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FOREWORD

The “Journal of Comparative Studies” is a scholarly forum covering a wide range of topics. It aims to promote a broad conception of cultural studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences and involves scholars from academic communities worldwide applying a comparative methodology.

This volume of the journal is presented in two parts.

The first more voluminous part, consisting of six articles, focuses on the subject of Western Esotericism and the East; the majority of them grew out of presentations given at the 5th International Conference of the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism on April 16–18, 2015, organized by the Latvian Society for the Study of Religions in collaboration with Daugavpils University and the University of Latvia in Riga. The presented ideas and findings in the shape of the revised and expanded versions of the contributions were included in the special issue as a result of collaboration with the guest editors, Professor Birgit Menzel from Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz (Germany) and Professor Anita Stasulane from Daugavpils University (Latvia).

Two articles on literary and cultural studies included in this volume were presented at the International Academic Conference “Human: Language, Society, Culture” on November 22, 2021, organized by the Society “Cultural Artefact” in cooperation with the Daugavpils University Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences Centre for Cultural Research.

The work on the current issue was very challenging. It differed from the previous experience not only due to the themes covered in the articles and participation in a new (collaboration) team of co-editors, but also, and mainly, due to finding ourselves in the so-called “non-war” [read: war] situation that elicited such powerful emotions as sadness, anger, fear, grief, anxiety, and despair. In parallel with grasping lost opportunities and dashed hopes marked by the boundary line of February 24, 2022, the world was attempting both to understand historical events by attaching them to worldviews, social struc-

tures, and values and to overcome the circulating belief that painful events become non-existent if they are neglected. Initial wondering about how a full-scale war in Europe can be possible in our century was rather promptly substituted by the awareness of not only significant global political and socio-economic changes but decisive cultural shifts. In the future, the latter will require even more rigorous studies on understanding culture in all its complex forms and expressions and of the social and political contexts, in which culture manifests itself.

Editors

PART I

ESOTERICISM AND THE EAST: INTRODUCTION

BIRGIT MENZEL, ANITA STAŠULĀNE, ILZE KAČĀNE

The East-West dichotomy, around which research in philosophy, religious studies, literary theory, and cultural studies have rotated for centuries, is a construction that has divided the world into two parts: the West, meaning Europe, and America with their dominating Judeo-Christian tradition, and the East, which begins beyond the space of Judeo-Christian practices. The economic, social, and political reality of today's world provides evidence of the collapse or restructuring of this bipolar world. Current socio-political and cultural processes offer the opportunity to dispute nearly every major Eurocentric myth prevalent in mainstream economic history (Hobson 2004), and attempts to rescue the history of non-Western civilizations are continually increasing, emphasizing that "the Orient came first and the Occident was a latecomer" (Nederveen Pieterse 2006, 62). To overcome conventional Eurocentric approaches to history, but also due to the revolution in communication technologies, which has led to an almost instantaneous flow and exchange of information, many recent publications from the humanities and social sciences propose to take a global perspective on the human past (Conrad 2016). The constructed West-East dichotomy is currently being replaced by attempts at a new understanding of the complex structure of the world's cultural processes.

This recent trend toward global perspectives and postcolonial critiques of Eurocentric narratives in the humanities includes the academic study of esotericism, which has attempted to develop a globally applicable conceptual framework (Asprem and Strube 2020, 2021). The academic study of Western esotericism owes its establish-

ment, scientific consolidation, and flourishing to the French religious studies scholar Antoine Faivre (1934–2021) and the Dutch cultural historian Wouter Hanegraaff (Hanegraaff 2012).¹ While their academic contribution is beyond question, a current debate among scholars of Western esotericism has raised awareness of the problematic power dynamics inherent in the attribute “Western”. Questioning its usefulness, scholars suggested dropping the term altogether (Granholm 2013, 31) and focus on a comparative and global-scale study of esotericism (Asprem 2014, 5), including on the Jewish and Islamic esoteric traditions (von Stuckrad 2010, 49).

In his comments to various arguments by critics, Hanegraaff holds the opinion that the dual nature of the attribute “Western” defines both a geographical location and a cultural domain” (Hanegraaff 2015, 62). Esotericism as such, he explains, is only an expression of the Western culture, a form of thought of the Enlightenment that has become “rejected knowledge.” Hanegraaff continues to advocate the usage of the concept of “Western esotericism” as long as the historical method is applied (Ibid., 80–81). While denying the existence of some global esotericism, he encourages research on how Western esotericism is now being globalized (Ibid., 86). In contrast, younger scholars maintain that the concept of “Western esotericism” was developed as an explicit reaction to Eastern esotericism, which the influential Theosophical Society has promoted since the late nineteenth century (Strube and Krämer 2020, 1–29). Strube pointed out that the notion of “Western esotericism” is itself a polemical occultist construct of the late nineteenth century (Strube 2017), and Asprem and Strube recently stated that “the exclusively ‘Western’ identity of esotericism is an artefact of how the field has been theorized. It is a product of scholarly choices” (Asprem and Strube 2021, 3).

Despite these recent academic debates, the dichotomy between the East and the West still lives on in various ways shaping ideas of reality. For instance, what is still widely excluded from academic research on esotericism is the meta-geographical region of Eurasia, by political definition, comprising the land of the former Russian and Soviet Empires. Eurasia, under Western eyes, is still considered “Eastern”. Although geographically the largest continental space

¹ The concept “Western esotericism” was introduced by Antoine Faivre in his monograph “Accès de l’ésotérisme occidental” (1986), and “the use of the concept” was consolidated by the foundation of an academic society, the *European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism* (ESSWE) in 2005, as well as by the publication of the “Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism” (2006) edited by Wouter Hanegraaff.

on earth, it still appears to be much of a provincialized area (Turoma and Waldstein 2013). Eurasia not only shares in part the Western Judeo-Christian tradition but also significantly influenced and shaped Western movements and ideas. Its religious thought and esoteric conceptualizations are historically and substantially entwined with their European and American manifestations. Well aware of the semantic baggage of the biased terms “East” and “West”, the authors of this special issue refrain from using them as analytical concepts but employ them as historically contingent terms of self-description.

The study of esotericism beyond “Western” and within Eurasian confines, focusing on the Soviet and post-Soviet space, challenges the conventional spatial imaginings of the Western intellectual tradition and destabilizes colonialist ideas of Western pre-eminence. The cross-cultural encounters and interactions are critical to this special issue’s field of research as they reveal hitherto unseen or overlooked material and chains of transfer and explain how cultural networks have developed. From a cross-cultural perspective, esotericism can be viewed in a new light – as a suggestive cultural network dissolving the East-West dichotomy.

The “Journal of Comparative Studies” special issue has been compiled to provide insight into the questions discussed above and inspire further debate. Hopefully, this will allow us to look more widely at esotericism, breaching the currently dominating boundaries of understanding, which treats them as a European and North American phenomenon. By placing esotericism and the East in the centre of interest, it intends to bring a range of essential dimensions of esotericism to the attention of academic discussion. The issue contains articles by scholars from various disciplines: philosophy, history, religious studies, literary studies, cultural studies, oriental studies, translation studies and Slavic studies. Following different methodological approaches, the articles share the common focus of addressing general questions and those related to comparative aspects of esotericism in the West and the East.

In his article, “The Quest for Shangri-La”, Christopher McIntosh explores a literary adoption of the Buddhist paradisiacal legend of Shambhala in various Anglo-American adaptations in film and fiction. He places them into the historical and geopolitical context of the struggle between Russia, China, and Britain to control Central Asia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In Birgit Menzel’s article “Eurasia as A Spiritual Realm? Inquiries into an Imagined Continent”, Eurasia is understood as the territory of the former Russian/ Soviet Empire. It is discussed as a meta-geographical spiritual entity, an imagined continent. By applying a cultural

studies approach, various perspectives on spiritual Eurasia are presented as a mythologically, ideologically, and symbolically charged space, historical ethnographic descriptions, stories of various esoteric seekers of a re-enchanted spiritual landscape, academic experts in oriental studies as translators of spiritual ideas from the East to the West, as well as hybrid forms of religious revival among indigenous people in the post-Soviet present. Two examples are given to illustrate the post-Soviet invention of tradition in more detail: Arkaim as a Russian Stonehenge in the Urals and Eurasian spirituality as an instrument of political ideology.

“H. P. Blavatsky’s Later Reception of Hindu Philosophy” by Tim Rudbøg analyses Helena Blavatsky’s reception of classical Hindu philosophy to track the impact of Indian philosophy on western theosophy as the central concept of western esotericism. By juxtaposing ideas, sources, and quotes from Blavatsky’s main work, “The Secret Doctrine”, with basic terms and views from the six classical orthodox schools of Hindu philosophy, Rudbøg reveals how Blavatsky concocted various source texts from several translations into her argument, in which she drew ideas both from eastern Hindu and western philosophical texts, i.e., German *Naturphilosophie* [Nature Philosophy]. In “The Secret Doctrine”, Blavatsky blended it into what she considered the seventh school of ancient esoteric wisdom, her unified synthesis of all.

Whereas, in his article “Theosophical Anthropology or the Septenary Constitution of Man Reconsidered”, Ulrich Harlass provides a critical interpretation of the major “eastern” aspect in Blavatsky’s teaching: the genealogy of the so-called “septenary constitution” in her “secret doctrine”, i.e., man is constituted of seven principles corresponding to the cosmic structure of the universe. This geographical and doctrinal change in relation to her earlier work “Isis Unveiled” has been identified as the theosophical shift from Occident to Orient with sources from Indian wisdom assumed as inspiration. Instead of arguing for one of the positions theosophists have developed on this shift (seeing it either as an application of ancient Indian ideas or remodelling of old ideas in a new shape), Harlass describes the discourse in which this new doctrine emerged and tracks down Alfred Percy Sinnet’s “Esoteric Buddhism” as a western key-text in shaping it. By placing the teaching into the contemporary polemical debate between spiritualism and theosophy, he reveals various interests of Indian Hindu disciples and western occultists, demystifies some vague interpretations, and, at the same time, offers clarification about the historical-discursive context of Blavatsky’s ideas and teachings.

The East, analyzed by Konstantin Burmistrov in his article "Russian Esotericism of the Early Twentieth Century and Kabbalah" by focusing on the role of the Kabbalah in the popular occultist movement of the early twentieth century, is again situated in Russia. Burmistrov portrays the most influential figure in this movement, Georges Osipovich Moebes, the head of the Russian Martinist order, who gave several popular lecture series in St. Petersburg in the first two decades before he was arrested. Burmistrov reveals that these original lecture series are nothing less than an encyclopedia of esoteric knowledge in which the "occult Kabbalah" of the Tarot plays a crucial role. At the same time, rituals and magical actions were essential, and all lectures were aimed at the conversion and rebuilding of the personality. The ideas in Moebes' lectures were oriented toward transforming the self and the adept. Burmistrov offers a detailed explanation for the arcana which Moebes invented and developed. With the diligence of a detective, the author then follows the trail of reception of Moebes' lectures throughout the continent of Eurasia, both in remote publications, anonymous adaptations, and in the Russian underground. He argues convincingly that most of the contemporary knowledge about the Tarot was developed by Moebes, and its impact, barely known to most adepts, can be seen in the post-Soviet esoteric revival in Russia and other European countries.

In her article "Russia's Mystical Anarchism: The Case of Aleksei Solonovich (1887 –1937)", Romina Kaltenbach dwells upon the encounter of "mysticism" and "anarchism" in post-revolutionary Russia and analyzes the unacknowledged mastermind behind "mystical anarchism," the philosopher Solonovich's input in the intellectual movement of social protest which significantly contributed to the downfall of Russian anarchism.

Western culture and philosophy have been placed not only out of the Ancient Greek and Roman, as well as Christian values but also out of eastern codes, principles, and standards constituting the otherness and exoticness the West has always been searching for. This original distinction has been not only appealing to the western world but also deeply influential to the western "self". The western identity developed in permanent interchange with the East, a diverse and complex phenomenon with often contradictory attitudes that were either rejected or perceived with fascination and adopted. Therefore, constructing the East-West dichotomy, the relationships between philosophy, science, and religion have been deeply affected by the two spaces' geographical, mental, and spiritual bordering processes.

This “Journal of Comparative Studies” issue could encourage academic debate in three methodological aspects. Firstly, by facilitating intercultural comparison, we can consider the broad range and historical fluidity of the cultural models of esotericism. Secondly, it could be helpful to utilize the potential of a conceptual history approach, which would assist in clarifying the understanding of the concept of “esotericism” in different historical and cultural contexts. Thirdly, by overcoming Eurocentrism and developing a polycentric view of cultural history, the transformations that the concept has undergone during travel from one part of the world to another could be identified.

Finally, we would like to express our gratitude to all the reviewers who significantly contributed to the final drafts of the studies and all the authors for their hard work, without which this issue would have struggled to come to life.

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THE QUEST FOR SHANGRI-LA

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ABSTRACT

The name Shangri-La was coined by the English writer James Hilton in his classic novel "Lost Horizon", first published in 1933. Since then the name has become a synonym for an exotic, paradisaical never-never land. The word is clearly derived from the legend of Shambhala. According to this tradition, Shambhala is a hidden center, located somewhere in the mountains of Central Asia, inhabited by a group of highly evolved sages. The legend had an important geopolitical aspect in the context of the struggle between Russia, China and Britain for control of Central Asia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. At the same time, the various indigenous peoples of the region were constantly struggling to fight off the great powers. In this struggle, the Shambhala mythology was constantly invoked.

When the Bolsheviks came to power in Russia they attempted to exploit the Shambhala mythology as a way of bringing the Mongol-Tibetan region under Russian and communist hegemony. Around the same period a crazed White Russian warlord, Baron Ungern-Sternberg, was recruiting followers in the region by claiming to be acting on behalf of Shambhala. Another figure linked with the Shambhala legend is the Russian painter Nicholas Roerich who in the 1920s and 30s led expeditions through Central Asia and Mongolia, hoping to establish a new country that he envisaged as the earthly manifestation of Shambhala.

The Shangri-La/Shambhala narrative has its counterparts in both the East and West, involving other legends of remote, hallowed places. This paper provides a searching investigation into this narrative, tracing its origins and development and comparing its eastern and western versions. The paper is a revised and expanded version of a lecture delivered at the 2015 conference of the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism, on the subject of Western Esotericism and the East, held at the University of Latvia, Riga.

Keywords: Shangri-La, James Hilton, Shambhala, Central Asia, Nicholas Roerich, Monsalvat, Never-Never-Lands

The name Shangri-La will probably be familiar to most readers. It has passed into general usage as a synonym for an exotic, paradisaical never-never land, far from the madding realities of the everyday world. The name was first introduced by the English writer James Hilton (1900–1945) in his best-selling novel “Lost Horizon” (first published in 1933). Today Hilton is one of those writers whose books are better known than their author. Apart from “Lost Horizon”, many people have heard of his other famous novel, “Goodbye Mr. Chips” (1934), the story of a quirky and endearing schoolmaster in an English upper-class boarding school, but fewer know that these two seemingly very different books are by the same author. Yet the two novels are perhaps not so far apart as they might seem. Both were published in the early 1930s when the distant rumblings of the approaching war could already be heard by someone with their ear to the ground, and both offered a vision of a protected and innocent world where time has stood still: on the one hand the privileged world of the English public school, on the other the world of the remote mountain utopia in Central Asia. By the time the film version was released in 1937, Hilton had moved to California to work in the Hollywood film industry and the rumblings had become louder, which probably accounts for the immense popular success of the film. A 1973 remake as a musical was less successful.

“Lost Horizon” tells the story of an English diplomat, Hugh Conway, who is evacuated by an airplane from a trouble spot in northern India along with three other people – a fellow British diplomat, an American businessman and a British woman missionary. The plane is hijacked and crash-lands in the mountains of Tibet. A party of Tibetans arrives and takes the group to the hidden oasis of Shangri-La, located in the Valley of the Blue Moon, where life is miraculously prolonged, and the inhabitants live an idyllic existence under the benevolent rule of an order of lamas who live in a splendid monastery high above the valley, full of beautiful works of art. The Grand Lama of the monastery is in fact a French priest called Father Perrault who has been living there since the eighteenth century, but is now nearing death. Before he dies he names Conway as his successor and tells him that a great world conflagration is coming, which is going to destroy civilization (Hilton evidently foresaw the Second World War). The purpose of Shangri-La, he tells Conway, is to act as an ark in which wisdom and beauty will be kept alive, ready for the time when the destruction will subside and a new civilization will arise out of the ashes. This is how Perrault puts it to Conway:

[...] I see [...] a new world stirring in the ruins, stirring clumsily but in hopefulness, seeking its lost and legendary treasures. And they will all be here, my son, hidden behind the mountains in the valley of the Blue Moon, preserved as by miracle for a new Renaissance [...]. (Hilton 1998, 198–199)

Conway accepts the assignment, but he is then persuaded by his fellow diplomat Mallinson to leave Shangri-La. A few weeks or months later he turns up suffering from amnesia in a mission hospital in China, where he is discovered by his old friend Rutherford. He agrees to go back to England with Rutherford, but at Bangkok, he jumps ship and disappears, and the implication is that he has found his way back to Shangri-La.

Hilton's story exploits the nimbus of mystery, danger and adventure that clung to Central Asia, where geopolitics mingled with legend and mysticism in a heady mixture. Public fascination with the region was fed by works such as Rudyard Kipling's novel "Kim" (1901), in which the eponymous boy hero plays a plucky role in the Great Game, the struggle between Britain and Russia for control of the Eurasian territory. Equally evocative is Kipling's story "The Man Who Would Be King" (1888) about two rascally Freemasons, Dravot and Carnahan, and their ill-fated venture into the mountains of Kafiristan to establish a kingdom. The story was made into a memorable film, directed by John Huston and released in 1975, starring Sean Connery, Christopher Plummer and Michael Cane. Another work that contributed to the mystique of the region was the German writer Karl May's late novel "Ardistan und Dzhinnistan" (1907–1909).¹ There were also real-life events that further added to the mystique, like Francis Younghusband's punitive invasion of Tibet in 1903–1904, which turned him into a mystic and a passionate advocate of inter-religious understanding.

And there were the explorers – men like Sven Hedin, Aurel Stein and the Austro-American explorer and botanist Joseph Rock. It was Rock who is thought to have provided one of Hilton's sources in the form of a series of articles on remote parts of China and Tibet, written for the "National Geographic Magazine" in the 1920s and early 30s.² Another – and well-attested – source was a book entitled "A Journey in Tartary, Tibet and China During the Years 1844–5–6" by the French missionary and priest the Abbé Evariste-Regis Huc,

¹ See critical editions edited by Hans Wollschläger (2005 and 2007).

² See Gordon (2006).

first published in 1852 and republished in English in 1928. This book is also reputed to have provided Helena Blavatsky, founder of the Theosophical movement, with much of the information on Tibet that she included in her work "Isis Unveiled" (Partridge 2015, 616).

Theosophy pervades the works of the British-American writer Talbot Mundy, whose novel "Om, the Secret of Abhor Valley" (1923) was probably also one of the inspirations for "Lost Horizon". Mundy lived for a time in Katherine Tingely's Theosophical community at Point Loma, San Diego, California, whose exotic domed buildings and idyllic, palm-shaded grounds, overlooking the Pacific coast, could almost be a film set for Mundy's Himalayan sanctuary. The Abhor Valley in Mundy's novel has certain similarities to Shangri-La. The hero of the story, who has the improbable name of Cotswold Ommony, is led to the valley via hidden mountain passes, over rickety bridges, along impossibly narrow cliffside ledges and through bat-infested caves. At last, he is rewarded by a breathtaking view:

The track passed between two monolithic columns more enormous than the grandest ones at Thebes, and emerged on the rim of a natural amphitheater, whose terraced sides descended for about two thousand feet to where a torrent of green and white water rushed from a cave mouth and plunged into a fissure in the limestone opposite. The air was full of the noise of water and the song of birds, intoxicating with the scent of flowers and vivid with their color [...] Above the topmost terrace, occupying about a third of the circumference, were buildings in the Chinese style; the roofs were carved with dragons and the rear walls appeared to be built into the cliff, which rose for a thousand feet to a sheer wall of crags, whose jagged edges pierced the sky. (Mundy 1924)

The narrative goes on to describe his meeting with a venerable lama, whom he takes to be one of Blavatsky's "Masters". "He knew that Pythagoras, for instance, and Apollonius, and scores of others had gone to India for their teaching. For twenty years he had kept ears and eyes alert for a clue that might lead him to one of the preservers of the ancient wisdom, who are said to mingle with the crowd unrecognized and to choose to whom they will impart their secrets." However, the lama tells him: "The Masters are only discoverable to those, who in former lives have earned the right to discover them" (Ibid.).

While Hilton's "Lost Horizon" lacks any overt Theosophical message, it has certain similarities with Mundy's novel. Here, for

example, is the passage describing Conway's arrival at Shangri-La after a difficult journey over the mountains:

To Conway, seeing it first, it might have been a vision fluttering out of that solitary rhythm in which lack of oxygen had encompassed all his faculties. It was, indeed, a strange and half-incredible sight. A group of colored pavilions clung to the mountainside with none of the grim deliberation of a Rhineland castle, but rather with the chance delicacy of flower-petals impaled upon a crag. It was superb and exquisite. (Hilton 1998, 66)

As for the name Shangri-La, it is obviously derived from Shambhala, which, in Tibetan and Mongolian Buddhist tradition, is a hidden utopian territory, located somewhere in the mountains of Central Asia, inhabited by a group of highly evolved sages. Sometimes Shambhala is described as a place that exists in physical reality, sometimes as existing in some dimension beyond the physical world but capable of manifesting itself to those who are sufficiently receptive.³

A similar legend is that of Agartha or Agharti, which appears to be of more recent origin. Agartha, like Shambhala, is a hidden, mystical center where there resides a group of spiritually advanced beings. The first European to write about it was the French nineteenth-century Indologist Louis Jacolliot (Godwin 1993, 81) and it was further popularized by Jacolliot's contemporary Saint-Yves d'Alveydre, who claimed he had visited it in his astral body. He described it as a vast subterranean kingdom, which – like Shambhala – sometimes sends emissaries out into the everyday world (Ibid., 83–85).

These traditions of Shambhala and Agartha overlap with an ancient Chinese tradition concerning a "Land of the Immortals", that is a group of highly enlightened people who have found the secret of eternal life. Sometimes this place was described as being high up in the mountains, as in "Lost Horizon", sometimes in a vast underground world with its own sun and moon, sometimes on some mysterious islands in the Pacific, which always melted away in the mist when they approached. Again and again with this group of legends we find the same ideas recurring: the remote never-never land where peace and harmony reign, the superior beings who inhabit it, the idea of immortality or longevity, certain features such

³ See also Birgit Menzel's paper from this volume.

as a sacred mountain like the one that rises behind Shangri-La in "Lost Horizon", and the idea that one day the invisible center will make itself visible and a great avatar will emerge to rule the world and bring about a new era for humanity.

