

MacFadyen, David. 2006. *Russian Culture in Uzbekistan: One Language in the Middle of Nowhere*. Central Asian Studies Series, vol. 6. London: Routledge. A 162 pages. ISBN 978 04153 4134 9

Anderson, Warwick. 2006. *Colonial Pathologies: American Tropical Medicine, Race, and Hygiene in the Philippines*. Durham, London: Duke University Press. 355 pages. ISBN 0 8223 3843 2

# Encapsulate everything, grasp nothing:

## Russian imperialist discourse in Uzbekistan

NATHAN LIGHT

This idiosyncratic book explores Russian language discourses in Uzbekistan. MacFadyen is one of those unusual writers who packs vast conceptual territory into a small text: a 43-page bibliography buttresses a mere 128 pages. But while MacFadyen quotes some of his sources at length, he also has a lot to say himself, and effectively crafts much of his esoteric argument.

From the ideas of Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek ('Žizek' in this volume), MacFadyen develops the theme of absence and nothingness, hence the 'nowhere' of his title. From the unknown of Islam against which Russia defines itself, through the Russian and Soviet imperial projects, to the loss of Russians from post-Soviet Uzbekistan, he leads us through discursive rhetoric that attempts to encapsulate everything but grasps nothing. As Žižek summarises, 'When I simply see you I simply see you – but it is only by naming you that I indicate the abyss in you beyond what I see' (pp 24, 116). Emptiness in Russian discourse on the other arises from the effort to narrate a future for that other that will converge with and legitimate Russian reality: MacFadyen thus investigates the projective and prospective logic of imperialist discourse.

### From Russian imperialism in Uzbekistan to 9/11

In fact, MacFadyen takes on a far larger project than merely describing the predicament of Russians and Russian culture in Uzbekistan. Those who seek the latter in this volume will be somewhat disappointed, because in the author's attention to texts he loses the sense of experience. He only briefly evokes Russian life in Uzbekistan over the past 15 years, at one point calling it a 'mess' (pp 97-104). Because his argument revolves around distortion and loss, he grounds his analyses in the socialist and nationalist texts that most distort lived reality, which leaves the book largely devoid of representations of experience.

Instead of Russian experience, MacFadyen analyses state and imperial projects (American, Russian, Uzbek), terrorism, Soviet discourses about Uzbek and Russian music, literature and culture, and post-Soviet social and cultural changes in Uzbekistan perceived through the Internet. He follows Malise Ruthven and John Gray in suggesting that the ideas and techniques of Muslim terrorists developed from radical European thinking and revolutionaries (pp 110-11). Many may disagree with this narrow lineage for political and symbolic violence, or feel it makes little difference. But MacFadyen and his intellectual colleagues argue that European and American violence and imperialism created current horrors. I find little point in finding a determinate path of responsibility from forebears to heirs, but it matters



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to these scholars that lineages for present problems start in Europe.

Somewhat contradictorily, MacFadyen also quotes Žižek's advice not to 'praise Islam as a great religion of love and tolerance that has nothing to do with disgusting terrorist acts', but to see within it productive sources of resistance to the 'liberal-capitalist world order' (p 25). Islam, essentialised in MacFadyen's account, threatens with more narrowly conceived social reform, while Leninist ideology owes more to the revolutionary possibilities of Pauline Christianity and its vision of multifarious social life (p 36).

### A slippery narrator

MacFadyen's compact, ambitious account of the Soviet politics of culture in Central Asia challenges the reader with suggestive insights. But because he shows little concern for underlying historical realities, it is sometimes difficult to tell whether he is quoting from others or presenting his own sense of the facts. I assume he does not think Uzbeks existed in the fourth century when he writes, 'Uzbek dance enjoyed an international reputation very early in its history; records exist of Samarkand dancers performing in Chinese courts as early as the fourth century' (p 51); nor that there is truly timeless continuity in the 'domestic and intensely non-professional ancient choreography' that endured despite Soviet interventions (p 54). Because of his compact style, he moves from summarising others' words to his own arguments without sufficiently indicating the transition.

The discussion of dance comes after a long summary of what Soviet academics decided was the 'history of Uzbek music' (p 43). In the subsequent pages of canonical history MacFadyen's own voice only fitfully returns, and it is never fully clear who is narrating until he starts describing the 1951 reform of Uzbek music to suppress fantasy and legend and introduce polyphony. He ties this back to the volume's theme of nothing: at the heart of the inextricable Uzbek triad of poetry, music and dance that resulted from national development, Soviet scholars saw 'nothing in particular', an absence of meaning, subject or theme. What writers described as the 'ineffable charm', plasticity and lyricism of Uzbek

music and dance had to be resemantised with socialist and patriotic content (pp 49-55). This recalls other discussions of the projected emptiness and uniformity of empire-making, such as that found in the essay by Guy Imart.<sup>1</sup>

### An overreaching narrative

Because he does not mark his voice clearly, some readers may miss his critiques of discourses. Believers in the moral benefits of European elite culture will not see Soviet Russian chauvinism hiding in talk of European music as the most universal, developed and thus fertile for the cultivation of an authentically creative national musical tradition (pp 61-2). Likewise, some may agree that Pushkin, Lermontov, Nekrasov, Gogol and Chekhov embody the romanticism and realism that Uzbek writers need to reform their literature (pp 66-7).

