a more detailed discussion of developments in 1920s and 1930s Soviet Armenia, see my 'A People Forgotten by History: Soviet Studies of the Kurds', paper presented at the International Conference on Soviet Iranology, Oxford University, December 2012.

26 Marr wrote relatively little on the Kurds; see in particular his early 'Eshcho o slove Celebi' [Again Concerning the Word *Çelebi*], *Zapiski vostocnogo otdeleniia imp. Russkago arkheologiceskago obscestva* 20 (1911), 99-151, a speculative discussion of the etymology of the term *çelebi*. For a hyperbolic appraisal of Marr's importance for Soviet Kurdish studies, characteristic for its period and published shortly after Marr's death in a special commemorative journal issue, see O. Vil'cevskij, 'N. Ia. Marr i kurdovedenie' [N. Ia. Marr and Kurdology], *Yazyk i Myslenie* VIII (1937), 209-234.

27 J. Stalin, 'Marksizm i voprosy yazyznaniia', *Pravda* (June 20, 1950). English translation available via URL: http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1950/jun/20.htm.

28 Among authors working on the Kurds, one may find critiques of Marr's Japhetic theory later in the 1950s and 1960s; see, e.g., Q. Kurdoev, 'Kritika oshibocnykh vzgliadov na kurdskii yazyk' [Critique of Erroneous Opinions on the Kurdish Language], *Kratkie soobsceniia Instituta vostokovedeniia* 12 (1955), 43-61. See also the discussions of Marr in O. Vil'cevskij, *Kurdy: Vvedenie v etniceskuiu istoriiu kurdskogo naroda* [The Kurds: Introduction to the Ethnic History of the Kurdish People] (Moscow: Akademija Nauka, 1961), *passim*.

29 The linguistic origins of the concept of hegemony are discussed in Franco Lo Piparo, *Lingua intellettuali egemonia in Gramsci* (Rome: Laterza, 1979: 103-145), and more recently in Peter Ives, *Language and hegemony in Gramsci* (London: Pluto Press, 2004: ch. 2).

30 I explore these wider patterns of vernacularization and their significance in my forthcoming *From Coffee House to Nation-State: The Creation of National Languages in the Ottoman Empire*.