What has always fascinated me as a historian is the interface between history and mythology – the way in which history turns into myth and myth often drives historical events. And this group of myths is a classic example. It has inspired spiritual movements, expeditions, revolutions, books, and films. And it has exerted a powerful fascination in both East and West. Why? What is it about this group of myths that is so compelling?

Looking first at the West, there is a long tradition of the notion of hidden centers of wisdom in the East, going back to the eighteenth century and continuing through the nineteenth and twentieth. And within this mystique of the orient, there is a particular mystique that focuses on Tibet and the Himalayas, fed by the works of writers such as Blavatsky with her notion of the Mahatmas, the wise ascended masters in their Himalayan abode. Shambhala is briefly mentioned by her, but she locates it in the Gobi Desert and calls it the "White Island" (Ibid., 97–98). The break-away Theosophist Alice Bailey also located Shambhala in the Gobi Desert and said that it existed in etheric matter, but would become visible when human beings had developed etheric vision (Ibid., 98).

In the 1920s a colorful Polish scientist and explorer called Ferdinand Ossendowski, in a sensational book called "Beasts, Men and Gods" (published in 1922), described a journey to Mongolia in which he was told about an underground kingdom called Agarthi (with an "i"), which corresponded almost exactly to Saint-Yves' description, although Ossendowski claimed never even to have heard of Saint-Yves at the time he wrote the book. He records how a Mongol prince described Agarthi as follows:

It extends throughout all the subterranean passages of the whole world. I heard a learned Lama of China relating to Bogdo Khan that all the subterranean caves of America are inhabited by the ancient people who have disappeared underground. Traces of them are still found on the surface of the land. These subterranean peoples and spaces are governed by rulers owing allegiance to the King of the World [...] You know that in the two greatest oceans of the East and the West there were formerly two continents. They disappeared under the water but their people went into the subterranean kingdom. In underground caves there exists a peculiar light which affords growth to the

grains and vegetables and long life without disease to the people. (Ossendowski 1923)

Ossendowski's account was enthusiastically taken up by René Guénon, the founder of the traditionalist movement, who further propagated the notion of Agartha in his book "Le Roi du Monde" (The King of the World, a title that he possibly took from Ossendowski's book), published in English as "The Lord of the World". The whole Agartha story is tied in with Guénon's idea that there is a primal source of all true spiritual wisdom, which has become lost for the modern world. Guénon even suggests a connection between Agartha and the Rosicrucians:

It is a remarkable fact that several writers have agreed that the true Rosicrucians left Europe shortly after the Thirty Years War to retire into Asia: it may be recalled that the Rosicrucian adepts numbered twelve like the members of *Agartha's* inner circle, both, therefore, complied with the constitution common to so many other spiritual centers formed in the image of the supreme center. (Guénon 1927, 48)

One is also reminded of Gurdjieff's account of the Sarmoung Brotherhood, described in his book "Meetings with Remarkable Men" (Gurdjieff 2011), which operated from a hidden monastery somewhere in the mountains of Central Asia (Gurdjieff worked on the book from 1927, but it was not published in English until 1963). Whether such a monastery existed is a matter of debate. James Moore, in his biography of Gurdjieff, writes:

The allegorists [...] construe Gurdjieff's entire monastery symbolically, beginning with a wayside episode involving a dangerous rope bridge across a deep gorge. The hero on the 'perilous bridge' is noted as the very stuff of myth and folklore: in the West we have Lancelot's sword-bridge, and Bifrost the Scandinavian rainbow bridge; in the East there is Sirat, the Muslims' bridge over hell, and the awesome Chinvat bridge of the Zoroastrian last judgement. As to the remote and secret spiritual center ringed by mountains, it is a glyph which, as 'Shambhala', pervades Tibetan and Mongolian culture; and in the West has touched minds as diverse as Helena Blavatsky, René Daumal, Alexandra David-Neel, Mircea Eliade, René Guénon, James Hilton, Ferdinand Ossendowski, Nicholas Roerich, Giuseppe Tucci and Emmanuel Swedenborg. (Moore 1991, 31–32)

The Russians also have their version of the myth in what they call Belovodye (meaning “White Waters”). The popular utopian belief was shared by peasants, especially the Old Believers as a refuge from the persecution inflicted on them by the Tsar and the mainstream of the Orthodox Church. Many groups of peasants moved East in search for Belovodye to flee from serfdom since the eighteenth century, even equipped with secret maps. The myth survived the coming of communism, and in 1923 one of the last expeditions set off in search of Belovodye but, like most of the previous ones, vanished somewhere en route. Originally said to be located somewhere in the Altai region in the borderland between Kazakhstan, Siberia, Mongolia and China, it was later thought to lie somewhere in or near Tibet (Ashe 1977, 157–158).⁴

I would argue that what we are dealing with here is what the Jungians would call an archetype – the archetype of the shining citadel, remote, difficult to find and aloof from the world – but not totally aloof because occasionally there are intimations of its existence, perhaps in the form of emissaries or reports from the rare travelers who have managed to go there.

One obvious example of this motif is the Grail castle, Monsalvat, in the Arthurian legends, home of an order of knights who go out incognito into the world to do good deeds. It is interesting that there was a renewed romantic interest in the Arthurian mythology just at the time when the Agartha and Shambhala legends were catching on. The painters of that era were fond of depicting idealized visions of the Arthurian world. Typical is a painting by the German artist Hans Thoma, painted in 1899, entitled “Gralsburg” (Grail Castle), showing a shining citadel on a hilltop, bathed in an atmosphere of sacredness, and a group of knights – emissaries of the Grail King – processing back to the castle, probably having completed some mission in the everyday world.

The picture is strikingly similar in symbolism and composition with a painting from 1932 by the Russian artist and writer Nicholas Roerich, called “The Path to Kailas” – Kailas being the most sacred mountain in the Himalayas and believed to be the gateway to Shambhala. In both paintings there is a similarly remote mountain environment, a shining citadel and a procession of mounted figures

⁴ See also McCannon (2002). The most reliable sources for the Belovodye myth are Chistov (2003; 1967); German translation, *Der gute Zar und das ferne Land. Russische sozial-utopische Volkslegenden des 17.–19. Jahrhunderts*. Münster, New York, Munich, Berlin: Waxmann, 1998.

approaching it – in the case of the Roerich painting mounted on yaks rather than horses.

Now let me turn to the Shambhala tradition in its oriental homeland. It originally developed between about the tenth and thirteenth centuries as a way of galvanizing Buddhist resistance against Muslim invaders. Shambhala was seen as a stronghold of the Buddhist faith, from which one day a powerful king would go forth at the head of a great army and crush the enemies of Buddhism. Thus, Shambhala had two aspects. There was the militant, liberationist side, and there was the image of Shambhala as a place of peace, spiritual enlightenment and superior wisdom. The latter aspect is reflected in the name Shambhala, which means “quietude”.

The legend has to be seen in the geopolitical context of the Mongol-Tibetan region, which was the focus of what has been called the Great Game – namely the struggle between Russia, China and Britain for control of Central Asia, which came to a head in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. At the same time, the various indigenous peoples of the region were constantly struggling to fight off the great powers and assert their independence. In this struggle, the Shambhala mythology was constantly invoked.

When the Bolsheviks came to power in Russia, they attempted to exploit the Shambhala myth and link it with communism as a way of bringing the Mongol-Tibetan region under Russian and communist hegemony. Consequently, Bolshevik agents and indigenous fellow-travelers were highly active in the region, often posing as Buddhist pilgrims, stirring up nationalist feelings and exploiting prophetic traditions like that of Shambhala. At the same time, there was a White Russian fraction under a crazed, bloodthirsty character called Baron von Ungern-Sternberg, who for a short period became leader of Mongolia and recruited followers by claiming to be acting on behalf of Shambhala (Sunderland 2014). Much information about this whole period has come to light with the opening up of various archives in Russia since the fall of communism, and these have been used by the Russian-American historian Andrei Znamenski, in his fascinating book “Red Shambhala” (2011). Znamenski weaves an extraordinary narrative, involving characters such as Alexander Barchenko, a writer of popular novels about magic and the paranormal, who was an admirer of the works of Saint-Yves d’Alveydre and believed that among the sages of Agartha/Shambhala a high spiritual knowledge had been preserved that could benefit Bolshevik Russia. As Znamenski writes: “Barchenko began contemplating how to ennoble the Communist project by using the ancient science hidden

in Inner Asia" (ibid., 54).⁵ These ideas attracted the support of Gleb Bokii of the Soviet secret police, and for a time Barchenko's project was officially sanctioned, but eventually he fell victim to factional infighting within the Bolshevik establishment and was executed in 1938.

Now we come back to Nicholas Roerich⁶, who is a key figure in this whole story. Nicholas Roerich was born in St. Petersburg in 1874, left Russia on the eve of the Revolution and spent some years in the United States, where he and his wife Helena became closely involved with Theosophy and similar movements and in the early 1920s they moved to northern India. Helena was clairvoyant and channeled a whole series of visionary writings, which she believed to come from the Theosophical Master Morya, who revealed the "Great Plan" that the Roerichs were to carry out. This was nothing less than the establishment of a vast new country in Central Asia, which they envisaged as the earthly manifestation of Shambhala, a country of peace and beauty, which would send its message out to the rest of the world.⁷ Roerich himself was to be cast in the role of the great avatar, the King of Shambhala. This plan included bringing to humanity the doctrine of Agni Yoga, the yoga of fire – by fire the Roerichs meant universal energy similar to *ch'i* or *prana*, which they believed was going to transform the world.

In order to prepare the way for this great plan, in the years from 1925 to 1928 Roerich, his wife and son George made a great expedition through the heart of Asia. On this expedition, Roerich carried with him a banner called the Thangka of Shambhala, depicting Rigden Djienpo, the ruler of Shambhala, defeating his enemies. The expedition was supported partly by American money, but partly also secretly by the Bolsheviks, with whom the Roerichs played ball in order to further their great plan.

The Roerichs' activities aroused the suspicions of the British intelligence service, and there is some evidence that intelligence officers may have consulted the English occultist Aleister Crowley as someone who understood the esoteric world in which the Roerichs moved. At any rate, around the time of the Roerichs' expedition, Crowley painted the picture entitled "Four Red Monks Carrying a Black Goat across the Snow to Nowhere", and Tobias Churton, in

⁵ On Barchenko and Bokii see also Shishkin (2011).

⁶ For Roerich's life and work, see Decter (1989); Stasulane (2013); Andreyev (2014); Waldenfels (2011).

⁷ See Osterrieder (2012), note 20.

his biography of Crowley, surmises that the painting is a satirical comment on the Roerich plan and the Shambhala legend, the red monks being Bolshevik agents in disguise (Churton 2011, 301–302).

It is significant that Roerich explicitly connected Shambhala with the Grail mythology. Following Wolfram von Eschenbach's "Parzival", he described the Grail as a stone that had fallen from a distant star. The greater part of this stone, according to Roerich, rests in Shambhala, but a part of it has become detached and circulates throughout the world. Roerich possessed a precious stone that he claimed was this very fragment, namely the Chintamani Stone, a wish-fulfilling stone in Tibet Buddhist tradition. The theme of precious stones, linked with the theme of Shambhala, comes across strongly in Roerich's painting "Treasure of the Mountain", showing an underground cavern, studded with huge crystalline stones, while in an inner sanctum in the background a group of robed figures are performing a ceremony, one of them holding up what appears to be a Grail. Roerich was on the lookout for signs and portents from Shambhala, and sometimes he found them. In his diary from the first expedition he recorded the following incident:

A sunny, unclouded morning – the blue sky is brilliant. Over our camp flied a huge, dark vulture. Our Mongols and we watch it. Suddenly one of the Buriat lamas points into the blue sky. 'What is that? A white balloon? An aeroplane?' – We notice something shiny, flying high from the north-east to the south. We bring three powerful field glasses from the tents and watch the huge spheroid body shining against the sun, clearly visible against the blue sky and moving very fast. Afterwards we see that it sharply changes its direction from south to south-west and disappears behind the snow-peaked Humboldt chain. (Ashe 1977, 187–188)

The lamas who were present and also saw the apparition called it "the sign of Shambhala", and one of them told Roerich: "Ah – you are guarded by Shambhala. The huge black vulture is your enemy, who is eager to destroy your work, but the protecting force from Shambhala follows you in this radiant form of matter" (Ibid., 190).

In 1934 and 1935, the Roerichs made a second expedition – this time through Manchuria and Inner Mongolia – with the support of the American Secretary for Agriculture, Henry A. Wallace, who was enthusiastic about Roerich's ideas, as was the President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Roerich was able to gain the support of Wallace and Roosevelt for what became known as the Roerich Pact, a sort of Geneva Convention of the arts, with the purpose of safeguarding art

and culture even in times in war. This was signed at the White House in 1935 by the United States and 20 other nations. The symbol of the pact was three discs within a circle, as shown in a painting by Roerich called "The Madonna of the Oriflamme". Later both Wallace and Roosevelt turned against Roerich.⁸

Although Roerich's "Great Plan" never came to fruition, he and Helena Roerich have left behind a considerable achievement – the Agni Yoga movement, the Roerich Pact, the wonderful paintings, the books that both of them wrote, and the enduring legend of Shambhala, which he helped to nourish. Today the Nicholas Roerich Museum at 319 West 107th Street, New York City is a small oasis of beauty and tranquility amid the hustle and bustle of the Upper West Side – a Shangri-La or Shambhala in miniature. The paintings breathe an other-worldly quality: austere lamaseries dreaming amid snow-covered peaks, lone visionaries meditating beneath skies dominated by vast figures of horsemen and angels, Roerich himself as painted by his son Sviatoslav – a white-bearded, black-robed figure with faintly oriental features, who might have stepped out of the pages of "Lost Horizon". A stone's throw away, at 310 Riverside Drive, is an earlier home of the Roerich Museum, an art deco apartment block called the Master Building, completed in 1929, which is probably named after the Master Morya, the Roerichs' superhuman mentor. The largest Russian Roerich Museum, which was opened as a non-governmental museum in 1989/1993 in a grand historical mansion in the centre of Moscow, given to the International Centre of the Roerichs (ICR) by Mikhail Gorbachev, was closed by the order of the Russian Ministry of Culture in April 2017. The collection of the museum has now been appropriated by the Russian State, and part of it has been integrated into the State Museum of Oriental Art (State Museum of Oriental Art).

Now I return to the point where we started: "Lost Horizon". At the time that Roerich was gathering support for his pact, James Hilton was busy in north London writing the book. It seems very likely that Hilton knew about Roerich and his activities. Hilton's description of Shangri-La – the sacred place of peace and beauty located in its remote Tibetan valley – is strikingly reminiscent of Roerich's vision. And the idea of Shangri-La as an ark of culture and beauty, as described in "Lost Horizon", is so close to the idea of the Roerich Pact that I feel sure there is a connection. Here is the Grand Lama again, revealing to Conway the *raison d'être* of Shangri-La:

We have a dream and a vision. It is a vision that first appeared to old Perrault when he lay dying in this room in the year

1799. He looked back then on his long life [...] and it seemed to him that all the loveliest things were transient and perishable, and that war, lust, and brutality might some day crush them until there were no more left in the world. He remembered sights he had seen with his own eyes, and with his mind he pictured others; he saw the nations strengthening, not in wisdom, but in vulgar passions and the will to destroy [...] And he perceived that when they had filled the land and sea with ruin, they would take to the air. (Hilton 1998, 157–158)

When Conway asks him if Shangri-La will escape he replies: “We may expect no mercy, but we may faintly hope for neglect. Here we shall stay with our books and music and our meditations, conserving the frail elegancies of a dying age... We have a heritage to cherish and bequeath” (Ibid.).

As already mentioned, the Roerich pact was activated with the support of the US President Franklin D. Roosevelt, and it is probably no coincidence that Roosevelt was an admirer of “Lost Horizon”, to the extent that he named the presidential retreat in Maryland “Shangri-La” – later, of course, it was re-named “Camp David”.

Today the name Shangri-La crops up ubiquitously, as a search in the Internet will reveal. It is the name of a botanical garden in Texas as well as of numerous businesses all over the world, from restaurants and hotels (especially in China) to beauty salons and travel agencies. Hilton’s novel goes on selling, and many people go on believing in the ascended Masters in their secret Central Asian abode.

Tibet has also retained its mystique. Since the Chinese occupation of the country in the early 1950s and the flight of the Dalai Lama in 1959, the country has been much talked and written about. Western curiosity about it has been fed by books such as Heinrich Harrer’s “Seven Years in Tibet”, first published in German in 1952 and subsequently in many other languages. Harrer’s book was followed soon afterwards by the publication of “The Third Eye” (1956), the first of a series of books by a man calling himself Lobsang Rampa, describing his life as a high-ranking Tibetan lama. Shortly after publication, it was revealed that the author was in fact an Englishman named Cyril Henry Hoskin. Unabashed, the author stated that he was the spirit of a genuine lama, who had taken over the body of Hoskin with the latter’s agreement. If anything, the controversy fueled public interest in Lobsang Rampa’s works and helped to keep Tibet in the public consciousness.

Meanwhile, the Chinese, aware of the allure of the Shangri-La story, have officially given the name Shangri-La to a district of Yunnan

province, and one can now even go on “Shangri-La” tours. This is partly to capitalize on the legend as a tourist attraction, but it has also been seen as an attempt to create a sanitized, Disneyland version of Tibetan Buddhism, which can be easily controlled.

I shall end with the last words of Hilton’s novel “Lost Horizon”. The narrator has been told the whole extraordinary story by Conway’s friend Rutherford, and now the narrator continues:

We sat for a long time in silence, and then talked again of Conway as I remembered him, boyish and gifted and full of charm, and of the War that had altered him, and of so many mysteries of time and age and of the mind [...] and of the strange ultimate dream of Blue Moon. ‘Do you think he will ever find it?’ I asked. (Ibid., 231)

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EURASIA AS A SPIRITUAL REALM? INQUIRIES INTO AN IMAGINED CONTINENT

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses Eurasia as a meta-geographical spiritual entity, an imagined continent, which is still much of a provincialized area under western eyes. By applying a cultural-studies approach, various perspectives on spiritual Eurasia are presented, as they have helped to incorporate this territory into a mythologically, ideologically, and symbolically charged space. This implies historical ethnographic descriptions and stories of various esoteric seekers of a re-enchanted spiritual landscape, from Blavatsky to Gurdjieff and Roerich, but also academic experts of oriental studies as translators and transmitters of spiritual ideas from East to West as well as hybrid forms of religious revival among indigenous people in the post-Soviet present time. Two examples illustrate how new myths are created in post-Soviet Russia: Arkaim as a Russian Stonehenge in the Urals and Eurasian spirituality as an instrument of political ideology, particularly Lev Gumilev and Nursultan Nasarbaev in Kazakhstan.

Keywords: Eurasia, spirituality, esotericism, Shambhala, Arkaim, Belovod'e, meta-geography Siberia, religious revival

INTRODUCTION

This article is about the spiritual dimension of Eurasia, a meta-geographical entity (Turoma 2018, 89)¹, the name of which – before the twentieth century – was associated both in Russia and in the West with Europe’s Asian territories. After the end of colonialism and with the emergence of post-colonial self-reflection in a globalized world, Eurasia, the largest continental space on earth, is still much of a provincialized area under Western eyes (Turoma and Waldstein 2013). This article is also about cultural differences, which have become incorporated into a mythologically, ideologically, and symbolically charged space. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Eurasia became an imagined continent with a significant impact on geopolitical and economic realities (Suslov 2018). Russia and its Asian parts have also been considered a landscape of mysticism in western Europe ever since the eighteenth century.

The history of relations between East and West² on this continent has been one of the mutual reflections, projections, and reactions between western Europe and the Russian Empire. Religions and belief systems which are considered eastern, such as Byzantine Orthodoxy, Tibetan-Mongolian Buddhism, and indigenous pagan traditions, such as Siberian shamanism, also responded to a longing in Western people for Eastern wisdom since the beginning of secularist modernity. This situation is comparable to other cross-cultural histories of esotericism and calls for further analysis³ for which,

¹ The term “meta-geographical” is used to describe cultural, ideological, or other entities which are constructed on the basis of geographical spaces and charged with symbolic meaning. I thank Anna Tessmann, Michael Hagemester, Konstantin Burmistrov, Birgitte Beck Pristed, Irina Pohlan, and Paul Hillery for critical comments.

² The terms East and West are not used as analytical concepts here, but as historically contingent terms of self-description. They have been challenged after the collapse of the Soviet Union, in post-colonial discourses, and in recent debates on global dimensions of esotericism (Asprem and Strube 2020). In Russia, notions for metageographical self-descriptions until the mid-nineteenth century were North and South (Schenk 2002).

³ It would be worth exploring how far a comparative approach of this contemporary space of Eurasia can be reconfigured as connected histories. For a discussion of this concept applied to early modern Eurasia see Subrahmanyam 1997.

however, some of the methodological concepts in the study of Western Esotericism need to be modified (see Suarsana 2020).⁴

Some remarks should be made about terminology. All terms used in this context are problematic in one way or another. Although this article attempts to introduce various esoteric dimensions of Eurasia, the term esotericism, which has never been used for self-description, will not be applied in this context. The object of study is not “esoteric Eurasia”. Definitions of esotericism have been developed in Western academic discourse (Hanegraaff 2013) and recently challenged for lack of a globally applicable conceptual framework (Asprem and Strube 2020). Rather than developing a new theoretical approach, a more modest aim is pursued here by giving a survey of material which may inspire future comparative analyses. Therefore, I prefer to use “spiritual Eurasia”, “Eurasian spirituality”, and “spirituality in/and Eurasia” as synonymous descriptive, in part self-descriptive terms. “Spirituality” is an English term much discussed by scholars of religion since the 1960s. The relation between religion and spirituality – whether it is rather complementary, overlapping, or one of opposition and replacement – has been debated in Western academic publications of the past decade (Huss 2014a, 2014b).

In this article, the term “spirituality” is defined as an “explicit relationship to a reality beyond the goals and reality of the individual”, an “experienced approach to a transcendental dimension” (Walach 2011, 23), “something (or maybe Someone) that exists beyond the empirical realm – whether it is God, Brahman, buddhas, and bodhisattvas, or some kinds of spiritual beings such as Ascended masters or devas. Spirituality typically expresses itself in ritual [...], is about finding meaning in one’s life, receiving guidance for life, obtaining answers to questions about why we are here, what the purpose of life is, and what may happen after we die” (Chryssides 2007, 14).