The sweeping narrative that MacFadyen tells can be difficult to grasp. Over a two-page span, for example: 'colonialist literary discourses must deal with the newness of truth that is always supplement to their presumably stable norms'; despite seeking 'the indescribable and risky', the Soviets 'installed huge institutions' to attain 'literary control', particularly over religious expression; when the Soviet period ends, there is a new openness to literary possibilities and 'run of the mill notions of time and space are being jettisoned', which leads to a 'radical step from real geography and tangible events' that pushes the operation of culture into the virtual world (pp 93-4). Out of context, I would have read this final line as a description of the unreal operations of culture in the Soviet period as well. MacFadyen's writing promises much and often delivers, but it also demands an attentive and forgiving reader who can switch easily among stories and interpretations. ■

1. Imart, Guy. 1987. *The Limits of Inner Asia*. Bloomington, Indiana: RIFIAS.

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# Intimate Empire:

## Bodily contacts in an imperial zone

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Warwick Anderson's fascinating new book is the outcome of meticulous research into the relationship between colonisation and medical practices in America's administration of the Philippines, 1898 - 1930s. The author argues that as Americans sought to maintain their own corporal and psychic health during this imperial encounter, colonial medicine gradually came to represent Filipinos as a 'contaminated' race, and so attempted to 'civilise' and 'reform' them through a focus on personal hygiene and social conduct. This is a history, therefore, of the development of 'biomedical citizenship' (p 3).

### Colonialism, race and medicine

To some extent, the book is firmly embedded within the traditions of the 'history of medicine', and tells us more about the relationship between often unstable perceptions and representations of race and disease leprosy, cholera, hookworm, malaria - in a hitherto unknown context. However, it has further depths which constitute an important intervention into the historiography of colonialism, race, and medicine. First, Anderson studies everyday practices such as the management of human waste and the control of crowds. Second, he tracks the relationship between medical practices and the development of peculiarly colonial perceptions of whiteness and in a particularly interesting manoeuvre - masculinity amongst American doctors and scientists themselves. Third, the book makes an original attempt to grasp the continuities between colonial and post-colonial practices, and to show how U.S. interventions provided the basis for later policies, both in the Philippines and internationally. As such, Anderson speaks to growing concerns within emergent historiography about the intimate effects of empire, and the configuration of America as a colonising or imperial power. It breaks further ground in creating 'a specific genealogy of metaphors, practices, and careers that links the colony with the metropole' and, in an often neglected enterprise, in linking experiences in and of the Philippines with other colonies (p 7).

I would like to focus briefly here on Anderson's fascinating account of the Cullion leper colony (ch 6). Cullion was an 'isolated outpost' in the far west of the Philippines archipelago (p 158), and became the site for the isolation, therapy, and socialisation for lepers from across the islands. Unlike missionary-run leper colonies elsewhere, this was an experiment in citizenship for a 'contaminated' community, and lepers lived in houses, worked, voted in elections, and engaged in approved forms of leisure like theatre, music, and baseball. Cullion had its own form of currency, and there were even bakeries and an ice-cream parlour. Exile

to Cullion was not, as Anderson explains, represented as the deprivation but the creation of liberty (p 178). Such 'civic transformation' was always underpinned with colonial brutality, however. For instance, both leprosy and non-leprosy children were being removed from their parents at an early age. One is left pondering how the Cullion lepers themselves and also their descendants represented their experience of social extrication and civic transformation in this and other respects.

The volume is heavily illustrated with a variety of fascinating photographs ranging from interior views of hospitals and leper wards, a line-pail cholera brigade, doctors and nurses, a hookworm dispensary, toilets, and even a leper brass band. I should have liked to know more about the relationship between such images and the textuality of Anderson's description of medical and hygiene practices. In what context were such photographs produced? Were they published in books and journals, or perhaps made into postcards for widespread circulation? Who looked at them, and where and how? Moreover, what is the relationship between the medical representation of both Americans and Filipinos - and their personal habits and practices - in text and image?

Nevertheless, this fascinating and ambitious book is of broad appeal, and will intrigue and challenge readers interested in the history of the Philippines and American colonial expansion, as well as the history of medicine, 'race', masculinity, confinement, and discipline. ■

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### Notes

1. Stoler, Ann Laura ed. 2006. *Haunted by Empire: geographies of intimacy in North American history*, Durham and London, Duke University Press.