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Field Report¹

The American *Empire of Knowledge*: US research on Russia, the (former) Soviet Union, and Eastern Europe since World War II.

My project examines US-based research on Russia, the (former) Soviet Union and Eastern Europe during the second half of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st centuries. This topic has recently attracted considerable attention on the part of historians, sociologists and philosophers of science. The concept of *Cold War science* is especially popular and has been applied to a variety of cases. While stressing the importance of governmental resources in promoting certain research agendas, this approach still uses the national/state divisions as crucial for explaining differences in the production of knowledge. By considering the development of Slavic, Russian, Soviet (Eurasian) and East European studies in American academia, I would like to demonstrate that, since World War II, a different form of social and human sciences has become dominant. This new form is diluting the national boundaries between scholarly institutions and reshaping the hierarchies and power relations among scholars and disciplines. Some of the concepts commonly used to make sense of these transformations are *empire*, *imperial knowledge* and *center-periphery divisions*. The US academia appears to be the core of this new *empire of knowledge* in the world system (the concept is borrowed from Altbach's chapter (2007). For a different use of the term, see, Vucinich (1984).

Actual research problems in the field:

1) institutionalization of Slavic, Russian, Soviet (Eurasian), and East European studies in the US academic milieu.

In US academia, Slavic, Russian, Soviet (Eurasian), and East European studies as a separate branch of scholarship became firmly established after World War II. Their initial form was conceived of along territorial lines. So-called *area studies* were expected to examine the region from the interdisciplinary perspective involving history, political science, economics, sociology, linguistics, and literary criticism, among others. This process has been examined by several historians, especially with regard to outside influences including the ideological and scientific competition between the US and the USSR, the demands for expertise and huge

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funding by the US government, and a variety of adjustments and responses on the part of scholars (e.g., Chomsky et al. 1996; Engerman 2009; Xenakis 2002).

My main task is to shift the emphasis from the nation-state level (the US) to the local and supranational one in order to investigate the problem of institutionalization beyond national boundaries. I would like to track the competitive relationship between the newly established area studies and the more traditional academic disciplines (history, political science, sociology, economics, anthropology, etc.). What models of organization of area studies were proposed and what actors participated in forging the field? How did the development of area studies modify the universities' prestige and ranking within and outside US academia? How did Slavic, Russian, Soviet (Eurasian), and East European studies contribute to the existing networks of knowledge that had already transcended single cultures, nations or regions? And how did they influence the replacement of the national-oriented and culture-specific production of knowledge and support the building of new *center-periphery* relations?

2) The formation of *hybrid scholarly identities*.

According to Keri E. Iyall Smith (2008, p. 3–4)

a reflexive relationship between the local and global produces the hybrid... With globalization and increasing modernization, being a hybrid is now a benefit. The ability to negotiate across barriers – language, cultural, spiritual, racial, and physical – is an asset... Those who occupy hybrid spaces benefit from having an understanding of both local knowledge and global cosmopolitanism.

While examining the transition of the US academic milieu from the national to the imperial model, one is struck by the growing gap between national and scholarly identities. Area studies, with their emphasis on high levels of linguistic and cultural competence, benefit researchers with roots in the region (Russia, Eurasia, and Eastern Europe). Mass involvement of Russians, Ukrainians, Poles and other *native* representatives of the region in American academic life engenders mass hybridization of national and social identities. The interviews conducted by me with US-based scholars reveal a variety of self-identification strategies from (1) dismissing ethnic origins to (2) dismissing one's *American identity*. From this point of view, the investigation of migrations from the region (four waves: after the 1917 Revolutions; as a result of the World War II displacements; in the 1970s–80s; after the collapse of the USSR), émigrés' and diasporas' communities in the US may be immensely useful.

3) the linkage between academic and non-academic phenomena.

In general, this linkage is analyzed using the concept of *Cold War science* with its emphasis on military, intelligence and other state resources in cultivating certain research principles and disciplinary hierarchies (e.g., eds Solovey and Cravens 2012). In this framework

the emergence of Slavic, Russian, Soviet (Eurasian), and East European studies is explained as a successful response of the US government to the outside challenge, namely the existence of the militant Soviet Union. Taking into account the benefits of the *Cold War science* approach, I will investigate the degree to which the achievements of area studies were based on state involvement.

On the other hand, the *empire of knowledge* approach helps to understand why these studies are still important although the Cold War ended. While peripheral states examine themselves, imperial states, such as the US, place first priority on studying the *others*, in such a way imposing the dominant discourse of knowledge/power on these others. Here knowledge performs not only descriptive, but also *transformational* function. This specific function of *imperial knowledge* explains why today's area studies are undergoing the process of theoretical and methodological renovation (cultural studies, transnational studies, environmental history, the cultural transfer approach, to name a few). The same goes for private non-profit organizations that try to reshape the region supporting the enhancement of scholars' networks, while unintentionally strengthening the center-periphery structure of the production of knowledge and encouraging migrations from peripheries to the core (the US academia).

4) language unification within scholars' communities.

English has become the lingua franca as a result of language unification. Scholarly, cultural, and language diversity among Slavic, Russian, Soviet (Eurasian), and East European study establishments in Germany, France, Great Britain, and Canada, with their own academic traditions, has been remade into a single global imperial structure within which a new division between the center/core (the US), the inside periphery (Canada, Great Britain, Australia), and the outside periphery (Germany, France and other non-English-language countries) has been established. English language used in scholarly literature in the field serves not only as a means of communication, but as a marker of social prestige, academic recognition, scholarly canon (commonly cited literature), and a tool for ranking scholars at various levels.

From this point of view, it is extremely interesting to examine how various diasporas have tried to implement their research projects and agendas within US academia using the English language as a legitimizing means (e.g., the activities of Russian historians Michael Karpovich and George Vernadsky; the establishment of the Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute and Ukrainian chairs at the Harvard University, etc.).

5) mental mapping of the region.

With the transformation of Soviet space into post-Soviet one, the former Soviet studies have lost the underlying principle of their identity and, consequently, their proper name. The search for a new (self)-designation accompanies the complicated process of creating a new mental map of the region in US academia. One way of doing this was exemplified by the Kennan Institute, Washington, DC, which dismissed the second part of its name, “for Advanced Russian Studies”. Another way was to introduce the concept of *Eurasia*. I will analyze what it means for US-based scholars, what countries are included and excluded, and how it challenges the hierarchies of regions and center-periphery relations in the production of knowledge.

6) changes in the theories and grand narratives about the region.

The theories and narratives about the region have swayed back and forth among the totalitarian approach, social history, cultural and everyday life studies, national and transnational studies, etc. I will explain the long-term success of some (e.g., the totalitarian approach elaborated in the 1950s is still used and continually updated in history and literary studies) and the short-term popularity of others (e.g., social history of the USSR that failed to create a coherent theory and its own grand narrative about Soviet society). I will attempt to consider how the flourishing of cultural studies and the image of the USSR/Russia/Eastern Europe as a distinct civilization they have created has contributed to the US imperial system of knowledge production.

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