Recently, a Russian publication has presented the first comparative survey on “spirituality” in the Russian, English, and German language academic research (Orekhanov and Kolkunova 2017). The translation of the terms which comes into consideration here has rarely been studied. It is, however, important and adds to the

⁴ For excellent examples of this modified methodological approach, see the two monographs by Mark Sedgwick, “Against the Modern World. Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century” (2004) and “Western Sufism. From the Abbasids to the New Age” (2017), 1–12.

complexity of the topic, as I will briefly exemplify. The Russian word for spirituality is “*dukhovnost*”, but this is an inadequate translation. As a general term, it has become very popular only since the 1990s, but the word, especially in its adjective form, carries a long multilayered history and a variety of blurred meanings fraught with tensions and even contradictions. The word has been a key term since the early nineteenth century, first defined as “matters of faith and morality and subject to the authority of the clergy” (Rousselet 2018, 40). Later it became a synonym for Russian culture. Secularized in the early twentieth century, it attained a new religious-philosophical dimension which also included esotericism. In the Soviet period, “*dukhovnost*” was propagated as a basic value of non-materialism, morality, and collectivism. “Soviet atheism reoriented itself from the battle against religion towards the battle for a Soviet spiritual life” (Smolkin-Rothrock 2014, 175). It became a unifying ideological principle of what was considered Soviet civilization. But since political opposition and New Age religious non-conformism emerged in the 1970s as well, “*dukhovnost*” has also adopted some meanings of the Western term “spirituality” (Kolku-nova and Malevich 2014)⁵. In the past decade, “*dukhovnost*” has become a politically instrumentalized key element in Russian patriotism (Rousselet 2018). The word is vastly used in a wide range of political and cultural public contexts, always applied in opposition to Western individualism and materialism. The fact that philosophical concepts of the pre-revolutionary Russian Empire, moral principles of Soviet scientific atheism and post-Soviet ideology merge in a multi-faceted mixture point to a historical continuity throughout the changes with only one common feature: the link between religious and national identity.

One of the contradictions in recent neo-imperialist ideology is that “*dukhovnost*/spirituality” is not only seen as a unique national feature of Russianness but also as a unifying feature of a supranational, in fact, multiethnic and multireligious Eurasian identity. Eurasia has been connected with a certain spirituality, with a special integrative power, and as such, it has been claimed by some intellectuals

⁵ Recently, the term “*dukhovnost*” has also been critically discussed by Russian-speaking scholars as a possible self-descriptive term of Russian esotericism. Anthropological mini-conference as part of the VDNH-XII conference at the European University of St. Petersburg (November 16th–17th, 2018) “Spirituality as a New Religion?” See more: <https://eusp.org/news/dukhovnost-kak-novaya-religiya>

and politicians in Russia to be a geoculturally unique territory (Ramazanov 2015; Kofner 2011). The West, which this recently growing movement refers to, is America as the antagonistic Atlantic continent more than western Europe.⁶ The question, which will be explored in this article, is whether and, if so, in which way Eurasia has been mapped as a spiritual space in its own right, beyond the ideological instrumentalization? What would make it specific and distinct from other geo-cultural spaces, especially in relation to esotericism? And how can esotericism and the “East” be understood in this context? Through a stereoscopic exploration into this “East” as a space, which has been considered by different groups of people as a spiritual unity, I would like to test this hypothesis from the perspective of cultural studies. As a scholar of cultural studies, I expand the focus of description from ideas and religious concepts to subjects, actors, and processes of constructing, projecting, and building identities. By this, I hope to contribute to an emerging comparative view in the studies of esotericism, as suggested by Egil Asprem (Asprem, forthcoming). Before discussing this question, both the notion of Eurasia as a continent and the methodological approach need to be explained: since when and by which criteria has the term Eurasia been used and defined as a meta-geographical continent?

EURASIA AS AN IMAGINED CONTINENT

After the fall of communism, the “grand chessboard”, as Zbigniew Brzezinski called Eurasia (Brzezinski 2016), has returned to the center stage of geopolitics, where it had been in the early twentieth century, when Russia and England, two colonial powers, competed for dominance in the so-called “great game”. With the emergence of post-colonial discourses and the so-called “spatial turn” in historiography since the 1990s, Eurasia has also gained scholarly attention as a “mental map”, a space in which various Eastern and Western empires, civilizations, and religions have co-existed and in part merged for centuries.

But we need to consider that the idea of Eurasia as a continent is a cultural construct (Suslov 2018, 22–28). Both the term and the notion as a continent have repeatedly changed over decades and

⁶ This can be especially seen in the influential rightwing neo-Eurasian ideology of Aleksandr Dugin who bases his writings and public actions on a – more concealed – set of occult-esoteric ideas.

centuries (Turoma 2018, 101). While in pre-World War I Western, especially British knowledge, Eurasia was associated with Europe's Asian colonies and its racial significations, in the cold war period after 1945, it became the most influential key notion for a continental division between East and West. In Russia, Eurasia was first mapped as a continent in the early twentieth-century ideology of Eurasianism, an attempt of Russian émigré nobles after the revolution of 1917 to create a scientific theory of Russian identity. By this, they wanted to preserve the empire into Soviet times and integrate its European and Asian parts against western Europe. What is almost unknown, is that some of these classical Eurasianists were deeply involved in esotericism. Lev Karsavin, historian of religious thought, for instance, was one of the most important Russian esotericists, the creator of neo-gnostic theory, and at the same time a practitioner.⁷ In the 1930s, a "leftist" political Eurasianism emerged, breaking with the "classical" Eurasianism of the 1920s. Only in the 1970s began the notion of Eurasia to play a central role in Soviet Russia's geopolitical imagination. Referring mainly to the new political myth of the 1930s, Eurasianism was now directed against a twofold West, western Europe and America.⁸ The close relationship of classical Eurasianism and esotericism still awaits further research.

By speaking of Eurasia here, I mean the territory of the former Russian and Soviet empire that includes Siberia, the Caucasus, Kazakhstan, and large parts of Central Asia. Russia has a key position in this area, though a controversial one, claiming either domination or the role of a mediator between East and West, Orient and Occident. In order to understand today's aspirations to spiritual Eurasia, the Soviet history of militant atheism is of crucial significance and will have to be taken into account.

⁷ Information by Konstantin Burmistrov.

⁸ In the 1970s, Eurasia was propagated as the "greatest continent that combined two parts of the world", the "sixth continent [...] which shaped the worldview of generations of Soviet and post-Soviet citizens." The ideology of one Soviet people was promoted by the Brezhnev regime which was paradoxically defined by both ethnic national and imperial supranational criteria. Geography became a massively popularized subject providing a supposedly natural basis of the Soviet ideology and national pride of Soviet citizens (Turoma 2018).

PERSPECTIVES ON SPIRITUAL EURASIA

Before turning to the notion of spiritual Eurasia or Eurasian spirituality, some methodological remarks need to be made. The term esotericism appears only indirectly here in the sense that a great variety of religious ideas, movements, and phenomena related to esotericism are being included in the notion of “spiritual Eurasia”. Since the use and controversial definition of terms and the problems of their translations are part of the academic discourse on esotericism, as explained above, this article follows the cultural-studies approach suggested by Michael Bergunder (Bergunder 2010). Much of what Bergunder explains about the term esotericism can be applied also to the notion and discourse of spiritual Eurasia, which is associated with other terms like Eastern mysticism, Eastern wisdom, shamanism, etc. Esotericism should be understood neither as fiction nor as an essence, but rather as “a form of identity marker”. “Identity itself is not an essence, but a *positioning*, thus relational and always within a social discourse” (Hall 1994, 395, quoted in Bergunder 2010).⁹ The topic should therefore be studied under the name that people (esotericists as well as researchers of esotericism) give to a certain discourse related to religion or scholarship. Bergunder traces the contemporary notion of esotericism back to global negotiation processes beginning in the middle of the nineteenth century, dealing with concepts, such as religious history, world religions, and Eastern wisdom. Esotericism in this sense can be seen as a historical product of early globalization and colonialism. Early globalization includes also pre-modern migrations of spiritual concepts and mystical ideas, be this along the Silk Road from China to Transcaucasia or Iro-Celtic migrations on the Eurasian continent towards the Black Sea. Since it is not only a form of identification and a set of ideas and traditions but also a social practice, all actors and networks of this discursive field,¹⁰ esotericists and opponents alike, travellers, literary authors, journalists, academics, tour-ists, etc. should be included in the picture.

The elements of a discursive analysis according to a cultural-studies approach applied to “spiritual Eurasia” are all present in this

⁹ Another methodological premise of the cultural-studies approach mentioned by Bergunder is that the perspective of the academic observer is always interrelated with its subject.

¹⁰ Here, Bergunder refers to Bourdieu’s sociological concept. He later argues with the concept of “empty signifiers” developed by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe following Jacques Lacan.

field: the long history of fascination, exoticism, and demonization from a Western perspective on Siberia, Mongolia, the Caucasus, and the Altai mountains for instance, but also on Russia itself; the role of “Eurasian spirituality” as an identity marker by both Russians and various non-Russian indigenous people of the Asian parts, especially in the post-Soviet decades; the naming of “spiritual Eurasia” from within Russia and even the impact of academic researchers on the esoteric milieu, which Bergunder mentions as another premise of the cultural-studies approach, can be observed in the study of shamanism and Tibetan Buddhism. The Caucasus, if it is included in the notion of Eurasia¹¹, then becomes Russia’s Orient (Schimmelpenninck van der Oye 2010).

In the following, some examples of Western perspectives¹² on “spiritual Eurasia” will be sketched, then some inside perspectives from the “continent” Eurasia itself. Here, a distinction needs to be made between Russia, i.e. the more western part of the Empire that has always been closer to Europe, and self-perspectives from peoples of the Eastern, the more Asian part of the Russian Empire beyond the Urals.¹³

Firstly, Siberia has always been a landscape of spiritual longing in western Europe, especially in Germany with its specific and complex relations with the Russian empire (Stolberg 2005). The first ethnographic descriptions about unknown phenomena like altered states of consciousness in shamanism for instance by Western scholars in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries – many of them Germans – were impregnated with distanced colonial attitudes of alienation, which Edward Said has described as Orientalism.¹⁴ They were shaped either by a Christian worldview, full of contempt for

¹¹ In contemporary discourse on Eurasia, depending on countries and geopolitical contexts, the Caucasus is sometimes included and sometimes not.

¹² The history of how the reception of Siberian shamanism, Tibetan Buddhism, and other religions practiced in the Russian/Soviet Empire became part of the history of esotericism is beyond the scope of this article but is yet to be written.

¹³ This set of perspectives is an attempt to illustrate the complexity of the subject. Naturally it contains generalizations and calls for further specifications and more detailed analyses.

¹⁴ The lure of the East is even much older. As Rafał Prinke has illustrated on the example of alchemy (see his forthcoming article “The Bitch of Armenia and the Dog of Khorasan: Transcaucasian Motifs and Influences in Latin Alchemy”), exchanges, traveling texts, concepts, and spiritual teachings go back to the Middle Ages.

any lack of civilization and pre-Christian paganism, or by a more neutral world-view of scientific dissection, the rationalism of enlightenment.¹⁵ A second type of appropriation followed in the age of Romanticism of the nineteenth century. Inspired by Johann Gottfried Herder's idea that every people has its own culture, ethnographers and anthropologists set off to discover the peoples and folk traditions of the Russian and Siberian East as objects of romantic exoticism.

In the early twentieth century, the age of modernity and secularization led to what Max Weber (Weber 1946, 155) called the "disenchantment of the world (*Entzauberung*)". One reaction to this was the occult revival and the rise of Theosophy, in which many people, especially intellectuals, saw a possibility to reconcile natural science with religion or spirituality, as well as religions of the East and West. Inspired by this re-enchantment of the world different people with different aspirations set off to explore the Eurasian East: adventurers, such as the Polish nobleman Ferdynand Ossendowski (1876–1945) and the Baltic-German Baron Robert Nikolaus Maximilian von Ungern-Sternberg (1886–1921)¹⁶, travelled in search for revolutionary change, often driven by ideas of political occultism. Some were seeking Shambhala, the Tibetan Buddhist paradise, or Eastern wisdom, trying to establish mythical and esoteric connections between East and West. Since the 1970s, Siberia has become a steady "mind-place" (*Sehnsuchtsort*) in Western New Age, and after the fall of communism, especially since the 2000s, also a brand name on the international spiritual marketplace, striving for attention and commercial success via esoteric tourism.¹⁷

Secondly, while in earlier centuries either travel accounts from both East and West had created separate complementary exclusive

¹⁵ The majority of the ethnographers exploring Siberia by the order of the Tsarist Academy of Science founded by Peter the Great were Germans, such as Daniel G. Messerschmidt, Johann G. Gmelin, Gerhard F. Müller, just like early scientists of Oriental cultures and languages (Bucher 2007).

¹⁶ For the connection of shamanism and the Bolshevik Revolution, see Znamenski (2011); for Ungern-Sternberg, see Sunderland (2014); for Ferdynand Ossendowski, see Palmer (2008).

¹⁷ To give just a few examples from Germany: specialized travel agencies offer spiritual Baikal-tours (<<https://baikaltours.de/reisen/schamanen-tour-baikaltours/>>) including encounters with real shamans (<<https://www.newsage.de/2016/01/ur-religion-oder-ur-kult/>>). Spiritual guidance is offered by therapists experienced in working with Siberian shamanism (<<https://www.newsage.de/2016/01/ur-religion-oder-ur-kult/>>).

images of each other¹⁸, or Western scientists had directed their attention towards the eastern continent, in the early twentieth-century transfers from the East to the West began to have an impact on Western esotericism. Major spiritual teachers of the twentieth century, such as Georgy Gurdjieff (1866–1949), Helena Blavatsky (1831–1891), and Nicholas Roerich (1874–1947), were born and raised in the Russian Empire where they lived and practised for a considerable part of their lives. Only later they became influential and famous in the Western world. While little is known about the works and impact of Gurdjieff and Blavatsky during their time in Russia – much is still in archives and has neither been published nor translated yet –, the Russian symbolist painter Nicholas Roerich, a key figure of Russian esotericism, has become an object of academic studies outside of the international cult and myth created around him and his wife Helena Roerich (1879–1955) by his followers. The Roerichs and their reception can be seen as a paradigmatic example for the construction of Eurasia as an esoteric space.¹⁹ In his life and art, which were surrounded by deliberate myth-making and his religious mission, which was transmitted in his writings, Roerich strived for Eurasia as a unique esoteric realm: Russia, with its symbolist art and orthodox Christianity, was seen as the primeval place of culture, the Siberian Altai mountains with their folk religion of shamanism, part of the Russian Empire, were seen as the cradle of mankind carrying magical properties; Buddhist Mongolia and Tibet were ultimate lands of a perennial religion (Agni Yoga) (Stasulane 2005; Andreev and Savelli 2011; Andreev 2008). Although Roerich travelled between conflicting countries and continents – Russia, Europe, America –, financed by both Eastern and Western money and serving different national security services (Ringboom 1966), and although he conceived himself as a founder of a new religion, who ultimately settled in Northern India with his family, he nevertheless remained a representative of the Russian art-religion of the *fin de siècle*. Roerich wanted to establish an esoteric connection between Western, Russian modernism, and Eastern, i.e. Siberian, Indian, Mongolian-Tibetan mysticism. By connecting esotericism, art, and politics in the International Roerich pact (1935) he created an organization, which, together with his

¹⁸ For an excellent analysis of the mutually complementary negative stereotypes created by travelers from western Europe to Russia and vice versa since the sixteenth century, see Scheidegger (1993).

¹⁹ Roerich did not use the term Eurasia but spoke of the “new land” (*novaia zemlia*) in his Agni Yoga writings.

esoteric writings, teachings, and paintings, has survived the Soviet Union, and which after 1991, has even experienced a revival in Russia and some post-Soviet states. Reconnected with post-Soviet nationalist ideologies, today it has grown into an international network, an esoteric Roerich movement, with representatives in many Eastern and Western countries.²⁰

Thirdly, a more contemporary example of the popular²¹ esoteric myth of the Altai mountains as Shambhala or the Land of the White Waters (Belovodye), which was promoted by Nicholas Roerich, can be found in a book by the Russian clinical psychiatrist Olga Kharitidi (born 1960). In the 1980s, she was practising in Novosibirsk, where, on a trip to her native area in the high mountains of Altai, she had a life-changing healing experience with a shaman-woman. After this, Kharitidi quit her job, went on to explore indigenous psychic healing in Central Asia and emigrated to the United States, where she is now practising nontraditional trauma therapy. Her book *Entering the Circle* was published in San Francisco in 1995 and became an international bestseller, translated into many languages (Kharitidi 1995).²² In her book, Kharitidi presents the Altai as the prehistoric cradle of a unified human core civilization, which had a special spiritual connection to the cosmos and from where all other humans developed. Therefore, it is an area with special spiritual energy where excavated graves reveal mummies with messages from transcendent realms. Kharitidi's book can be seen as a typical example of the popular syncretistic mixture of various traditional and new religious myths in post-Soviet new religious movements, in which Siberia and Eurasia play a crucial role.

A somewhat different perspective can be found when we look at the religion and spirituality among the various indigenous peoples of Siberia and the Far East. The notion of indigenous religion in connection with indigenous peoples has been critically discussed in recent years as an attempt to overcome unjustified generic projections (Tafjord 2017). It needs to be considered that, contrary to the ideology promoted in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia, there were

²⁰ For the contemporary reception of Roerich, see McCannon (2012), 348–69.

²¹ For this myth as part of global New Age culture, see, for instance, Ashe (2018) and Jeffrey (2019).

²² In German: *Das weiße Land der Seele*. Berlin: Ullstein, 2017; in Russian: *Vkhozhdenie v krug*. Moscow, 2000. Available at <<https://refdb.ru/look/2337502-pall.html>>.

no ethnically “pure” people in Eurasia. Most of the indigenous population east of the Urals has been of mixed ethnic origin since the thirteenth century.²³ Secondly, under the atheist Soviet regime, ethnically defined nationality and religion were tied together, i.e. would be registered in passports. Next to the Russian Orthodox Christian religion, there were three other religions with an officially acknowledged status: Judaism, (Tibetan) Buddhism (in Buryatia, Kalmykia, and Tuva²⁴), and Islam (mainly in the Caucasus – Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkariya, and North Ossetia – and in Central Asia – Tadjikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan, but also in the European part of Russia – Tatarstan, Bashkiria, and in the regions of Nizhny Novgorod and Orenburg). After the end of the Soviet Union, when some of these former republics became independent states, others remained republics within the Russian Federation, the religious revival became stronger and more complex. Sufism, for instance, has become popular as both an ethnic and a spiritual identity marker in the Volga-Ural region (Tatarstan, Bashkortostan) since the late 1980s. Religious practices are being revived from regional long term, even suppressed Sufi traditions. New orders are present on traditionally Islamic territories, such as the Naqshbandi Haqqani brotherhood in the Volga-Ural region, which has existed for a long time outside Russia. But as Sufism has spread also in the metropolises and has become part of global New Age culture, people who are interested in the regional Sufi practices at the same time may become familiar with Sufi readings by Gurdjieff, Osho, Idris Shah, or Inayat Khan so that the revival of Sufism has become a multilayered, often paradox phenomenon.²⁵

Outside of the traditional religions, there is also a wide range of spiritual, pagan traditions and traditional folk belief systems in this area, which have mixed since the first encounters with Christian settlers and missionaries, with Islam since the thirteenth century, and the entering of Buddhism in the sixteenth century. Animistic

²³ The indigenous population of this vast territory was mixed ever since the Tartar-Mongol invasion in the thirteenth century. The territory was settled by religious groups and communities which fled from persecution in the West, also by prisoners and exiles from the European part of Russia various ethnic groups deported to the East, and by survivors of the GULag.

²⁴ The number of registered inhabitants of these republics (ca. 1,5 mio.) does not reflect the actual practice of Buddhist religion (compared to 269 mio. population of the Soviet Union). See Bräker (1981).

²⁵ For the revival of Sufism in the Urals, see di Puppo and Schmoller (2019). For the New Age in post-Soviet Tatarstan, see Kefeli (2022).

rituals, the worship of pagan deities, living nature, and ancestors in everyday life, a fluent border between life and death had long been co-existing with Orthodox Christian or Buddhist symbols, rituals, and practices.

The religious revival began in the late Soviet period in the 1970s, unofficially, still under conditions of rigid atheist propaganda and sanctions: after all, religious practices had been abolished and severely repressed in the Stalin era. This religious revival was eclectic and hybrid in many ways, which is a characteristic feature of the New Age in the Soviet Union and elsewhere continuing today: mainstream religions (Christianity, Islam, Tibetan Buddhism), their mystical undercurrents (Hesychasm, Imiaslavie (the sacred cult of names) in Christian Orthodoxy, Sufism, Kabbalism), traditional folk belief systems (Shamanism, Tengrism, Burkhanism²⁶) and New Age ideas and practices (including Blavatsky's Theosophy, Gurdjieff's teachings, and psychedelics) re-travelling from the West, have all been revived at the same time: some are related to traditions on more local or regional levels, others follow readings by individual or collective choice, as individuals and in groups, all in search for new spiritual orientation beyond the atheist Soviet "quasi-religion of rationalism".

The revival of esoteric belief systems and shamanism in post-Soviet Siberia is a complex phenomenon in which many diverse motives and elements are mixed together. The opening of borders in the early 1990s for the first time facilitated numerous international encounters and conferences; not only Western practising scholars like Michael Harner, Fritjof Capra, and transpersonal psychologists, such as Stanislav Grof, cooperated with Russian anthropologists in experimenting with shamans on site (Kharitonova 2006), but shamans themselves began to appear at international conferences in order to speak for themselves and correct what they perceived as distorted historiography (Zhukovskaia 2011). This situation is somewhat similar to what Suarsana describes for the "hippie revival" in Bali (Suarsana 2020): the serious effort to revive cultural and religious

²⁶ Tengrism is a collective term for the primordial folk belief system of all Turk peoples in Central Asia, by some scientists considered the earliest form of shamanism on the Eurasian continent. Early written sources about Tengrism come from China and Mongolia (see Laruelle 2006). Burkhanism was a new religious movement between 1904 and the 1930s, millenarian and originally anti-shamanist, by which Altai people sought to distinguish themselves from other Eastern peoples in the Czarist Empire (see Sherstova 2010). All of these movements were somewhat religious forms of ethnic identity in the Russian Empire, later forbidden and repressed in the Stalin era.

traditions by local indigenous people and academic scholars is mixed with commercial considerations reacting to the demands of a new market, of national and international esoteric New Age tourism²⁷, elements of nation building and reactions to the challenges of globalization. What may be specific in Siberia compared to Bali: after six decades of harsh atheism, the striving for attention and acknowledgment is driven by disastrous economic consequences for the provincial parts of the dissolved empire. The goals are much less hip than similar areas in other parts of Asia. The case of Arkaim will be presented below as an example of Eurasian New Age.

As mentioned above, there were also orientalist scholars, both from Russia and from the Far East of the Empire, who had an impact on the esoteric culture. One example in the 1970s is Boris L. Smirnov (1897–1967), an exiled Russian neurosurgeon and sanskritologist in Turkmenistan (Menzel 2011, 154), a practising esotericist, who translated ancient Sanskrit texts, studied them in-depth, and published them in academic editions with rich comments. He also wrote for popular science magazines and thereby transferred knowledge from original Indian and Tibetan source texts into the space of the Russian language. These writings informed and inspired people who began to practise yoga and establish conspiratorial esoteric groups. Bidia Dandaron (1914–1974)²⁸, was a Buddhist lama-shaman from Buryatia, who worked as an academic lecturer of Indology and Tibetology at Leningrad University. Before that, he was arrested and sent to the GULag twice. During the Thaw, when the GULags were liquidated, he was rehabilitated, but then fell under repression again, together with his students, during the Brezhnev era. After being imprisoned and in exile from 1937 to 1956, he was arrested for the third time in 1972 and sent to a prison camp where he died from brutal beatings. Dandaron lived a double life in and outside Soviet academia. Several of his disciples, who later became internationally

²⁷ An example for this is the Ivolginsky datsan outside of Ulan-Ude in Buryatia. It has become a site of spiritual pilgrimage for people from all over the continent, of different religions, nationalities, classes, and ages. It is the place where the Buddhist lama Dashe-Dorzho Itigelov (1852–1927), – by his own words went into an anabiotic deep state of meditation to protest against the Bolshevik repression – was excavated in 2002 and found undecayed, with supposedly clear signs of being alive, he is being exhibited to the public once a year. By traditional Buddhists in Russia Itigelov is considered the head of the Russian sangha (community) in our time. (see Zhukovskaia 2011b, 36–39; Al Jazeera English 2008).

²⁸ In Buryatia Dandaron received his monastic education and was acknowledged as a religious leader in 1921.

acclaimed Buddhologists²⁹, were initiated by him, others were arrested, too, and followed him to the Gulag and later continued to edit his writings into the post-Soviet present (Dandaron 2006; Montlevich 2008).

A third example of how academic scholars themselves had an impact on esotericist culture is Nicholas Roerich's oldest son, the internationally renowned scholar of orientalism Yuri (George) Roerich (1902–1960). After he had studied in Finland, London, Harvard, and Paris in the 1920s, and learnt numerous languages of the Far East, Roerich accompanied his father on his expeditions to Mongolia, Manchuria, and Tibet in the 1930s, and settled in India where he continued his studies in Tibet, taught in Bengal, and founded the Himalayan Research Institute in Darjeeling. When he returned from India to Moscow in 1957, he became a senior researcher at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the USSR Academy of Sciences. From 1958 until his death he was the head of the philosophy and history of religion sector of this institute. Roerich is considered one of the founders of academic studies of Tibetan Buddhism. His legacy in post-Soviet academia in Russia is mixed with elements of the cult of Nicholas Roerich (*Rerikhovskoe Nasledie...* 2005).

POST-SOVIET NEW AGE: ARKAIM – RUSSIAN STONEHENGE IN THE URALS

In this section, two antagonistic perspectives on Spiritual Eurasia will be introduced in more detail: Arkaim as a case of Russian New Age in Eurasia, and the new, officially supported ideology of (Neo-) Eurasianism with its esoteric leaning both on Russian nationalism and on the nation-building process in Kazakhstan.

In 1987, a new archeological site caused a sensation in the Soviet-Russian world. In an uninhabited valley in the great steppes of the Southern Urals and Northern Kazakhstan, where since the 1960s several prehistoric fortified villages from the sixteenth – eighteenth century BCE (Middle Bronze Age) were excavated, among them an amazingly well-preserved necropolis of Sintashta with one of the oldest wooden wheels (2026 BCE) of the world³⁰, a new myth –

²⁹ Examples are the Soviet dissident, later exiled philosopher and orientalist Aleksandr Piatigorsky (1929–2009) and the Estonian orientalist Linnart Mäll (1938–2010).

³⁰ According to archeological analysis, the most settlements existed no longer than 150 years.

Arkaim – was created. With the few sparse texts and sites of pre-historic history on the grounds of the Russian and Soviet empires, Arkaim was soon instrumentalized for the new Russian patriotic myth of origin.³¹

A well-known Russian astrologist, Pavel Globa (born 1953), and his former wife, Tamara Globa (born 1957), are key figures in the new post-Soviet Russian New Age. Tamara Globa visited Arkaim in 1991 and she declared it immediately as Russia's Stonehenge. From then on, a flow of several thousand New Age pilgrims have visited Arkaim each year. They attend summer solstice folklore festivals and ceremonies and worship this as a sacred place and origin of a Eurasian civilization, also the traditional Slavic holiday of Ivan Kupala. The tourists of esotericism represent a very wide range in terms of religious orientation: from orthodox Christians to Buddhists, from Tyva people³² to Islamic Mullahs, from psychics to all kinds of different healers. Symbolic sacrifices are offered on the surrounding mountain tops, collective rituals and public readings of the ancient sacred texts are performed several times a year. The highest peak above the Arkaim valley Cherkasinskaya sopka, the so-called "mountain of reason", has become a sacred site where people mount on by spiraling movement against the movement of the sun in solemn processions to get in touch with cosmic powers, practice energy and other healing rituals. Each summer, hundreds gather to meet the sunrise on another peak Voronya sopka ("mountain of love"). Summer camps on the mountain slopes and stone labyrinths have been newly built by patterns taken from the historical ritual labyrinths of the indigenous people of the Northern Tundra.

There are also special tours such as "On the Paths of Zarathustra" organized by Russian Neo-Zoroastrians, one of the new religious movements in contemporary Russia.³³ As it has been shown in Anna Tessmann's study (Tessmann 2012, 81 ff.), Arkaim has been interpreted as an important pilgrimage destination of Russian Zoroastrians, namely connected with the Zoroastrian ancestor Yima or the legendary protector of the Zoroastrian prophet Zarathushtra King

³¹ In 2005, President Putin visited the site and confirmed it as a place of historical Russian identity.

³² I.e. autochthon inhabitants of the Siberian Republic of Tyva.

³³ According to Neo-Zoroastrians in Russia, this ten day-tour consists of eleven sacred Zoroastrian places (natural: caves, lakes, mountaintops), including later Orthodox-Christian chapels and churches, which possess a "khvarna" – Zoroastrian charisma. Such organized travels are popular among people coming from Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus and also from abroad.

Vishtaspa, the figures of ancient Iranian mythology.³⁴ According to Globa's interpretation who views himself as a Zoroastrian priest and astrologer the Zarathushtra's teaching "will come back to [the place] where it originated" (Globa 2008, 31) what in his eyes certainly refers to Arkaim and the Eurasian steppe landscape (Aryan width) around it. Many of Globa's adherents now claim Arkaim to be a somewhat Avestan twin brother of the esoteric cult at Stonehenge. A mystical connection is seen not only in the same longitude but in the cosmic observatory and gigantic horoscope. Arkaim has become the most-visited tourist place in the Urals in the 1990s–2000s. Whereas in Soviet times mountain-climbing, nature, and traditional crafts attracted tourists, it has now become a space of sacred geography, a place of power, earth magnetism, a mix of psychic, neo-Slavic, and neo-Aryan origin.

Apart from this attraction as an esoterically charged site, Arkaim is also a place where new myths are created. People gather there to communicate across national, religious, cultural, and ethnic borders, searching for a meaningful spiritual community, sometimes with fragmented, eclectic worldviews. Tessmann calls Arkaim a contemporary "discursive crossroads" where scientific, religious, political, and economic interests meet. Additionally, it is an interpretative construct in search of a resurrection of an imagined Eurasian unity.³⁵

EURASIAN SPIRITUALITY AS AN INSTRUMENT OF POLITICAL IDEOLOGY

Since the beginning of the 1990s, in Russia, as well as other post-Soviet countries, new religious movements have become fashionable as part of constructing a new national identity. Along with resurging movements with a long-standing history, such as Spiritualism, Theo-

³⁴ The popular etymology of Arkaim since the "arc of Yima", a legendary king and ancestor of Iranian people, also mentioned in the Indian Vedas (see Tessmann 2015).

³⁵ Other New Age communities on Russian territory are the "spiritual eco-community" of Vissarion (Sergej A. Torop, b. 1961, the New Jesus) in Tiberkul, Siberia, which is said to be the largest contemporary utopian community (about 5,000 international residents (see <<http://www.vissarion.info/>>); Kellner 2022, 122–161; Panchenko 2020; Senina 2020), and the Anastasiia movement, which is based on the book series by Vladimir Megre "The Ringing Cedars of Russia" and has become an international East-West movement with about 500 villages and ca. 6000 people (see Andreeva 2021).

sophy, Anthroposophy, and Cosmism, the more recent (Neo-)Eurasianism, Neo-paganism, and Astrology have become quite popular, even though they are strongly attacked by the semi-state institution of the Russian Orthodox Church, but relevant as part of global modernity with their “invented traditions” (Laruelle 2008 and 2012).

Today all moments of national history have been opened to alternatives. Alternate histories include the paranormal, the study of parallel worlds, and the mysteries of ancient civilizations, and numerous para-academic texts claim to represent alternate scholarship. Conspiracy theories, especially anti-Semitic ones, play a crucial role in these so-called “memory wars”, based on a kind of post-modern, paranoid cultural imagery.³⁶ The matrix of the new Eastern spirituality includes a rejection of the Judeo-Christian tradition and reiterates instead a reinterpretation of the Mongols (Genghis Khan included) as well as the Turkish nomad tribes of the steppes as part of the mystic origins of the Slavs (Shnirelman 2001; Laruelle 2008, 287ff.). One of the major theorists and founders of the neo-Eurasian ideology is another scientist, the historian and orientalist Lev Gumilev (1912–1992).³⁷ He developed a highly speculative, non-orthodox theory of ethnogenesis including a positive reinterpretation of the role of Genghis Khan and the Mongols for the Russian civilization. Unaccepted in the international academic community, Gumilev’s writings have now become standard teaching material in many universities of the post-Soviet territory.³⁸

Although Germanic ideas of the prestigious Aryan origin of European peoples were discussed as roots of the Russian civilization already in the nineteenth century by Slavophile intellectuals, Orthodoxy had still remained the primary religious influence before. Neo-pagan Aryanism, i.e. the rejection of the Russian orthodox faith, was introduced only in the 1960s and 1970s by underground right-wing Russian nationalists. A new Russian Aryan myth including

³⁶ The historian Marlene Laruelle offers a socio-psychological explanation for this: “The feeling that the limits imposed through social conventions and institutions in writing history were open to challenge worked to reinforce the need to find explanations for the traumatic events linked to the collapse of the Soviet Union” (Laruelle 2012, 566).

³⁷ One of the state universities of Kazakhstan in the former capital of Almaty was founded and named in 1996 as L. N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University. On Gumilev, see Bassin (2016).

³⁸ The university of the Kazakh capital Astana upon its foundation in 1996 was named L. N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University.

national pre-Christian Slavic faith transplanted Germanic Ariosophy and national-socialist ideas to the Russian-Eurasian realm. A forged manuscript, the so-called “Book of Veles” [Velesova kniga], became a core-piece of this new myth: a supposedly ancient text found on wooden birch tree boards, dating from the first centuries BCE, and considered to be an authentic manuscript by Russian nationalists as well as Russian and Ukrainian emigrants (Laruelle 2008, 285). The new term of “Vedism” was invented to describe the Slavic Neo-paganism and thus appropriating the Indian filiation of the Vedas.

In Kazakhstan, one of the most prominent post-Soviet independent states, Eurasian spirituality has even become the official ideology, a major argument for political unification and nation building, promoted by its president Nursultan Nazarbaev (in power since 1990) who called Kazakhstan a “traditional secular society supported by the foundation of Sufi-spirituality, traditional Islam.”³⁹ In 1997, Astana, a city in the northern desert of Kazakhstan, was declared the new capital of the largest post-Soviet state, in the geographical and geopolitical “heart of Eurasia”. The Palace of Peace and Reconciliation⁴⁰ was opened in 2006 by President Nursultan Nazarbaev, a quadratic pyramid modelled after the Egyptian pyramids, hosting the biannual Congress of leading representatives of the World-and traditional Religions. Alexander Dugin, the spokesman of Russian (Neo-)Eurasianism, has promoted this Kazakh renaissance as a project of his anti-western political occultism with close ties to the New Right all over Europe.

³⁹ Sufism is traditionally very popular in Kazakhstan, even among the younger Slavic population who seeks a way out of the orthodox dogmatic religious revival.

⁴⁰ The pyramid was specially constructed to host the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions. It contains accommodations for different religions: Judaism, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Daoism and Shintoism. It also houses a 1,500-seat opera house, a national museum of culture, a new “university of civilization”, a library and a research center for Kazakhstan’s ethnic and geographical groups. This diversity is unified within the pure form of a pyramid, 62m (203ft) high with a 62x62m (203x203ft) base. The building is conceived as a global center for religious understanding, the renunciation of violence and the promotion of faith and human equality.

CONCLUSION

The forced secularization during the atheist Soviet twentieth century deeply affected all belief systems but could not erase them. Driven underground, but reactivated in the 1970s mostly within the intelligentsia, all religions and religious movements moved closer together so that hybrid forms of esotericism emerged under conspiratorial conditions. One result of the long-term political repressions was a longer and stronger coexistence of Christian mysticism, Eastern religions, and traditional folk-beliefs, which in this mixture – even if it is far from being a mass movement – cannot be found in the New Age movement in Western countries. Since the post-communist decade of the 1990s, with a new religious revival, together with the search for national identity or – outside Russia – nation building, the imagined meta-geographical continent Eurasia has now been reconstructed as a geosacral space with a network of old and new sacralized territories, pilgrimage sites for members of religions as well as new religious movements.

This article argues that Eurasian spirituality, indeed, exists as a phenomenon with real impact. In a wider sense, as a historical constellation, connecting religions and space, early forms of globalization, it can be found in

- the constructions and projections of western travellers, ethnographers, and other intellectuals for several centuries discovering and thereby orientalizing the East;
- the migration of Iro-Celtic mysteries to the Slavic territories and the Black Sea (Osterrieder 1995), as well as spiritual teachings migrating along the historical Silk Road;
- the search for earthly paradises in sacred spaces east of the Urals by people migrating from Russia, the western, European part of the Empire; visions of paradises were for instance Shambhala in the magical Altai mountains and “the Land of the White Waters” (*Belovodye*), a peasant myth of a promised land since the seventeenth century which was revived in the twentieth century (McCannon 2002);
- in all co-existing hybrid forms of traditional religions of non-Russian indigenous people, including shamanism, and orthodox mysticism (Hesychasm) or Eastern religions, such as Tibetan Buddhism⁴¹ (in Buryatia, Kalmykia, Mongolia) and Sufism.

⁴¹ Tibetan Buddhism has been traditionally practiced in Buryatia, in Kalmykia and in Tuva (see Zhukovskaia 2011).

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Eastern ideas, spiritual concepts, and teachers began to travel West (Blavatsky, Gurdjieff, Tibetan medicine), while Western, including Russian, esotericists (Roerich) also began to transform the spiritual East of Eurasia. Scientists and orientalists, contributed to this transfer by the translation and popularization of Eastern folk-beliefs, wisdom-teachings, and practices. Here we can observe travelling belief systems and spiritual teachings from East to West and back.

In a narrower sense, Eurasian spirituality is a contemporary phenomenon and therefore closely linked to the post-Soviet atheist condition. Three manifestations can be distinguished: the first is neo-Eurasianism, an explicitly constructed ideology in search for national identity, with political implications and links to political occultism. In Russia, this movement is driven by the construction of national identity, with a strong leaning to neo-pagan Russian or Slavic nationalism, while in other post-Soviet states, such as Kazakhstan, it has become an instrument for a new nation-building process which at the same time offers a global, transcultural, trans-religious esoteric identification. This spiritual Eurasia is mostly shaped and manipulated by actors outside the Asian part of the empire, i.e. from Russia or Western countries.

The second manifestation is a more implicit, bottom-up movement, connected with globalized new religious movements respectively the New Age in Russia. Both create their own mythological past as a history alternate to Soviet historiography. Eurasian spirituality here is a result of the search for a non-Western spiritual identity beyond mainstream religious borders and dogmas, with roots in the late Soviet underground both in Russia and among non-Russian indigenous people. This is an expression of new religious movements inventing traditions in post-atheist space, around sacralized places. Typical for this is a hybrid cross-religious diversity with connections to both ancient Eastern religions (Zoroastrianism) and Western New Age (Arkaim, Altai-myth). In this space, both Eastern and Western religious and esoteric concepts cross-fertilize each other. The historiography of New Age in Russia and the post-Soviet Eurasian imagined continent, however, has only begun to be established in recent years.

A third manifestation can be found in the complex religious revival and diverse perspectives from within the indigenous peoples of the Eurasian East (Siberia, Central Asia, and the Caucasus). What used to be inherent traditional folk-beliefs and practices, rooted in everyday life, after repression and confusion during the atheist Soviet past, now has become a special attraction for globalized actors from

the outside, or an instrument for building local, regional, national identity, economic survival, sometimes leading to distortion or commercialization on the spiritual marketplace.

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H. P. BLAVATSKY'S LATER RECEPTION OF HINDU PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

This article explores Helena Petrovna Blavatsky's innovative use of Hindu Philosophy in "The Secret Doctrine" (1888). Read in connection with scholarship on Hindu philosophy at the time, it is shown how the use and assimilation of Hindu philosophy in "The Secret Doctrine" was done in accordance with a pre-established frame of the Esoteric philosophy. It is argued that "The Secret Doctrine", as a textual product, can be regarded as an innovative product (re)constructing esotericism in a number of new ways: (1) in the sense that Hindu philosophy became of central relevance to the themes discussed in the work and thereby to the development of the modern occultism and theosophy, which the work facilitated; (2) in the sense that the identity of Esoteric philosophy itself was framed in direct relation to Hindu philosophy; and (3) in the sense that concepts from Hindu philosophy such as *purusha* and *parabrahm* were explored, reinterpreted, and adopted to be a part of the worldview expressed in "The Secret Doctrine", which in turn became central to modern esotericism. The article also shows that while all the traditional six schools of Hindu philosophy are mentioned in one way or another in Blavatsky's works, Sāṃkhya and particularly Advaita Vedānta played the most significant roles in "The Secret Doctrine".

Keywords: H. P. Blavatsky, Theosophy, Hindu philosophy, orientalism, esotericism, "The Secret Doctrine", innovation

INTRODUCTION

Helena Petrovna Blavatsky was arguably a significant innovator in esotericism during the nineteenth century (Hedesan and Rudbøg 2021, 1–31). One of her major innovations consisted of using Asian traditions and philosophies in her (re)construction of esotericism in a time when Asian traditions became more widely known. This article on H. P. Blavatsky's later reception of Hindu philosophy chronologically continues where Rudbøg and Sand's "H. P. Blavatsky's Early Reception of Hindu Philosophy" stopped (Rudbøg and Sand 2020, 107–132). Rudbøg and Sand's work covered the period from approximately 1875–1888 and did not discuss Blavatsky's "The Secret Doctrine" (1888) in detail (Rudbøg and Sand 2020, 108). Blavatsky's "The Secret Doctrine", is however Blavatsky's most comprehensive work and deserves a more detailed study, especially her use of Asian traditions and philosophies. Buddhism equally entered into the composition of "The Secret Doctrine" (Rudbøg 2020, 83–105), but the six schools of Hindu philosophy received special emphasis as Blavatsky conceived the universal secret doctrine, which she claimed to be outlining in "The Secret Doctrine", to be the synthesis of the six Hindu schools. Blavatsky, for example, wrote, "As a whole, neither the foregoing nor what follows [in "The Secret Doctrine"] can be found in full anywhere. It is not taught in any of the six Indian schools of philosophy, for it pertains to their synthesis – the seventh, which is the Occult doctrine" (Blavatsky 1888a, 269). And furthermore, "Hence Esoteric philosophy passes over the necessarianism of this purely metaphysical conception, and calls the first one, only, the Ever Existing. This is the view of every one of the six great schools of Indian philosophy – the six principles of that unit body of Wisdom of which the 'gnosis', the hidden knowledge, is the seventh" (Ibid., 278).

While these quotes could be read as a dismissal of the six schools, as the secret doctrine is not specifically found there, in fact, "The Secret Doctrine" is consciously construed in relation to Hindu philosophy as the synthesis of the six schools, as the seventh school. Also, the six schools are all construed as parts of a unified body of wisdom and thereby each has importance to the synthesis. Some work has been done on the use of Hindu traditions in Blavatsky's work, but not much directly related to the six schools (Snell 1895, 259–265; Goodrick-Clarke 2007, 3–28; Hall 2007, 5–38; Baier

2016, 309–354; Baier 2013, 150–161, Rudbøg and Sand, 2020 107–132). Nevertheless, given the influence of Blavatsky on the modern religious landscape, a study of her reception of Hindu philosophy is in order (Hammer and Rothstein 2013, 1), as it in the long run will facilitate a historical understanding of how Hindu philosophy innovatively became integrated with esotericism and from there other modern forms of spirituality.

“THE SECRET DOCTRINE” AND “THE SIX DARŚANAS”

A common conception today is that Hindu philosophy is constituted by six so-called “orthodox” (*āstika*) schools (*darśana*) (Winternitz 1967, 467; Flood 1996, 231). This six-fold classification and knowledge of the *darśanas* did exist to some degree prior to Blavatsky, but Max Müller’s major study “The Six Systems of Indian Philosophy” was not published until a few years after her death in 1899 (Winternitz 1967, 467; Flood 1996, 231, Müller, 1899).

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, knowledge of Asian religions and philosophies continued to grow by the day and “The Secret Doctrine” is the first large-scale occultist attempt to integrate Hindu philosophy with western esoteric traditions and other intellectual strands. Thus, it is important from the outset to keep in mind that “The Secret Doctrine” – subtitled “The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy” – sought to uphold the idea of consilience, a union of all fields of knowledge, science, philosophy and religion, ancient and modern, in a time in which these were being differentiated. It sought to include spirit and occult forces in cosmology in the face of the increasingly dominant movement towards scientific naturalism and agnosticism, and it sought to contribute to the study of religions by rescuing “from degradation the archaic truths which are the basis of all religions; and to uncover, to some extent, the fundamental unity from which they all spring” (Blavatsky 1888a, viii). This unity, which Blavatsky terms “Wisdom-Religion” in “Isis Unveiled”, is often termed “Esoteric philosophy” in “The Secret Doctrine” (ibid., xx, 11n, 17, 277, 298; 1888b, 196, 487). The specific philosophical system of “Esoteric Philosophy” described in “The Secret Doctrine” related to the so-called “Book of Dzryan”, which this work to a large extent is a commentary on, is termed the trans-Himalayan doctrine (Blavatsky 1888a, viii) and largely frames the comparative and innovative nature of the work. In order to demonstrate the universality of Blavatsky’s “Esoteric philosophy”, she con-

stantly compares concepts and ideas from relevant traditions and forms of knowledge from around the world – but, “Esoteric Philosophy” and specifically the “trans-Himalayan doctrine” are considered the fundamental measuring stick by which these traditions, concepts and ideas are discussed. Hence, Blavatsky’s aim was not to understand the traditions, she studied, on their own historical or contextual terms, as these would only represent the incidental exoteric dress of the ideas, but to discover, frame, and demonstrate their place in what she perceived to be the esoteric universal knowledge (Partridge 2020, 15–36). This is in principle not that different from what a number of philosophers such as Hegel and Schopenhauer did when they fitted Indian philosophy into their own philosophical systems. Blavatsky, for example, wrote:

If, in the Vedānta and Nyāya, *nimitta* is the efficient cause, as contrasted with *upadāna*, the material cause, (and in the Sāṅkhya, *pradhāna* implies the functions of both); in the Esoteric philosophy, which reconciles all these systems, and the nearest exponent of which is the Vedānta as ex-pounded by the Advaita Vedantists, none but the *upadāna* can be speculated upon; that which is in the minds of the Vaiṣṇavas (the Vasīṣṭa-dvaita) as the ideal in contradistinction to the real – or Para-brahm and Isvara – can find no room in published speculations, since that ideal even is a misnomer, when applied to that of which no human reason, even that of an adept, can conceive. To know itself or oneself, necessitates consciousness and perception (both limited faculties in relation to any subject except Parabrahm), to be cognized. (Blavatsky 1888a, 55–56)

Here it is quite clear that the views on causality found in three systems of Hindu philosophy Nyāya, Sāṅkhya, and Vedānta are discussed and evaluated or negotiated according to Blavatsky’s “Esoteric Philosophy”. Blavatsky contends that the absolute or “Parabrahm” cannot be conceived by human reason and therefore not be an object of speculation. Only the material cause, *upadāna* or the root substance can be an object of speculation according to “Esoteric Philosophy”, which here is construed as being universal and able to reconcile any differences or conflicts. Advaita Vedānta is furthermore judged as the one closest to “Esoteric Philosophy” and thereby deemed the most profound.

Based on the above, it will be shown in the following how Blavatsky constantly discussed the Hindu philosophical schools in relation to her system of “Esoteric Philosophy” and framed several central concepts from them into her own system.

NYĀYA

In the quote above Blavatsky wrote, “If, in the Vedānta and Nyāya, *nimitta* is the efficient cause, as contrasted with *upādāna*, the material cause, (and in the Sāṅkhya, *pradhāna* implies the functions of both)” (Blavatsky 1888a, 55). This quote is a part of Blavatsky’s commentary on “Stanza II” from the “Book of Dzyan”. More specifically, it is part of a discussion about the cause of “creation” or manifestation of the universe in which Blavatsky brings the doctrines about causality in the Vedānta, Nyāya and Sāṅkhya into play and argues that in “Esoteric Philosophy” it is not regarded as possible to speculate upon the “ideal cause” of the universe, but only the *upādāna* or the material cause since the ideal cause is beyond human reason. This is later repeated in a footnote of “The Secret Doctrine” in a discussion about the so-called nights and days of Brahmâ:

In the *Vedānta* and *Nyāya* ‘*nimitta*’ (from which ‘*Naimittika*’) is rendered as the *efficient* cause, when antithesized with *upādāna* the physical or material cause. In the Sāṅkhya *pradhāna* is a cause inferior to Brahmâ, or rather Brahmâ being himself a cause is superior to *Pradhāna*. Hence ‘*incidental*’ is wrongly translated, and ought to be translated, as shown by some scholars, ‘*Ideal*’ cause, and even *real* cause would have been better. (Blavatsky 1888a, 370n)

Several things are in play here. First of all, we see how Hindu philosophy and specifically Nyāya is a part of Blavatsky’s debate about the cosmos and its origin thus innovating “Western” esotericism in terms of cosmology in a highly comparative way, but it is also worth noting that Blavatsky’s source for this is clearly Horace Hayman Wilson’s translation of the “*Vishṇu Purāṇa*”, one of the eighteen mahapurana texts of classical Hinduism, which includes significant cosmological ideas. Very close to Blavatsky’s formulation in the quote above, Wilson, for example, wrote in a footnote in his translation many years prior: “In the Vedānta and Nyāya, *nimitta* is the efficient cause, as contrasted with *upādāna*, the material cause. In the Sāṅkhya, *pradhāna* implies the functions of both” (Blavatsky 1888a, 66–67n). Regarding the second quote above in which “*Naimittika*” is mentioned in parenthesis, it is the same and “*Naimittika*” is also clearly derived from Wilson (*The Vishṇu Purāṇa*... 1864–1877d, 186n; *The Vishṇu Purāṇa*... 1864–1877a, 112–113). Even though Blavatsky does not refer to Wilson, she does not simply imitate him as she obviously makes use of the scholarly material at hand to discuss more broadly, and for her own purposes, Asian doctrines

on cosmogenesis. She even indirectly criticizes Wilson's translation of "Naimittika" as "incidental" in preference of "ideal" or "real", but again without directly mentioning that the translation in question is Wilson's translation (Ibid.).

However, there is no further mention of the Nyāya school in "The Secret Doctrine". Thus, in sum, it would be fair to say that perhaps Blavatsky only here mentions the Nyāya school because of Wilson's discussion from which she also derived her information.

VAIŚEṢIKA

Vaiśeṣika is not directly mentioned in "The Secret Doctrine", but three passages mention Kaṇāda who is the associated founder of the Vaiśeṣika school. He figures as a "positive other" or in the theological narrative as a significant source of wisdom from antiquity, as will be shown in the following. In criticizing modern science for constantly changing theories about nature Blavatsky, for example, writes:

They [the 'great men' of modern science] had to go back to the earliest 'Gods of Pythagoras and old Kanada' for the very backbone and marrow of their correlations and 'newest' discoveries, and this may well afford good hope to the Occultists, for their minor gods. For we believe in Le Couturier's prophecy about gravitation. We know the day is approaching when an *absolute reform* will be demanded in the present modes of Science by the scientists themselves – as was done by Sir W. Grove, F. R. S. Till that day there is nothing to be done. (Blavatsky 1888a, 495) [brackets mine]

It is, furthermore, demonstrated by the fact Kanada in India, and Leicippus, Democritus, and after them Epicurus – the earliest atomists in Europe – while propagating their doctrine of definite proportions, believed in Gods or supersensuous entities, at the same time (Blavatsky 1888a, 518, 579).

These quotes are included in Blavatsky's comparison between ancient knowledge and modern science and are critically used to show that the atom theory is nothing new, that it does not have to be materialistic, and that once scientists existed who did not confine nature to materialism. In other words, Kaṇāda is part of her discourse for ancient knowledge against modern materialism (Rudbøg 2012, 136–205). Kaṇāda is rightly associated with atomism or *anu* (*Sk.*), but her usages of *anu* in general in "The Secret Doctrine" primarily seems to be derived from Bhashyacharya's "Catechism of the

Visishtadwaita Philosophy” published in 1887, Wilson’s “Vishṇu Purāṇa” and Monier Williams’ “A Sanskrit-English Dictionary” (1872) and not from the “Vaiśeṣika Sūtras” first translated by A. E. Gough in 1873 (Bhashyacharya 1887, 91–93; Blavatsky, 1888a, 522).

SĀṂKHYA

Sāṁkhya is the school of Hindu philosophy that apart from Vedānta figures most prominently in “The Secret Doctrine”. The basis for this might be that this school was better known to the “Western” scholarship at the time and that Blavatsky perceived the legendary founder of Sāṁkhya, Kapila, to be a great initiate of the same “Esoteric philosophy”, which she also saw herself as a spokesperson of.

In the following from “The Secret Doctrine” it is, for example, clear how the legendary Indian philosopher “Kapila, the great sage and philosopher of the Kali Yuga, being an Initiate, ‘a Serpent of Wisdom’” (Blavatsky 1888b, 572), is integrated into the universal tree of great spiritual teachers. Blavatsky mentions that is the *Tree* from which, in subsequent ages, all the great *historically* known Sages and Hierophants, such as the Rishi Kapila, Hermes, Enoch, Orpheus, etc., etc., have branched off” (Blavatsky 1888a 207; 1888b 552). The tree of initiatory transmission now also includes a legendary Indian philosopher, such as Kapila whom she thereby integrated into the universal wisdom. This is an innovation to the “ancient wisdom narrative”, which has been central to “Western” esotericism (Rudbøg 2021, 201–228). The esoteric initiatory connection indicated in the above is something that preoccupies Blavatsky to a great extent in the case of Kapila. In fact, there were several Kapilas or initiates operating under that name in Sanskrit literature according to Blavatsky, but Blavatsky, for example, discusses the Kapila mentioned in the “Vishṇu Purāṇa” and the “Bhagavata Purāṇa” by interpreting the stories about them allegorically to discern the secret or esoteric message in contrast to the explanations of the orientalists. While she argues that there are many named Kapila throughout history, the Kapila who in the Puranas “slew King Sagra’s progeny – 60,000 men strong” in fact was the founder of Sāṁkhya, the initiate. The story of slaying 60,000 simply allegorically speaking represents the initiate’s or the pure self’s slaying of the personifications of the human passions (Blavatsky 1888b, 571; Vishṇu Purāṇa... 1864–1877a, xlii). This framing of the Sāṁkhyan Kapila in the image of “Esoteric philosophy” is furthermore connected with the stories of Kapila having meditated for a number of years at the foot of the Himalayas – the seat of Blavatsky’s “trans-Himalayan teachings”. “The Sāṁkhya philosophy may

have been *brought down* [from the esoteric seat in the Himalayas] and taught by the first, and written out by the last Kapila" (Blavatsky 1888b, 572; Vishṇu Purāṇa..., 1864–1877a, xl, xli, xlii; 1864–1877c, 299, 302n. (iv. 4); Select Specimens 1835, 301n).

In terms of cosmology, Sāṃkhya is now and again brought in as evidence that the ancients entertained notions of evolution (that it is not simply a new idea) and that evolution also was spiritual (Blavatsky 1888a, 284; 1888b, 259). Some of the main translated Sāṃkhya sources at the time were also referred to as universal evidence of the seven-fold structure and the fundamental building blocks of the universe (Blavatsky 1888a, 45, 256n, 335, 456; 1888b, 449; Sāṃkhya Kārikā 1837, 135, 138, 5(l):199n, (vi. 4); Vijnāna Bhikshu 1862, 13–14). However, the concepts *Purusha* and *Prakriti* are the concepts derived from the Sāṃkhya philosophy that Blavatsky assimilates most prominently in her extensive discussions of the relationship between spirit and matter.

Concisely put, Blavatsky's philosophy is monistic in the sense that behind the complexity of the cosmos with its many levels and beings there is one absolute principle (the absolute or parabrhaman), which is beyond the scope of human cognition. In the manifested universe we perceive the unity as a substance that has two aspects in the form of spirit and matter. These two aspects, which in ultimate reality are an illusion, because the oneness of the one absolute principle only enters into a dual form of evolutionary and involutory relationship in the limited consciousness of beings bound by time and space (Blavatsky 1888a, 273–274). The perception of the world through limited and dual consciousness is thus relatively real only to the one perceiving, but not absolutely real. The Sāṃkhya system, however, according to the most established tradition is a real dualist system. *Purusha* or spirit is real and independent of *Prakriti* or matter, including the mind, which is equally real (Larson and Bhattacharya 2006, 49, 74–78). Nevertheless, a less dualistic reading of the original Sāṃkhya philosophy is also suggested by David Reigle (Reigle 2018). The two fundamental principles never really touch even though they enter an illusory relationship. This traditional dualistic interpretation of Sāṃkhya philosophy therefore in terms of an absolute ontological level opposes Blavatsky's monistic philosophy, but she still seeks to integrate the two as can be seen in the following:

In the Sankhya philosophy, *Purusha* (spirit) is spoken of as something impotent unless he mounts on the shoulders of *Prakriti* (matter), which, left alone, is – senseless. But in the secret philosophy they are viewed as graduated. Though one and the same

thing in their origin, Spirit and Matter, when once they are on the plane of differentiation, begin each of them their evolutionary progress in contrary directions. [...] Both are inseparable, yet ever separated. In polarity, on the physical plane, two like poles will always repel each other, while the negative and the positive are mutually attracted, so do Spirit and Matter stand to each other – the two poles of the same homogeneous substance, the root-principle of the universe (Blavatsky 1888a, 247–248; 1888b, 42).

From the above, it is clear how the philosophical ideas from Sāṃkhya on spirit and matter are compared and sought to corroborate with the “Esoteric Philosophy”. “Both [spirit and matter] are inseparable, yet ever separated” (Blavatsky 1888a, 247–248; 1888b, 42). The same is seen in the following:

Spirit is living, and Life is Spirit, and Life and Spirit (*Prakṛiti Puruṣha*) produce all things, but they are essentially one and not two. ... The elements too, have each one its own Yliaster, because all the activity of matter in every form is only an effluvium of the same fount. [...] (‘This doctrine, preached 300 years ago,’ remarks the translator, ‘is identical with the one that has revolutionized modern thought, after having been put into new shape and elaborated by Darwin. It was still more elaborated by Kapila in the Sankhya philosophy’) (Blavatsky 1888a, 284).

In the first quote and in several instances in “The Secret Doctrine” Blavatsky states that Puruṣha mounts on the shoulders of Prakṛiti, or that the two engage in this way as head and body. This is clearly an expression sourced from Monier Williams’ “Hinduism” (1880) where he states:

But although Prakṛiti is the sole originator of creation, yet, according to the pure Sāṃkhya, it does not [...] create at all to any practical purpose unless it comes into union with Puruṣha [...] But each separate soul [...] is a looker on, uniting itself with unintelligent *Prakṛiti*, as a lame man mounted on a blind man’s shoulders [...] (Williams 1880, 197).

Furthermore, Blavatsky might have interpreted the Sāṃkhya as holding to a fundamental unity of Puruṣha and Prakṛiti based on Wilson’s “Vishṇu Purāṇa” when she without making a direct reference, yet with quotation marks in an extensive comparative discussion of the absolute, spirit and matter with Hegel, Fichte, Hartman,

Schelling wrote, “Spirit and Matter, or Purusha and Prakriti are but the two primeval aspects of the One and Secondless” (Blavatsky 1888a, 51). Compared with Wilson, the idea of unity is clearly similar: “This Prakṛiti is, essentially, the same, whether discrete or indiscrete; only that which is discrete is, finally, lost or absorbed by the indiscrete. Spirit {*Purṁ*}, also, which is one, pure, imperishable, eternal, all-pervading, is a portion of that supreme spirit which is all things. [...] Nature (Prakṛiti) [...] and spirit {*Purusha*} [...] both resolve into supreme spirit” (Vishṇu Purāṇa 1864–1877d, 199–200). Here a higher unity of Purusha and Prakriti is indicated, which equally becomes Blavatsky’s interpretation.

The second quote above again clearly demonstrates how not only “western” philosophy but esotericism is integrated with and compared with Asian ideas when Yliaster and the elements from Paracelsus are merged with the discussion of Purusha and Prakriti from Sāṃkhya. This section in Blavatsky’s work was itself derived directly from Franz Hartmann’s study from 1887 of Paracelsus (Hartmann 1887, 43).

YOGA

The word yoga figures quite prominently in “The Secret Doctrine”, but Patañjali (who traditionally is regarded as the composer of the Yoga-Sutras) and the Yoga-Sutras themselves are not mentioned, at all. It was of course not until the twentieth century that the Yoga-Sutras, especially due to Vivekananda’s book “Raja Yoga” (1896), became more well-known and thereafter gained the popularity the text holds today. The Yoga-Sutras had, however, been known to some in the “West” since Henry Thomas Colebrooke and the Theosophical Society actually brought out some of the first translations and publications available to “western” audiences (White 2014, 105–106). In “The Secret Doctrine”, however, yoga is primarily mentioned in relation to Buddhism.

K. T. Telang’s translation of the “Anugītā” and the “Bhagavad-gītā” and Wilson’s “Vishṇu Purāṇa” are among the primary source materials for Hindu yoga. The two words, which Blavatsky used the most in connection with Hindu yoga, are, however, “Raja yoga” and “Taraka yoga”. Blavatsky never connects Raja Yoga with Patañjali’s Yoga, as Vivekananda, for example, did, and generally disregards hatha-yoga, “Hâtha so called was and still is discounted by the Arhats. It is injurious to the health and alone can never develop into Raj Yoga” (Blavatsky 1888a, 95; White 2014, 106–114).

T. Subba Row, the prominent Brahmin theosophist, is Blavatsky's primary source for the "Taraka Raja Yoga" and also for information on the Siddhis or yogic powers (Blavatsky 1888a, 292–293). Row correlates this with Vedanta (Row 2001b, 580–581) and rhetorically claims that the Taraka is actually the most important branch of the "wisdom-religion" itself and that it equally comes from Shambhala (Row 2001b, 581; Row 2001a, 453–454). Tāraka Raja Yoga is not a widely known form of yoga and exactly what it entails does not seem to have been explored further in theosophical literature or in scholarly studies on Blavatsky. In "Five Years of Theosophy" we are told that "*Tāraka Yog*, [is] one of the Brahmanical systems for the development of psychic powers and attainment of spiritual knowledge" (Five Years of Theosophy 1885, 568; Blavatsky 1892, 321). Tāraka means "deliverer" and this yoga form is medieval, also called the secret doctrine and is apparently based on some sort of light phenomena (Feurstein 2002, 435–436; Larson and Bhattacharya 2008, 361, 364, 58–92). The name Taraka does, however, also figure as the name of a Daitya of immense yogic powers (The Vishṇu Purāṇa... 1864–1877b, 69–70; Dowson 1879, 318), both of which Blavatsky seems to have used (Blavatsky 1888b, 382).

Anyhow, based on a long discussion of the classification of principles in man throughout the 1880s with Row (Rudbøg 2012, 377–392), who emphasized its importance, Blavatsky included a diagram of "The Sedentary Division in Different Indian Systems" in "The Secret Doctrine" (Blavatsky 1888a, 157), which includes three schemes including the "Classification in Taraka Raja Yoga." This scheme is discussed in comparison with Blavatsky's "'time-honoured' classification of the trans-Himalyan 'Arhat Esoteric School'" (ibid., 157, 593).

PŪRVA-MĪMĀNSĀ

Blavatsky does not at all mention Pūrva-Mīmāṃsā or Jaimini's "Mīmāṃsā Sūtras" in "The Secret Doctrine" even though she knew of the system when she wrote in "The Theosophical Glossary" "Jaimini (Sk.). A great sage, a disciple of Vyāsa, the transmitter and teacher of the Sama Veda which as claimed he received from his Guru. He is also the famous founder and writer of the Pūrva Mimāṃsā philosophy" (Blavatsky 1892, 162). The philosophy of interpretation, rituals and dharma does not play any significance in theosophy and is also the school to date, which has received the least attention by scholars.

VEDĀNTA

Uttara Mīmāṃsā Vedānta, especially the Advaita Vedānta associated with Sankara is beyond doubt the school of Hindu philosophy which plays the main role in “The Secret Doctrine” in terms of concepts and references used and in the way Vedānta philosophy is integrated into the philosophical esotericism of “The Secret Doctrine”. “[T]he nearest exponent of [...] [the Esoteric Philosophy] is the Vedanta as expounded by the Advaita Vedantists” (Blavatsky 1888a, 55) and Sankaracharya is “the greatest Initiate living in the historical ages” (Blavatsky 1888a, 271) and “the greatest of the Esoteric masters of India” (Blavatsky 1888a, 86). The other two sub-schools of the Uttara Mīmāṃsā Vedānta are not significantly mentioned in “The Secret Doctrine”. Madhva is mentioned elsewhere as a fanatic (Blavatsky 1987, 334–349, 343), and about *Vishishtadvaita* Blavatsky writes in “The Secret Doctrine” that it is “an orthodox and exoteric system, yet fully enunciated and taught in the XIth century (its founder, Ramanujācharya, being born in A.D. 1017)” and that the school is “the most tenaciously anthropomorphic in all India” (Blavatsky 1888a, 132, 522; Bhashyacharya 1887). Both the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad-gīta*, which the Vedānta builds on, are hailed as cornerstones of the secret or Esoteric philosophy and Sankara’s “Vivekachudamani” or “Crest Jewel of Wisdom” is enthusiastically utilized. (“The Secret Doctrine” abounds with references to the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad-Gīta* the main sources being: “The Upanishads”, Part I and Part II, translated by F. Max Müller; “The Bhagavadgītā, with the Sanatsujātiya and the Anugītā”, translated by Kāshināth Trimbak Telang; and Sankaracharya, “The Crest Jewel of Wisdom”, translated by Mohini M. Chatterji. For a more extensive exposition see Spierenburg (1992); and for the *Upanishads* as secret knowledge see Blavatsky (1888a, 269–70)).

Several central concepts related to Vedanta are also discussed and employed, but the limit of this paper does not allow a full discussion – only aspects of one case “Parabrahm”, which serves well as an example of innovation and the comparisons made in the Theosophical frame of finding universal principles of the “Esoteric philosophy” across cultures and other philosophical systems.

The absolute unity of everything in the form of an absolute principle is one of the central philosophical concerns of Blavatsky’s “The Secret Doctrine” and she clearly utilizes concepts and perspectives from *Advaita* in a comparative manner to demonstrate her subtle points. *Parabrahm* is simply, as a “‘Secondless Reality’, the all-inclusive Kosmos” (Blavatsky 1888a, 6).

Parabrahm is, in short, the collective aggregate of Kosmos in its infinity and eternity, the 'that' and 'this' to which distributive aggregates cannot be applied. 'In the beginning this was the Self, one only' (*Aitareya Upanishad*); the great Sankaracharya explains that 'this' referred to the Universe (Jagat) (Blavatsky 1888a, 7; *A Manual of Hindu Pantheism* 1881, 7–8; *The Aphorisms of Sāṅḍilya* 1878, 39, 42).

This is the "Omnipresent, Eternal, Boundless, and Immutable Principle" of the first proposition of "The Secret Doctrine" (Blavatsky 1888a, 14–15), and as Blavatsky states, "The Occultists are, therefore, at one with the Advaita Vedantin philosophers as to the above tenet" (Blavatsky 1888a, 8).

It may also, according to Blavatsky, comparatively "be taken as a representative of the hidden and nameless deities of other nations, this absolute Principle will be found to be the prototype from which all the others were copied" (Blavatsky 1888a, 6).

Blavatsky also compared it with the Cartesian philosophers. She argues that Spinoza's philosophy posed an absolute universal invisible substance similar to *Parabrahm*, but that Leibniz contrarily perceived the universe as constituted by a plurality of substances. In connection with this she however found that "if these two teachings were blended together [...] there would remain as sum total a true spirit of esoteric philosophy in them; the impersonal, attributeless, absolute divine essence which is *no* 'Being', but the root of all being" (Blavatsky 1888a, 629).

The German idealists such as Fichte, Schelling and Hegel and also Hartman are equally brought into the discussion. Here Blavatsky compares and argues, as well, that while their views are similar to the notion of Parabrahm "the Aryan philosophers never endowed the principle, which with them is infinite, with the finite 'attribute' of 'thinking'" (Blavatsky 1888a, 50).

This [discussion] leads the reader to the 'Supreme Spirit' of Hegel and the German Transcendentalists as a contrast that it may be useful to point out. The schools of Schelling and Fichte have diverged widely from the primitive archaic conception of an absolute principle, and have mirrored only an aspect of the basic idea of the Vedanta. Even the 'Absoluter Geist' shadowed forth by von Hartman in his pessimistic philosophy of the Unconscious, while it is, perhaps, the closest approximation made by European speculation to the Hindu Advaitic Doctrines, similarly falls far short of the reality (Blavatsky 1888a, 50).

It is clear that Blavatsky finds similarities between a number of traditions here, but favors Vedanta. The philosophical problem for Blavatsky is, as mentioned, that Hegel and the so-called “European pantheists” connect the absolute principle with consciousness, but according to Blavatsky the absolute must in principle be beyond consciousness at all time. Therefore, “A Vedantin would never admit this Hegelian idea; and the Occultist would say that it applies perfectly to the awakened mahat, the Universal Mind” (Blavatsky 1888a, 50–51). Blavatsky was also aware that similar subtleties about the absolute and its attributes are what distinguish the three main schools of *Vedanta*.

It is on the right comprehension of this tenet in the Brâhmanas and Purânas that hangs, we believe, the apple of discord between the three Vedantin Sects: the Advaita, Dvaita, and the Visishtadvaitas. The first arguing rightly that Parabrahman, having no relation, as the absolute *all*, to the manifested world [...] can neither *will* nor *create*; that, therefore, Brahmâ, Mahat, Iswara, [...] are simply an illusive aspect of Parabrahm in the conception of the conceivers; while the other sects identify the impersonal Cause with the Creator, or Iswara (Blavatsky 1888a, 451, 59n).

Thus Blavatsky clearly made philosophical comparisons in order to find the perceived universal principles of the “Esoteric Philosophy” as seen above, but she also adopted Asian standpoints as well, especially those of *Advaita* as seen in the framing of the quotes.

Before bringing this article to an end, it should, however, be specified that while *Advaita* is preferred to European philosophy and other forms of *Vedanta* on questions of the absolute principle, Blavatsky also in several places still contrasts *Advaita* with the “trans-Himalayan doctrine” of “The Secret Doctrine” indicating that this was the ultimate yardstick for comparisons (Blavatsky 1888a, 62, 136).

CONCLUSION

This article has explored the innovative use of Hindu philosophy in Blavatsky’s “The Secret Doctrine”, an important work in the modern history of esotericism, in which Sāṃkhya and particularly *Advaita Vedanta* came to play the most significant roles of all the six Hindu schools.

It was shown that the use and assimilation of Hindu philosophy was done in an innovative and comparative way in accordance with the pre-established frame of the “Esoteric Philosophy” or “trans-Himalayan teachings” of which “The Secret Doctrine” claims to be an exposition. “The Secret Doctrine” can, at least based on the above as a textual product, be regarded as a product of innovation: (1) in the sense that Hindu philosophy became relevant elements of discussion for the development of occultism and theosophy; (2) in the sense that the identity of “Esoteric Philosophy” was framed in relation to Hindu philosophy; and (3) finally in the sense that concepts from Hindu philosophy were explored, reinterpreted and adopted to be a part of the worldview expressed in “The Secret Doctrine”. Blavatsky’s “Esoteric Philosophy” and the reception of Hindu philosophy was, however, to a great extent mediated through the scholarship and the translations of the time (except for her knowledge derived from T. Subba Row) and fused with pre-established conceptions about “esoteric philosophy”, including the ancient wisdom narrative that had been core to “Western” esotericism. Elements of the Advaita, such as Parabrahm and an associated doctrinal perspective on maya or world illusion especially became a core part of the teachings in “The Secret Doctrine”. “The Secret Doctrine” was thus, as shown above, an innovative work of blending and negotiating numerous concepts from numerous traditions in the frame of Esoteric philosophy in order to establish “Esoteric Philosophy” or the secret doctrine as a universal yardstick. Given the recognized influence Blavatsky had on subsequent esoteric currents, it is fair to say that Hindu philosophy from here on became a recognized part of modern constructions of esotericism and the tradition that is portrayed by “the ancient wisdom narrative”, as it continued into the twentieth century.

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THEOSOPHICAL ANTHROPOLOGY, OR THE SEPTENARY CONSTITUTION OF MAN RECONSIDERED

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ABSTRACT

In "The Secret Doctrine" (1888), Helena P. Blavatsky declares to the astonishment of many readers that man is constituted by seven principles corresponding to the general "septenary" cosmic structure. This clearly represents a shift in comparison with her first major work "Isis Unveiled" (1877), where Blavatsky speaks of the "tripartite man". The change from three to seven principles was irritating not only to her contemporaries, but remained an enigma that evoked debates among later theosophists and their critics. In scholarly analyses, the sevenfold constitution marks the theosophical shift from occident to orient, which is not only geographical, but also doctrinal in nature. However, what has escaped scholarly analysis is the historization of this particular "shift" and its context that lead to the first theosophical book that introduces the sevenfold scheme—namely "Esoteric Buddhism" (1883). The paper shows that this septenary constitution was a result of the historical discursive context and developed in response to ongoing disputes. To this end, the paper will illustrate this concept's genealogy rather than its "sources". Theosophists in India and confidantes of Blavatsky both attempted to circumvent what they claimed to be the esoteric knowledge of occultism. In doing so they addressed and interpreted modern science and spiritualism in equal measure, rejected Christianity, integrated reincarnation and, despite the absence of explicit references, relativized the oriental traditions.

Keywords: Theosophical Society, Helena P. Blavatsky, postcolonialism, orientalism, theosophical anthropology, septenary constitution

INTRODUCTION

In her first two volumes of *"The Secret Doctrine"* (1888a/b), Helena P. Blavatsky holds that man is constituted by seven principles that correspond to the comprehensive outline of the whole cosmos (Blavatsky 1888a, e.g., xxxv ff., 12ff.). This sevenfold or "septenary" structure had gradually been introduced in *"The Theosophist"* from the autumn of 1881 onwards. Discussion in the papers that followed Blavatsky's original publication shows a tone of great astonishment. This sevenfold structure clearly marked a shift when compared to Blavatsky's *"Isis Unveiled"* (1877a/b) and theosophical theorizing of the following years, including the triple nature of man (Blavatsky 1877a, xvi ff., 49, and 67ff.). And the differences between the two books became a subject of irritation to more than her contemporaries, continuing to the present. In scholarly analyses this transformation has been aligned to the theosophical shift from the west to the east, or from occident to orient, because between *"Isis Unveiled"* and *"The Secret Doctrine"* there not only occurred the theosophists' relocation to India in 1879, but also a strong change of emphasis towards what appeared to be "eastern teachings". Indeed, the first theosophical publication introducing the sevenfold nature of man was *"Esoteric Buddhism"* (1883) by Alfred Percy Sinnett (cf. Sinnett 1986)¹. However, the history of this "oriental shift" and the context has hitherto not been analyzed.

Consequently, we will approach the septenary constitution from a different angle than before: this anthropological scheme should be seen as neither the remodeling of old ideas in new terms, nor as the application of an authentic and ancient Indian concept. By tracing the debates and arguments that evoked the emergence of the septenary constitution instead, it becomes clear that this

¹ Alfred P. Sinnett (1840–1921) had been in India since 1872 where he worked as the editor of the renowned colonial newspaper *"The Allahabad Pioneer"*, where he printed the first accounts on Theosophy. He made acquaintance with Blavatsky and Olcott soon after their arrival in India and became one of the leading figures of the early Theosophical Society afterwards. In India, he received the majority of "mahatma letters", which dealt as a foundation for his second book *"Esoteric Buddhism"* (1883). His relationship with Blavatsky was to turn sour after his return to London in 1883. See also Godwin 2013, 16–31.

concept increasingly functioned as a significant theosophical identity marker after October 1881. In the following tangles, different positions in the historic context were discussed, incorporated, meanings (re-)sedimented, and others excluded, and the emergence and transformations of the sevenfold constitution reveal its procedural character and its formative historical framing.

STATE OF RESEARCH

In scholarly accounts, the sevenfold constitution is frequently mentioned or alluded to as a pivotal theosophical doctrine. But it very rarely stands at the centre of focus or appears at least as an independent point of interest. Most scholars identify the sevenfold constitution of the cosmos as a main teaching of “The Secret Doctrine”, but do not delve any further into the topic. One reason for this seems to lie in the common notion that modern theosophy is a distinct expression of *western* esotericism that, despite its “oriental shift”, has a continuous history of *western* concepts or currents with only nominal transformation (in the literal sense) through the reception of oriental terms (Cf. Hanegraaff 1996).² Some scholars, however, attempt to identify the oriental sources of that shift.

Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke emphasizes that modern theosophy is based on Neo-Platonism and its conception of a threefold human being and that the theosophical notions are but clarifications: “*Isis Unveiled* upheld three principles; in later Theosophical texts seven principles” [original emphasis] (Goodrick-Clarke 2007, 9). Yet, in a concise overview of Western Esotericism, Goodrick-Clarke provides an interpretation regarding the history of this change.

The first formal statement of the sevenfold principle in humans was actually published in October 1881 by A. O. Hume [...]. By late 1882, Blavatsky had revised her view in the context of the septenary constitution of humans. (Goodrick-Clarke 2007, 220–221)³

² From a less systematic and more historiographical perspective, Hanegraaff has emphasized the need to maintain the concept of a particularly “western” esotericism (Hanegraaff 2015, 55–91); see further: Godwin 1994, specifically 379f.; Goodrick-Clarke 2008; von Stuckrad 2004; Santucci 2008, 37–63; Partridge 2013, 309–333; Bevir 1994, 747–767; Lubelsky 2012; French 2000.

³ See also: Rudbøg 2013.

This sums up the general tone of the scholarly debate, where the focus lays on the transformation of Blavatsky's thinking that witnessed a "shift of emphasis which divides her career into an early 'hermeticist' period (epitomized by *Isis Unveiled*) and a second *Oriental* one (the manifesto of which is *The Secret Doctrine*)" [original emphasis] (Hanegraaff 1996, 452). But, in this view, the shift is merely one of the terms rather than content: Hindu thought "influenced the Theosophical theory mainly by broadening the spectrum of its sources of reference" (Lubelsky 2012, 120). As we shall see in greater detail below, "*Isis Unveiled*" presents man as composed of three elements, while the later sevenfold scheme is consequently held to be indebted to the oriental shift. For Jeffrey Lavoie, this "would demarcate Theosophy from Spiritualism" (Lavoie 2012, 190) after the septenary constitution was firstly published in the article "Fragments of Occult Truth" (henceforth "Fragments"), and more systematically in "Esoteric Buddhism" (Cf. Lavoie 2012, 196–203). But on this view the demarcation was mostly rhetorical, and the early Theosophical Society "could in fact have been considered a Spiritualist organization" (Ibid. 363).⁴ What is more, the "Fragments" and "Esoteric Buddhism" represent, for Lavoie, Blavatsky's thinking while the roles of the actual authors are insignificant.

The sevenfold anthropology itself has received specific attention in only a few scholarly accounts. Jörg Wichmann is one exception to describe the theosophical anthropology regarding its oriental sources. Unfortunately, the author confines his article to later theosophical works and his interpretation of the orient falls prey to (Saidian) orientalism (Said 2003)⁵ and grants little insight into the historical debate (Wichmann 1983, 12–13). Julie Chajes (then Hall) takes an historical perspective and inquiries into the origin of the sevenfold constitution or *saptaparṇa* (Skt. *saptaparṇa*). She identifies a handful of different actors in the discourse about the septenary scheme, among whom Tallapragada Subba Row (1850–1890) holds a prominent position (Hall 2007, 19f.; Chajes 2019, 77–87). He occurs as a *vedānta* (Skt. *vedānta*) specialist in these discussions, who initially promoted

⁴ Rudbørg interprets theosophy directly opposed to Lavoie and takes a "longe durée" position in his argument: Blavatsky was concerned with so many topics and sources older than spiritualism that this "new occultism" cannot be seen as a variation of spiritualism (Rudbørg 2013, 357).

⁵ For an updated view on the debate with a specific focus on India see: King 1999; for a discussion of Said and his critics see: Young 2001, 383ff.; Conrad et al. 2013.

the sevenfold constitution, but eventually rejected the concept along with most of Blavatsky's theosophy after 1886 (Cf. Eek 1965, 665–667). Chajes concludes that the majority of Blavatsky's known sources – eastern as well as western – are based on the assumption of man as a triune being and consequently “it appears that the *saptaparna* originated with Theosophy despite its debt to Western esoteric and Eastern traditions” (Hall⁶ 2007, 21). Still, according to Chajes, Blavatsky integrated “Eastern religious Ideas” (which, unfortunately, remain unexplained in this account), and “her mature Theosophy as presented in her magnum opus *The Secret Doctrine* (1888) expanded it [the threefold constitution; UH] to seven” [original emphasis] (Hall 2007, 5). Moreover, James Santucci reaches at the heart of the matter in his editorial note in the “Theosophical History Journal” where Chajes' account is published, stating that even though the sevenfold constitution “may be considered the central teaching of theosophy [...] there is little certainty regarding the origins of this teaching” (Santucci 2007, 1). The reason for this, he explains, is owed in part to the unresolved question of the identity of the occult masters of Blavatsky, the *mahatmas*. They allegedly provided their knowledge to her and a small circle of confidantes through their letters and were most prominently received by Hume and Sinnett.

INTERIM CONCLUSION

The history of the Theosophical Society is frequently reconstructed along the following lines⁷: In the course of theosophy's “oriental shift”, Blavatsky transformed and expanded the threefold being of “Isis Unveiled” to a sevenfold one, which corresponds to the universal cosmic structure of sevens. Between “Isis Unveiled” and “The Secret Doctrine” there not only occurred the physical move to India, but a simultaneous turn to eastern or “Asian” teachings became apparent. In recent research, the septenary constitution is seen as a pivotal step in this “oriental shift” and is furthermore valued as a central theosophical doctrine. Owing to the terms used to name the principles and corresponding concepts which are predominantly taken

⁶ Now Chajes. The word *saptaparna* is given in “The Secret Doctrine”, but it does not seem to be used in the debates analysed in this paper.

⁷ There is an increasing number of notable exceptions, but they are not concerned with the septenary constitution so far (cf. Krämer and Strube 2020; Aspren and Strube 2021; Bergunder 2014, 398–426; Chajes 2021, 27–60; Harlass 2017, 164–186; Harlass 2020, 179–215).

from Sanskrit, it is plausible to assume that this shift refers to South Asian source material.

Two consequences arise from these assumptions: firstly, there must have been a reception of Indian scriptures that constituted the basis of the new teachings, most prominently the *saptaparna*. Secondly, these new teachings were expressions of Blavatsky's thinking which she "clothed" in oriental garments. Unfortunately, as of now, the obscurity of her sources persists and no Indian scriptures could be found containing anything close to the septenary constitution. What is more, it remains unclear how the concept of the sevenfold man and cosmic structure developed and what historical debates shaped, transformed, and caused it to "sediment" besides its first literary precipitation in "Esoteric Buddhism". What remains open is the question: Why did this shift occur? We will not be concerned with the source(s) of these teachings or the authors of the Mahatma Letters here. Instead, we will outline a portion of the *origin* (or *Entstehung*) of the septenary constitution and the prominent concept of reincarnation in the obvious phase of the shift, from the early 1880s until the publication of "Esoteric Buddhism" in 1883.

After a short glimpse into "Isis Unveiled", we will pursue the leads in the historic debate about the septenary constitution. Starting with its first occurrence, we will follow its development to its systematic description in "Esoteric Buddhism", concluding with a summary of the main discursive strands bound together in the book. In doing so, we hope to underline that an examination of the (empirical) historical discussion yields a better understanding of both, the conceptions of orient and occident, and the early history of the Theosophical Society with its central concepts. This is not to say that the analysis of possible source-materials does not grant important insights; on the contrary, this remains a central academic task nevertheless. Historicizing the debate shows that there has not been one single discrete set of doctrines which was gradually revealed to the public, and that, despite its explicitly oriental layout, the septenary constitution bears less of the oriental traits than one might expect. What rather comes to the fore is a process of negotiation of meaning(s). This process continued or, to put it more theoretically, reiterated and reshaped meanings that were already present in the discourse. Reconfigurations of known elements, by the very act of their reiteration, sedimented and thus constituted meaning. This process, at the same time, allowed for transformation, the appearance and the gradual sedimentation of new meanings (Cf. Butler 1995, 35–58; Sarasin 2003, 31ff.).

“ISIS UNVEILED” AND THE THREEFOLD MAN

Although a hard and ambivalent read, Blavatsky in “Isis Unveiled” generally accepts the threefold division of man. In formulating her critique of spiritualism, she rejects the possibility of materialization during séances, but otherwise accepts the spiritualist phenomena. These could be disembodied spirits, spirits of dead animals or *elementals* (e.g., Blavatsky 1877a, 69–70). Blavatsky deliberately emphasizes India’s importance for the universally accepted idea of the trinity of man with the Hindu *trimurti* (Skt. *trimūrti*) of *brahma*, which was fundamental for later traditions in other world regions. One of many examples, the *trimurti* was appropriated by Pythagoras in his famous triad and the concept prevails in humanity’s most ancient traditions (Blavatsky 1877a, xvi–xvii).

Reincarnation, understood as the “succession of physical human births upon this planet” (Ibid., 345), is a trickier case. This form of rebirth is declared almost impossible and unnatural. But it is hard to identify a coherent system as Blavatsky abruptly moves from one topic to another, and at times seems to accept reincarnation in the above sense when she talks about Buddha, the Dalai Lama and other reincarnated teachers (Ibid., 437–439). Still, the sections explicitly dealing with reincarnation are unmistakable: it *is* said to be possible in very few exceptional cases, and it only takes place on this planet. As soon as reason is developed in the newborn person, “there is no reincarnation on this earth, for the three parts of the triune man have been united together” (Ibid., 351, cf. 179; Blavatsky 1877b, 152). Furthermore, in “Isis Unveiled” there is no septenary principle to be found and like the above example, key sections rely on the threefold constitution. Nevertheless both, reincarnation and the threefold man, appeared to be contradicted in statements after 1880, evoking harsh criticism and disputes with their contemporaries for Blavatsky and her fellows.⁸ The sevenfold constitution was introduced and developed and the succeeding disputes and the view on reincarnation changed.

⁸ The meaning of reincarnation is ambiguous in “Isis Unveiled”, but the critical passages are unequivocal. Chajes closely examines this book and notes that, when read against the background of Blavatsky’s understanding of metempsychosis, the case becomes clearer. Blavatsky distinguishes metempsychosis, where the spiritual portion of man progresses through successive existences, and reincarnation, where man is reborn on earth again. Blavatsky

CONFUSION OVER “ISIS UNVEILED” – THEN AND NOW

Disagreement about the meaning of “Isis Unveiled” was frequent after its publication. Stainton Moses (1839–1892) thus welcomed “The Occult World” in order to provide necessary clarifications in 1881. He hoped for an exposition of the relation of theosophy and spiritualism, information about the mysterious adepts, and explanations about the phenomena. Moses, who was not only a theosophist, but also a famous London spiritualist medium and seer, and editor of the London spiritualist journal “Light”, assumed that with “The Occult World” “eventually evidence was gathered” (Moses 1881, 194). Disappointment soon followed, however, as Sinnett mostly describes Blavatsky’s feats with little formal argument in his book and relies on “Isis Unveiled” for explanations, including man as a threefold being (Cf. Sinnett 1881, 15ff.; 153ff.). In “The Occult World”, he ascribes the phenomena that were so famously featured in spiritualism to the agency of Blavatsky and the help of her Tibetan masters. Nevertheless, only little information is actually given on them in the book.

The debate about the phenomena, along with discussions over their character and value was common in contemporary papers and journals, particularly “Light” and the short lived “Spiritualist Newspaper” on the spiritualist side, and “The Theosophist” which addressed a more general, though mostly theosophical readership; in many cases both positions were inseparable (Oppenheim 1985, 42ff.).⁹ Moses had received messages from his *spirit guide* Imperator+ for years, which he published as “Spirit Identity” and “Spirit Teachings” and in a succession of letters in “Light” (Cf. Moses 1879; Moses 1894). He was one of the earliest theosophists and had known Olcott since 1875, trying to reconcile spiritualism and theosophy for years until he eventually withdrew his membership and turned away from the Society – mostly due to quarrels with Blavatsky and suspicions of fraud against her (Cf. Godwin 2013, 292ff.; Lavoie 2012, 77ff.).

was heavily criticized for these passages in the debate discussed below (see further: Chajes 2012, 128–150). More recently, Chajes also sees a deliberate change in Blavatsky’s attitude towards reincarnation – as we shall see below (Chajes 2017, 65–93; Chajes 2019; see also Blavatsky 1877a, 67ff.).

⁹ For the global scope of communication on the “occult” see: Green 2015, 383–393; Lavoie 2012.

Charles Carleton Massey (1838–1905), another of Olcott’s old friends and a fellow theosophist (Cf. Lavoie 2015), was interested in both movements as well, and in July 1881 called for moderation in the ongoing debate (Harrison 1881, 8). But the conflicts over the scope and value of the spiritualist explanations lay much deeper. As we have seen, “Isis Unveiled” aimed critically at spiritualism, and in the spiritualist papers theosophy and its concepts and theories were frequently discussed. Commonly the correspondents did not take issue with the combination of spiritualism and theosophy or occultism. But many wondered whether the notorious theosophical adepts were actually spirits themselves or rather mediums from the East. And not few thought of Blavatsky as a medium herself, although they often commented polemically on her abilities, which they perceived as “mere child’s play through her powerful mediumship” (Ibid., 14). Consequently, when systematic attempts emerged to explain spiritualist phenomena by means of the sevenfold constitution, the temperature of the debate ran high.

SPIRITUALISM AND THE OCCULT TEACHINGS

“The Theosophist’s” subtitle may be paradigmatic for its preoccupation with spiritualism, insofar as it names its concern with “Oriental Philosophy, Art, Literature, and Occultism: Embracing Mesmerism, Spiritualism, and other Secret Sciences” (Blavatsky 1880). Strikingly, the journal’s subtitle strengthened the connection with spiritualism and contemporary debates on the connection of religion and science (Cf. Bergunder 2016, 86–141). The British civil servant and theosophist Allan Octavian Hume (1829–1912) particularly related to spiritualism when he introduced the septenary constitution of man for the first time in his “Fragments of Occult Truth” (henceforth “Fragments”) in October 1881 (Blavatsky 1882, 17–22).

Hume, like Sinnett, was receiving letters, presumably from the Tibetan masters Koot Hoomi and Morya, who were both elaborating on the occult sciences. The two Englishmen, in turn, replied with manifold inquiries and criticism before they published condensed and restructured accounts of their correspondence in the “Fragments” and several other articles. Here, the two developed the occult teachings in response to ongoing disputes and they clearly addressed spiritualist positions. Thus, the “Fragments” constitute a nodal point in relating theosophy and spiritualism through the discussion of the sevenfold nature of man. Nevertheless, by the time “Esoteric Bud-

dhism" was published in 1883, there had arisen at least five systems of nomenclatures.

Hume depicted the sevenfold scheme in the first "Fragments" in order to explain the impossibility of human spirits' appearance at séances. With "The Theosophist's" wide readership and its spiritualist leanings in mind, Hume refers to previous correspondence of William H. Terry's (1836–1913), a spiritualist, member of the Theosophical Society and editor of the Australian "Harbinger of Light" (Eek 1965, 164–165).¹⁰ Terry argued that both the given facts and two decades of his own experience had proven to him that spiritualist phenomena were caused by disembodied spirits. Further evidence, in his view, recently came from India, which hinted at the reports of Blavatsky's abilities and "The Occult World" (Blavatsky 1882, 17). Hume responded that the spiritualist phenomena were caused by lifeless shells, lingering remains of the lower principles that were cast off after physical death. Only the lasting entity, the spiritual Ego, continued its progression through rebirth into a higher world (*Ibid.*, 18–19). Apparitions at séances were not dead persons, continued Hume against Terry's spiritualism, and their utterings were only remnants of the person's past existence and its volition. Consequently, the phenomena did not possess the "spirit identity" that the audiences perceived (*Ibid.*, 20), and Hume's wording clearly referred to the wider spiritualist discourse in contemporary papers (e.g., Moses 1881, 156). He even asserted that attempts to communicate with spirits were harmful and that the easier the contact – or *rapport* – could be established, the less pure or refined must have been their living predecessors.

With the "Fragments", the general tone and the theosophical narrative for the unfolding debate was set. Spiritualists, according to theosophical criticism, witnessed genuine phenomena, but their explanations were incorrect, while the occult theories of the Tibetan adepts provided the only correct elucidation. Occultism, then, substituted the seven principles for the trinity of man. Subba Row (1856–1890), Blavatsky's informant on the "esoteric Hindu teaching" (Godwin 1994, 329) argued in this vein as well when he denounced mediumism as "wicked sorcery". Here, the concept of the sevenfold constitution came as the property of Brahmanism and Buddhism (Blavatsky 1882, 93–98) – as we will see below. While many points

¹⁰ *The Harbinger of Light. A Monthly Journal Devoted to Zoistic Science, Free Thought, Spiritualism, and the Harmonial Philosophy.* Melbourne, 1870.

remained unclear to the readers, the idea of a larger number of principles extending the known tripartite division was tentatively accepted and some even easily integrated the new knowledge of man into their spiritualist concepts. A. F. Tindall assumed Blavatsky and her adepts might even help to “originate a better method of conducting our séances” (Moses 1881, 390).

In any case, there were several reasons for the general reluctance to accept the sevenfold scheme as a detailing of spiritualist theorizing. Theosophical rejection of disembodied spirits clearly posed a threat to spiritualist reasoning, while a long running debate on reincarnation (Cf. Godwin 1994, 340f.; Zander 1999, 472–498) and the strong theosophical condemnation of Christianity (Cf. Oppenheim 1985, 63–110; Owen 2004, 40–49) were ambiguously received at best, as was the new focus on the Orient. Although these aspects might have been embraced separately, the acceptance of the whole combination seems as exclusive to the theosophists in India as was their alleged contact with the Tibetan adepts. Moreover, their lack of credibility was common knowledge to virtually everyone outside of Blavatsky’s circle. Doubts about the existence of the *mahatmas*, the originality of Blavatsky’s powers, and often her credibility were challenged altogether (Cf. Lavoie 2012, 249–354). The theosophists did not temper their criticism either, and attempts to reconcile spiritualism and theosophy evoked even stronger defenses and fostered more detailed explanations of the mistakes of the former.

William Oxley (1823–1905) proclaimed his own combination of eastern and western wisdom in his adaption of the “Bhagavad Gita” (Skt. *bhagavad gītā*) in “The Philosophy of Spirit” (1881) (Cf. Oxley 1881; Bergunder 2006, 187–216). After a critical review in “The Theosophist” in December 1881 (Blavatsky 1882, 62–64), a dispute unfolded, particularly with Subba Row. Not only did Oxley maintain that his ideas and the occult teachings from the “Fragments” were “in perfect accord” (Ibid., 151), but he also referred to the seven principles of man and suggested that Indian scriptures ought to be interpreted and understood with Böhme and Swedenborg, which was an “absurd” suggestion in Blavatsky’s opinion (Ibid., 300). Row, in May 1882, retorted that Oxley had not understood the Indian traditions at all, particularly the idea of “seven entities in man” and denied Oxley the right to speak for the Indian tradition (and thus for esoteric knowledge as a whole) (Ibid., 192). Oxley then introduced the concept of hierosophy, rather than theosophy, as an approach to spiritual progress, for the latter’s requirements were “so hopelessly beyond attainment” (Ibid., 300). In hierosophy, the human being

was constituted by twelve envelopes in four degrees, rather than the sevenfold constitution.

Blavatsky's tone towards Oxley and the spiritualists in general was not least a factor in the growing wariness about theosophy too, as her often polemical remarks were widely noticed. William Harrison openly expressed his anger about theosophical attacks (Moses 1881, 194), as did eventually Stainton Moses. While in June 1881, he called his readers to be "tolerant with divergent opinions" (Harrison 1882, 4–5; Moses 1881) and to consider the theosophical theories in an impartial light, in the course of the year, he became increasingly skeptical as the harsh tone, the credibility of the theosophical explanations and the lack of evidence concerning the adepts seriously disturbed him. In late 1882, he appeared altogether disenchanted with occult reasoning, and drew a final conclusion: "I ceased to take any active part in the London Society [...] and have during this year resigned my membership" (Moses 1882, 537).

During the second half of 1882, the theosophists reacted with a deliberate change of theorizing – and defense. They struck a blow with a series of articles that touched directly upon the critique demonstrated above. These articles elaborated on "occult" teachings and endeavored to eliminate the vagueness of their theory by amassing further details of their doctrine. The authors aimed at theosophical debates too, frequently addressing spiritualist theosophists such as William Terry, George Wyld or Francesca Arundale, and, of course, Moses and Massey. Moreover, Subba Row kept fighting with Oxley and wrote a series of accounts on *vedanta* and "Aryan" esotericism. Around the same time, Hume published the third part of the "Fragments" and reinforced the rejection of disembodied spirits against the background of the sevenfold constitution, while also refuting Terry's insistence of his spiritualist convictions (Blavatsky 1882, 307–314), Sinnett referred to both, the accounts of Row and Hume, and proclaimed occultism "a higher sort of spiritualism" (Ibid., 293). Thus, for Sinnett too, the doctrines of the Tibetan adepts concerning the phenomena and spiritualism were reconcilable and "the only difference as regards this part of their science, between them and the best spiritual medium is that they know what they are about" (Ibid., 294). Nevertheless, the Indian theosophists claimed exclusive access to esoteric truth which was based on the septenary constitution of man. And more precisely, in spite of its universal reach, this truth came via the orient.

EAST AND WEST

The reports of Blavatsky and Olcott in India in 1879 attracted immediate attention and accounts of their travels were printed in papers of different genres in India and Europe. For the spiritualists, not only did the phenomena which Blavatsky claimed to bring about in her “Manifestations in the Far East” (Harrison 1881, 13–14) become an issue. Spiritualists also discussed the general value of eastern teachings for spiritualism, bearing a vast amount of orientalist undertones. On the one hand, distrust and rejection of the theosophical doctrines abounded, not least because “Hindoo mystification acting on Western credulity brought out the Theosophical Society. [But] from an inflated people comes no salvation” (Harrison 1881, 45). Similarly degrading attitudes occurred among authors who connected spiritualism with Christianity, opposing the “monstrous creations of Oriental mythology” (Moses 1881, 222). On the other hand, the possibility of access to “eastern” wisdom appeared attractive and tempting, as we have already seen in the quote from Tindall above. Bringing together spiritualism with “oriental” knowledge, an anonymous author suggested that the spiritualists should follow eastern sages, as “Fakirs, talapoins [Buddhist “clergy”; the author], lamas or Yogis [...] have passed the dangerous threshold of physical mediumship” (Ibid., 120). Imagining the orient in this context thus ranged from romanticization and exoticism to colonial or European hubris – in each case, the orient was represented as one’s mysterious other (Cf. van der Veer 2001, particularly chapters three and four, 55–105; King 1999).

Regarding the sevenfold constitution, the eastern focus is particularly pertinent, for its oriental affiliation was explicit. The given systems of nomenclature listed (mostly) Sanskrit vocabulary, explanations referred to Hindu or Buddhist teachings and the line between eastern and western lore was drawn in increasingly bold strokes. While Hume named only three out of seven principles in Sanskrit (second: *jīvatma* [Skt. *jīvātmā*], third: *linga sarīra* [*līṅga śarīra*], fourth: *kamarūpa* [*kāma rūpa*]) (Blavatsky 1882, 17–22), other designations emerged in Row and Blavatsky (Ibid., 292–294), and the first attempt of Sinnett to grasp the oriental designations in January 1882 shows an entirely different scheme with Tibetan wording (Barker 1973, 376–382).¹¹

¹¹ The historical contextualization of this case offers remarkable insights on the wider orientalist context, which I will have to postpone to elsewhere. Sinnett gave separate principles for man and the cosmos and relied on (unclear) Tibetan vocabulary in this early sketch from January 1882. In my view, one can see the theosophical reception of (early) orientalist works here.

In "Esoteric Buddhism", Sinnett finally names all the seven in Sanskrit and English, omitting the former Tibetan vocabulary (Sinnett 1883, 20f.). Obviously, the exact nomenclature or even the literary origin of these principles appeared secondary and the mere assertion of the seven principles as opposed to other systems must have been the dominant aim.

In this process the exclusivism of theosophical access to esoteric truth was further corroborated by the use of allegedly oriental terms and in contradistinction to the west. Hume introduced his response to Terry by underscoring the fact that his explanations were "almost wholly unknown to Western nations" (Blavatsky 1882, 18), something which he further emphasized in the second "Fragments", by holding that intellectually capable spiritualists "will accept the aid of that nobler illumination which the elevated genius and untiring exertion of Occult Sages of the East have provided" (Ibid., 160). Sinnett repeatedly rang the same bell and critically reviewed Kingsford and Maitland's "The Perfect Way" by preaching against the authors' (and readers') ignorance "for want of knowledge [...] of modern Western thinkers" (Ibid., 234). Nevertheless, in "Light" in August 1882, he omitted the degradation of the west or spiritualism when he mentioned "true science [...] the accumulated knowledge of a vast number of thinkers" (Moses 1882, 412).

By this time, however, the discussion had begun to turn against the Indian theosophists. Moses prefaced Sinnett's above mentioned letter considered "the evidence weak to the extreme" (Ibid.). Kingsford and Maitland, although in the midst of spiritualist critique too, gained popularity with similar claims concerning esotericism, but with greater openness towards Christianity. And a debate regarding *discrepancies* had flared up since June 1882 that had begun with a challenge of the inconsistencies between the affirmation of "disembodied spirits" in "Isis Unveiled" and their rejection in the "Fragments" (Blavatsky 1882, 225–226). Now, a pivotal facet of the contemporary discussions was included in the discord over the (septenary) constitution of man, one that has been regarded a central theme in the theosophical turn to the east: reincarnation.

REINCARNATION

As "the reincarnation debate was a hardy perennial of spiritualism, rising and falling every decade or so" (Godwin 1994, 340), it seems that it was only a matter of time until this would come up in the esoteric teachings of the theosophists in Indian. But the statements

concerning reincarnation are ambivalent, even contradictory in the eyes of the critics. Chajes has argued in favor of consistent theorizing of theosophical reincarnation. Theosophical implicitly meaning Blavatsky here, Chajes argues that the new theories that developed in and from the “Fragments” onwards were consistent with earlier statements of Blavatsky. Other interlocutors basically facilitated the transition between Blavatsky’s major works: “In short, the ideas Hume outlined had elements in common with those of both Blavatsky’s earlier and later periods” (Chajes 2019, 33). And this later period comprised the shift from the tripartite anthropology to the septenary one, and from metempsychosis to reincarnation. “Presumably, Blavatsky found her later doctrine of reincarnation more appealing than the metempsychosis theory she had discarded around 1882” (Ibid., 85). Around midyear 1882, contradictory theosophical statements appeared. Sinnett, reviewing “The Perfect Way”, maintained the rebirth of the spiritual Ego – the individuality – into a new *personality*, a new set of lower principles. He therefore stressed that “re-incarnation, in the next higher objective world, is one thing; re-incarnation on this earth is another. Even that takes place over and over again” (Blavatsky 1882, 234). As a result, many readers were left confused as Blavatsky had apparently rejected rebirth on earth in “Isis Unveiled”. In their replies Kingsford and Maitland declared to represent *esoteric* knowledge themselves, combining eastern and western knowledge, but arriving at a fourfold constitution of man (Ibid., 295–296; Moses 1882, 127–128, 168–170). Conversely, Blavatsky accused them of a lack of understanding of the sevenfold constitution, spawning the idea of “retrogression in rebirth” (Blavatsky 1883, 10–11). The intricate discussions about the exact place of rebirth, the relation of ascent and descent in reincarnation, and other aspects do not need to concern us here. What is crucial is the application of the sevenfold constitution as the foundation of the theosophical theories.

Turning against the alleged discrepancies, Blavatsky argued that reincarnation on earth is indeed possible and that there is no contradiction with former statements, which have been merely preliminary tasters of the teachings now made public. Even though she rejected again spirits understood as the souls of the dead, she explicitly adopted reincarnation of the upper principles (Blavatsky 1882, 225–226). The dispute continued well into the following year with the Indian theosophists gradually adjusting their position – which still did not satisfy their critics. Charles Massey sought to expose the ambiguities with minute inquiries (Moses 1882, 323) and after some to-and-froing austerely concludes a “desire to see it

cleared" (Ibid.). The theosophists even lost their prominent author Hume in September 1882, who had written extensively on the subject in the third installment of the "Fragments" (Blavatsky 1882, 307–314), but eventually became frustrated himself with the occult uncertainties. After a raging letter in "The Theosophist" he was dismissed from his theosophical duties (Ibid., 324–326).

Subba Row held the most prominent position for the "eastern" or explicitly "oriental" side, particularly as he could claim to represent the Indian position by virtue of his own background.¹² In February 1883, he again emphasized the impossibility of *western science* to gain a comprehensive understanding of the universe as it was unable to understand the relation of mind and matter, "[n]or is it likely to solve the mystery hereafter, unless it calls Eastern occult science to its aid" (Blavatsky 1883, 105). He held that the septenary constitution of the human being and the universe had already been recognized by the "great Adwaitee philosophers of ancient Aryavarta" (Ibid.; Blavatsky 1882, 94) even though he admitted differences as to the exact number of principles. Accordingly, all matter proved to be a mere illusion under the impressions of the only real entity – mind or *purush* (Skt. *puruṣa*), the *parabrahman* (Skt. *parabrahman*) in *advaita vedanta* (Blavatsky 1883, 105). On several occasions, Row elaborated on *advaita* and defended the seven principles in theosophical concepts, although he was to change his mind drastically by 1886 (Cf. Hall 2007, 19f.; Eek 1965, 661–673). But in the early 1880s, he fulfilled the role of the Indian advocate of occultism and Blavatsky knew "no better authority in INDIA in anything, concerning the esotericism of the Advaita philosophy" (Blavatsky 1883, 118).

As Sinnett replaced Hume as author of the "Fragments", he consequently elaborated on the septenary constitution, reincarnation, and the general outline of occult teachings. His statements considered virtually all the topics we have discussed here (Cf. particularly Blavatsky 1883, 132–37). Passages from these accounts would enter "Esoteric Buddhism" which he drafted on his way home to London, enabling him to respond to the disputes outlined above. The sevenfold nature of man now served as a legitimizing tool for the occult teachings of the Tibetan adepts. This focus was mainly directed against spiritualist theories about spirits, against their explanations of mediumism and the whole spiritualist endeavor. Further-

¹² For a brief introduction to Row and his conversations with Blavatsky and her later concept of the Divine see: Chajes 2021.

more, Christianity was addressed in several ways, predominantly in a polemical spirit.

Reincarnation, according to Sinnett's final explanations, meant rebirth on earth or higher spheres in a new personality, while the individuality or spiritual Ego persisted and continued its evolutionary course. The systematic depiction of the occult teachings was clearly a response to the controversy about theosophical *discrepancies* and the concepts of Kingsford and Maitland. In "Esoteric Buddhism", Sinnett would present the full designations of the principles he had introduced in the "Fragments" shortly before. In so doing, he further corroborated the exclusivity of occultism, excluding western knowledge and drawing upon an obscure (and fluid) nomenclature, a "Theosophical hybrid Sanskrit" (Hammer 2004, 123). And he presented a concept that came to be seen as a central teaching of theosophy to the present.

CONCLUSION

We have examined the emergence of the systematic sevenfold anthropology in theosophical theorizing. Departing from both the predominant focus on Blavatsky's "thinking" and the assumption that Sanskrit designations, concepts of reincarnation and so on are essentially eastern or oriental, we rather historicized the debates leading to the first systematic articulation of that concept in "Esoteric Buddhism". The historical debate suggests that the emergence of the sevenfold constitution of man was to a surprisingly small degree a reception of Asian scriptures, its religious thought or eastern wisdom (whatever that may be), but rather instead a reaction to and intervention into the historic debates and quarrels in the "esoteric" field of discourse. The ongoing rejection of spiritualism was obvious following the introduction of the septenary constitution, and after alleged discrepancies with "Isis Unveiled", it became the focal point in theosophical theorizing.

But it would be too simple to argue that these points were mostly directed against spiritualism on its own terms. A clear distinction between spiritualism and theosophy or, for that matter, occultism, cannot be drawn from the historical context. Blavatsky's camp, as it were, exuded a strenuous effort to defend and legitimize this specific distinction in a bid to undermine attempts to combine spiritualism and theosophy, and to mark out the latter by its establishment of both a specifically occult doctrine and an exclusivity of access to it through (the Tibetan adepts') eastern lore. The interchangeable

terms of the seven principles, the “hot topics” of the contentions, and not least the lack of extended engagement with discussants from India or Asian background at all, corroborate the conclusion that there was less “orient” in this debate than both the historical self-perception (and representation), as well as present day research, would suggest. Several questions remain to be addressed in future research. That is, for example, the emergence of the specific names of the seven principles, the controversial status of the *mahatmas*, and in particular further influences on and (local) interlocutors of the theosophists beyond those immediate debates we have attempted to elucidate above.

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RUSSIAN ESOTERICISM OF THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY AND KABBALAH

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ABSTRACT

In the early twentieth century, after a long break caused by the governmental and church restrictions and persecution, there was an explosion of interest in esotericism in the Russian Empire. At that time, there was a number of occult groups of different schools and affiliations acting throughout Russia. The teachings, practices and rituals of these groups were syncretic and combined elements borrowed from European occultism, Freemasonry, Martinism and Rosicrucianism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Sufism, as well as from Jewish Kabbalah. The article discusses the place of Kabbalah – both Jewish and in its occult version – in Russian occultism of the early twentieth century. In the center of the analysis is the teaching of one of the leaders of the Russian esotericists and the most reputed occultist of the first third of the twentieth century Gregory Moebes (1868–1930/34), the head of the Russian branch of the Martinist Order and the leading figure of the Russian neo-Rosicrucianism. Since the heritage of Russian occultists of that time was not only not studied, but also not described, the author had to undertake a deep search in the archives. The article is partly based on the analysis of the manuscripts discovered by its author, their deciphering, as well as comparative historical and textual study. After discussing the place of Moebes in the history of Russian esotericism, special attention is paid to the interpretation of Kabbalah in his writings. As it turns out, some Kabbalistic concepts, borrowed mainly from the “Book of Creation” (“Sefer Yezirah”), the “Book of Splendour” (“Sefer ha-Zohar”) and the Lurian Kabbalah, played a crucial role in its interpretation of the Tarot arcane. As shown in the article, it was in the version of Moebes that Russian occultism of the early twentieth century became known outside Russia after the communist coup of 1917.

Keywords: Russia, occultism, Martinism, Kabbalah, Sefirot, Tarot, Mouni Sadhu

INTRODUCTION: REVIVAL OF ESOTERICISM IN RUSSIA AND KABBALAH

The esoteric movement in Russia was experiencing a period of rapid take-off in the early twentieth century. In two capitals, St. Petersburg and Moscow, as well as in many cities of the empire, groups and circles were formed, engaged in the study of secret knowledge and occult practices. Numerous periodicals were published on the study of occult knowledge and supernatural abilities and forces. Many Russian esoteric groups and schools considered Kabbalah in its occult version, along with magic and alchemy, one of the main parts of the perennial esoteric tradition and developed special courses on its study.

Some of these groups appreciated highly Kabbalah and its occult interpretations were ideologically and sometimes even directly connected with European esoteric institutions, like *Ordre Martiniste*, headed by Papus (Introvigne 2005; Serkov 2000, 67–84), *L'Ordre Kabbalistique de la Rose+Croix* (McIntosh 1998, 85–96), *Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn* (Howe 1972; Gilbert 2005), etc. These, to say, kabbalistically inclined occultists grouped round the publishing house “Izida” (Isis, 1909–1916) and a monthly magazine of the same name, where many classical works of Christian and occult Kabbalah had been published, including Agrippa of Nettesheim, Heinrich Khunrath, Lenain, Saint-Yves d’Alveidre, Papus, and even Erich Bischoff, a popular German interpreter of Kabbalah (Antoshevsky 1911).

Probably the most significant group of esotericists, interested in Kabbalah, was formed around Gregory Moebes (1868–1934), the head of the Russian branch of *Ordre Martiniste* and one of the most authoritative Russian theorists of the occult doctrine. Moebes’ views and his work will be examined in detail below. Other important groups of that type were the “*Obshchestvo vozrozhdeniia chistogo znaniia*” [Society for the Revival of Pure Knowledge] (1916) and the “*Martinezist Order*” [a branch of the Martinist Order], both founded by Maria A. Nesterova (Erlanger, 1878 – after 1932), Moebes’s wife and close associate. A special group for intensive theoretical and practical training, “*Gruppa Prometeia*” [The Promethean Group], which was strictly closed to the uninitiated, was set up within the latter order. During the Civil War (1918–1922), Moebes and his col-

leagues gave a lecture course for their closest followers in the context of this group. The lectures concerned the doctrine of the Kabbala (Moebes), the history of religion (Nesterova) and the history of Freemasonry. The last course was taught by Boris Astromov-Kirichenko (1883 – after 1941), a lawyer, occultist, and freemason. Astromov was one of the leaders of several Russian esoteric organizations in the 1910–1920s and later actively collaborated with the Soviet secret services. Despite this, he was arrested and convicted three times (1926, 1928, 1940) and probably died in prison (Nikitin 2005, 16–30; Brachev 1991, 253–256; Brachev 2007, 10–72). In addition to theoretical lectures, the leaders of the group also held practical training sessions in telepathy and psychometrics, as well as collective meditations (Burmistrov 2011, 58).

Another important representative of Russian esotericism at the beginning of the twentieth century was Vladimir Shmakov (1887?–1929), a Russian intuitionist philosopher and creator of a sophisticated esoteric doctrine (“pneumatology”), leaning toward the new-Rosicrucian tradition. In his books, especially in the first one, “The Sacred Book of Thoth”, devoted to the interpretation of Tarot arcana, Shmakov offers a detailed interpretation of the occult ideas underlying the kabbalistic understanding of the Tarot (Egorow 2014). In the early 1920s, Shmakov participated in some underground esoteric organizations, but in 1924, under the threat of repression, he was forced to emigrate from Russia through Europe to Argentina. He did not create, like Moebes, his own organization for the study and practical realization of his ideas, but his books became one of the main sources of knowledge about the occult Kabbalah for the Russian audience.

Kabbalah played a less significant role in the teaching of several other esoteric organizations that had been active in St. Petersburg in the years preceding the Bolshevik revolution (1917) and remained operative for some time after the revolution. Among them was “Obshchestvo Sfinks” [Sphinx Society] (1916–1918) established by Georgy Osipovich Loboda (1876–?). Subsequently, he participated in the work of a commission for the study of psychological phenomena at the Brain Institute in Leningrad (1923–1924), but in 1926 was arrested and exiled. Among active members of “Sfinks” were Antonin Semiganovsky-Dienti (1888–?) and Aleksander Barchenko (1881–1938), who later became prominent representatives of the early Soviet occult underground. A. Semiganovsky, a member of the “Martinist Order” (he was excluded from the order in 1919), in 1920 founded the “Khristianskiy ezotericheskiy orden” [Christian

Esoteric Order], and in 1924 another secret organization, “Vnutrennyaya ezotericheskaya tserkov” [Inner Esoteric Church]. One of the most mysterious occultists of the early Soviet period, whose activities were closely connected with the OGPU, was a science fiction writer and scientist A. Barchenko, the leader of “Edinoe trudovoe bratstvo” [United Labour Brotherhood] (Brachev 2007, 199–226; Shishkin 2011). Another occult order “Orden rytsarey sviatogo Graalya” [Order of the Knights of the Holy Grail], founded by Aleksey Gaucheron de la Fosse (1888 – after 1930) in 1916, was destroyed by the OGPU in 1927 (Brachev 2007, 72–79). Among the occult organizations of this time, one can also mention the Russian branch of the French occult order of the “Philalethes” (Brachev 1993, 192). In all the groups we mentioned, there was a study of esoteric doctrines, including Kabbalah. Below we will dwell in greater detail on the views of Gregory Moebes as the most prominent representative of Russian esotericism, in whose teaching Kabbalah played a determining role.

GREGORY MOEBES: LIFE AND WORKS

Gregory (Grigoriy Ottonovich) Moebes was born in Riga (then the main city of the Governorate of Livonia in the Russian Empire) in 1868. In 1891, he graduated from the Physics and Mathematics Faculty of St. Petersburg University but later he abandoned academic career and devoted himself entirely to the study of “secret knowledge”. For the sake of earning, he taught physics and mathematics in secondary schools of the privileged royal residence Tsarskoe Selo and later gave lectures in mathematics in the Page Corps, the most prestigious military academy in Imperial Russia, which prepared sons of the nobility and of senior officers for military service, as well as in St. Nicholas Cadet Corps. After the revolution, he worked as a teacher of mathematics in a regular high school in Leningrad. Moebes was interested in occult knowledge and secret societies since the late nineteenth century, however, we have almost no information about the early period of his life. By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, he was already a recognized expert in this field. In 1910 Moebes was appointed to Inspector General (secretary) of the St. Petersburg branch of the Ordre Martiniste headed by Papus (Introvigne 2005). Soon he established in St. Petersburg the first Russian Martinist lodge named after Apollonius of Tyana. Two years later, in August 1912 he provoked a confrontation with both the Moscow group and the Supreme Council of the Order in Paris and announced

the declaration of independence of the Russian Martinists. From that moment on, two groups of Martinists actually operated in Russia. One of them was led by Moebes. The second was associated with Czesław Norbert Czyński (pseud. Punar Bhava, 1858–1932), a member of the Supreme Council of the Martinist Order in Paris, who became the Sovereign Delegate for Russia and Poland in 1910 (he was also a high-ranking member of the Ordo Templi Orientis and the Eglise Catholique Gnostique). After the schism of 1912, the Moscow group of the Martinist Order under the leadership of Peter Kaznacheyev and his son Dmitry remained faithful to the Paris center and continued their activities until 1923 (Serkov 2009, 117–119).

Moebes established an independent Russian order under the name Autonomous Detachment of Martinism of the Russian rite (in 1916, it was transformed into a Martinist Order of the Eastern obedience). “Invisible Master” or Father of the Order was Moebes himself, whereas Ivan Antoshevsky (initiatory name Giatsintus) held the position of *Inspecteur général*. Moebes’ initiatory name was Butatar (Heb. בּוּטָטָר); according to the Nuctemeron of Apollonius of Tyana, as interpreted by Eliphaz Levi, Butatar is the genius of calculations (*génie des calculs*) (Levi 1904, 418). In the summer of 1917, when Antoshevsky was killed under unknown circumstances, he was replaced in this post by another disciple of Moebes, Vladimir Bogdanov. The chapter of the order consisted of seven persons (Serkov 2009, 117–126; Nikitin 2005, 155–159; Brachev 2007, 11–14). The official organ of Russian Martinists became a popular occult magazine “Isis” edited by Antoshevsky and (since 1911) by another renowned Russian occultist and astrologer Alexander Troyanovsky.

After the Bolshevik revolution Moebes did not leave Russia, as did many leaders of Russian esoteric groups (Burmistrov 2014, 78–83). He did not use the opportunity to immigrate to his home in Latvia, and for another ten years led underground Martinist and Rosicrucian groups in St. Petersburg. As already mentioned, during the Civil War Moebes and his wife established in St. Petersburg (in those years – Petrograd) a kind of esoteric academy and were told to read lectures on Kabbalah, the *Zohar* and the Minor Arcana of the Tarot (Brachev 2007, 14). Apart from the purely theoretical studies, practical work on the development of paranormal powers of psychics was conducted in the school. As it is known, they held practical training sessions in telepathy and psychometrics, as well as collective meditations. Though this esoteric school was clandestine, a number of known writers, poets and scholars attended it for some years, including military historian, colonel of the Russian Imperial Army

Georgy Gabaev (1877–1956) and poet Vladimir Piast (1886–1940). According to Russian emigrant occultist Alexander Aseev (1902/1903–1993), who was the editor of the most respected Russian occult magazine “Occultism and Yoga” (Belgrade, 1933–1936; Sofia, 1937–1938; Asuncion, 1952–1977), after the revolution, all the three main branches of the Russian initiatory movement – Freemasonry, Rosicrucianism and Martinism – existed as separate and independent organizations. However, they were guided by one and the same person – Gregory Moebes. All the three orders worked closely with each other and the same persons were often among their members (Aseev 1999, 431; Nikitin 2004, 93–94).

The Petersburg Martinist group continued its activities until 1926, when Moebes was betrayed by his former closest disciple, who became an agent of the security services. Moebes and dozens of other Russian esotericists were arrested. After interrogations Moebes was deported to the Solovetsky concentration camp on the White Sea (Nikitin 2005, 154–155, 193–194; Brachev 1991; Aseev 1934, 91–92). During interrogation, he declared himself the leader of the Martinist and Rosicrucian movement but refused to testify about his students (Nikitin 2005, 155–159). Some of his students apparently tried to keep in touch with Moebes even after his arrest and imprisonment (Nikitin 2004, 91). He died a few years later in exile (presumably in 1934 in Ust'-Sysol'sk, present. Syktyvkar), but we still are not aware of the year and the place of his death (Nikitin 2005, 154–155; Aseev 1999, 436–437). The richest archive of the Martinists group was confiscated (Nikitin 2005, 154, 188–189) and probably destroyed.

In 1911–1912, Moebes was giving a lecture course on the Major Arcana of the Tarot. In many aspects following Papus, he put together into a coherent system Kabbalah, astrology, alchemy, gnostic ideas, oriental cults, European occultism, and even some ariosophic concepts. These lectures enjoyed great popularity, as evidenced by dozens of memoirs and reviews. Soon afterwards these lectures were published in mimeograph under the title “A Course in the Encyclopedia of Occultism Given by G. O. M. in the Academic Year 1911–1912 in St Petersburg” (Moebes 1912; the book was reprinted by the Russian Occult Center in Shanghai in 1937–1938). The lectures were written down and edited by one of the closest disciples of Moebes, Ol'ga E. Nagornova (Ivanova; 1866 – after 1926) who became the Master of woman's Masonic lodge after 1917 (Aseev 1999, 432–33; Nikitin, 2005, 10 et al.).

The Moebes' book is structured as a detailed commentary on the twenty-two Great Arcana of the Tarot. Though Moebes frequently

used the well-known works by Papus, Stanislas de Guaita, Eliphas Levi and Etteilla, it is most certain that his book is an original composition, which is probably superior to all that has been written before by the depth of its analysis and by the range of ideas borrowed from different areas of occult knowledge. The second extant book written by Moebes miraculously survived. In the 1960s, this work, which was kept in the KGB archive, was illegally copied and remained in the Russian occult underground. This book is a course of lectures given by Moebes in 1921 for a narrow circle of disciples. It is a kind of addition to the “Encyclopedia of Occultism”, containing a more detailed analysis of the Major Arcana of the Tarot. It comprises, inter alia, an extensive analysis of the Hebrew and Aramaic grammar which is considered to be necessary for a better understanding of kabbalistic sources. Unfortunately, the text is cut off on the tenth lecture. The book was first published recently, in 2007 (Moebes 2007). Unfortunately, a number of works by Moebes were abolished or have not been found yet. According to Alexander Aseev, a lithograph edition of his lectures entitled “Padenie i reintegratsiya v svete khristianskogo illuminizma” [The Fall and Reintegration according to Christian Illuminism] was published in 1913; not a single copy of this book has been found yet. Among other writings, circulating in manuscript form among Moebes’ students, Aseev mentions a course of lectures about fifty-six Minor arcana of the Tarot; a kabbalistic analysis of the Apocalypse of John; a book on ceremonial magic (in five parts) (Aseev 1999, 432). I can add to this list a series of lectures on the Zohar, also distributed within the circle of Moebes’ students in handwritten or typewritten form.

KABBALAH IN MOEBES’ DOCTRINE

In the analysis of the surviving texts, unpublished documents and correspondence it becomes apparent that it was Kabbalah that underlay the interpretation of the arcana of the Tarot proposed by Gregory Moebes. As is known, as early as in the late eighteenth century Etteilla (Jean-Baptiste Alliette, 1738–1791) published his ideas of the correspondences between the Tarot, astrology, and the four classical elements and four humors. He was actually the first to issue a revised Tarot deck specifically designed for occult purposes. In his “Cours théorique et pratique du Livre du Thot” (Paris, 1790) Etteilla discussed the doctrine of the so-called Egyptian “Book of Thoth” and declared that this book contains an ancient version of the Tarot cards. Later, Eliphas Levi incorporated the Tarot cards into his magical

system, and as a result the Tarot became an important part of the agenda of Western occultism (Laurant 2005). In Moebes, however, Tarot cards are not just associated with twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, as it was already in Eliphas Levi. It is also known that Papus set up a correspondence between Major Arcana and astrological attributes using the Jewish esoteric book “Sefer Yetzirah”, in which the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet are correlated with three elements, seven planets and twelve signs of the Zodiac. This system, with some variations, was soon adopted by occultists in Germany, Russia and other countries. For Moebes, however, cosmological processes are directly associated with the action of the letters of the divine name – Tetragrammaton. Creation is thought of as a process of gradual unfolding and manifestation of the ineffable Name. Thus, he claims that there are active and passive principles in Tetragrammaton, represented by the Hebrew letters *Yod* and *He*, and their interaction gave rise to the third, androgynous principle, the *Vav* letter of the Tetragrammaton. And only after that, the process of emanation begins (Moebes 1912, 17). The kabbalistic system of Sefirot and their emanation is explained by Moebes in the commentary to the 10th Arcanum (“Wheel of Fortune, representing the tenth trump of the Major Arcana cards”), which corresponds to the letter *Yod* of Tetragrammaton. According to Moebes, the doctrine of Sefirot is the most important part of the tradition of the Great White Race. He describes the system of the ten Sefirot in accordance with the kabbalistic doctrine of Yitzhak Luria (1534–1572): the ten Sefirot constitute some kind of a family. The upper triad of Sefirot are corresponding to the Supreme Androgyne (or Macroprosopos), and the Father and Mother; then, the Child (or Microprosopus) comprises six lower Sefirot from Hesed to Yesod, and the last is the Wife or Bride (the 10th Sefirah, Malkhut) (Moebes 1912, 89). It is quite obvious that we are dealing here with *partzufim*, or Faces, that is reconfigured arrangements of the ten Sefirot into harmonized interactions in Creation, which are discussed in detail in Lurianic commentaries on the Zohar (Scholem 1974, 140–144; Burmistrov 2019, 106–107). So, in the diagrams in his book, Moebes demonstrates the relationship between the five faces/*partzufim* and the five levels of the human soul (Moebes 1912, 80–81). Although he never refers to the sources he used, the most likely source seems to be the translation of the “Idrot” (zoharic books of the Greater and Lesser Assembly) published by Christian Knorr von Rosenroth in his “Kabbala Denudata” (Knorr von Rosenroth 1684, 386–598; Schmidt-Biggemann 2013, 63–187; Burmistrov 2013, 183–184). This book appeared in the late seven-

teenth century, was the main source of his knowledge of Kabbalah, although it is still necessary to find out whether he used the original edition of “Kabbala Denudata” or a heavily abridged English translation published by Samuel L. MacGregor Mathers in 1887 (Mathers 1887).

Ein Sof, an absolutely incomprehensible divine essence, is situated above and beyond this family of *partzufim* (Scholem 1974, 88–96; Burmistrov 2018a), but Moebes almost does not say anything about it because it is not available for the mystic. According to Moebes,

The first cycle [of unfolding] of the Tetragrammaton should be written down as **יהוה** where the dot [over the letter *Yod*] corresponds to the Supreme Androgyne, the Ancient of Days, Macroprosopos, who emanates from himself the Father – *Yod*, and the Mother, [the letter] *Hé* who is added upon him. Their marriage brings to birth Microprosopus, [the letter] *Vav*. Microprosopus adopts the second *Hé* [of the Tetragrammaton] as his Spouse or Bride, and this is the sphere where all the family manifests itself. Whereas one should strive for and ascend to the Macroprosopos by the way of ecstasies, everyone can find Microprosopos in his heart. (Moebes 1912, 46)

Discussing the emanation of Sefirot, Moebes analyzes in detail the dynamic processes taking place in each of the four worlds of kabbalistic cosmogony (*Atzilut*, *Beriah*, *Yetzirah*, and *Asiyah*) and shows how different Sefirot can neutralize opposing and contradicting forces so that the whole system becomes harmonious. The process of expansion and circulation of energy in the world of Sefirot occurring through special channels (*tzinnorot*), Moebes calls “diabatic” using a term borrowed from thermodynamics. He describes it as a “difficult processes of transition [of energy] from one Sefirah to another by means of some intermediate Sefirot” (Moebes 1912, 81). These processes can be both descending and ascending. Moebes gives in his book few examples of descending and ascending diabatic processes, e.g., in his view, the formation of the universe is a top-down process, whereas the development and perfection of mystical knowledge is a bottom up process.

Moebes’ book at large is very concrete and specific. In this aspect it differs from many works of modern occultism. This is a kind of tutorial, it does not contain abstract reasoning, parables, etc. It is no coincidence, since its author was a professional mathematician. So, one can find in the book mathematical calculations, examples from physics and other natural sciences. According to Moebes, the

objective of studying Kabbalah and the main purpose of the use of Tarot is not producing predictions or gaining a state of prophecy, but the transformation of the very Self of the adept. People, who are not able to lead a conscious life, should help adepts to achieve their goals.

The task of rebuilding or restoration of personality is divided in two parts: 1) the conversion of an adept into the consciously volitional personality, 2) a proper reeducation of the impulsive man, he who acts in all areas reflexively, responding to certain perception with ready-made behavior [...]. Impulsive person should be brought up in such a way as to be a convenient tool for the will of a conscious man. It is necessary to strengthen some reflexes in his soul while also suppressing some others. (Moebes 1912, 33)

The Martinist school headed by Moebes paid primary attention to the ritual. Martinist “realizing work”, or “practice”, included collective meditations conducted according to a certain ritual, the so-called “commemorations” ceremonies. These were ceremonies simultaneously performed in different cities (St. Petersburg, Moscow, Vladimir, Tver’, etc.) and dedicated to the memory of some prominent characters of the Order’s history (e.g., Martines de Pasqually, Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin, Eliphas Levi and etc.). During these ceremonies, collective meditations were made to establish a magical connection with these personalities.

Martinist practice, closely associated with magical actions and ideas, implied the need to study Kabbalah, including the system of Sefirot and divine and angelic names. This knowledge was used in ceremonies and meditations. Moebes emphasized the necessity of studying Kabbalah in his correspondence, preserved in the archives. Thus, in 1910, in a letter to Peter Kaznacheyev (1854–1931), who was the head of Martinist lodges in Vladimir and Moscow, and since 1915 the general delegate of the Order of Martinists in Russia (Serkov 2009, 110–126), Moebes discusses an incident that occurred in Moscow and which was witnessed by one of the most theoretically savvy brothers, Vladimir Serik (“Brother Zachet”):

[...] The case that you mentioned in Moscow was accidentally mentioned by Zachet himself in a conversation with me. The fact is that in the circle of young occultists the question of the Sefirot of the world Aziluth (Emanation) was debated, and in a tendency of the majority of members to reduce the question of Sefirot to a diabatic process and to study it purely mathemati-

cally Zachet saw disrespect for the Higher Sefirot and expressed it quite sharply. In my opinion, he was absolutely right. (Moebes 1910, ff. 51r–52r)

Moebes had in mind that, because of insufficient knowledge of Kabbalah, the young members of the Order were inclined to reduce metaphysics (i.e., kabbalistic doctrine of the Sefirot) to physics and mathematics. In connection with this case, Moebes stressed the need for more serious teaching of Kabbalah, and at the end of the same letter he announced a special course of lectures “primarily devoted to the questions of practical magic and practical Kabbalah” (Moebes 1910, f. 55).

The knowledge of practical Kabbalah and magic was also necessary because some members of the Order faced during their work the so-called “manifestations of otherworldly forces”. Available Order’s documents and Moebes’ letters mention various cases of this kind. Thus, mysterious “electrical phenomena” were observed from time to time during some ceremonies. In a document, dated June 1910, it is noted that

[...] during the ritual of the Initiation of Sister E., those present witnessed three times manifestations of the Invisible World. 1. While reading the Book of Initiation, when she [Sister E.] reached the words ‘Nature acts by the force of fate [...]’, the electric light that illuminated the Initiation Table suddenly died out. The light of the other light bulbs did not weaken at all and did not intensify [...]. (Moebes 1910, ff. 16r–16v)

Further, it is told that this lamp behaved very “consciously” and faded or lit up depending on the events that took place during the ceremony, and that this was observed repeatedly in other ceremonies.

In their practice, members of the order could also come across the activities of elemental spirits (the so-called *elementals*). This is what Moebes wrote in 1910 in one of his letters to Peter Kaznacheyev: “Over the past few days, I have been overcome by elementals playing with consecrated objects belonging to me, moving them quite unceremoniously either during my dream, or when I turn away in the other direction. I’m taking proper measures” (Moebes 1910, ff. 53v–54r).

Thus, as we see, Martinist practices required thorough knowledge of various aspects of “secret knowledge”, including Kabbalah which was considered one of the main parts (if not the basis) of the occult tradition as a whole. It can be assumed that the goals Moebes

set for himself were primarily practical. He seeks to teach his students to decompose or deconstruct any closed system for Sefirotic attributes and to use this practice for the sake of meditation. To show the effectiveness of working with the Sefirot, Moebes takes as an example the theurgy, i.e. the practice of operational impact on the divine powers by using certain magical formulas. Thus, he interprets the well-known Catholic Lord's Prayer "Pater noster, qui es in caelis" as a system of interactions between different Sefirot, demonstrating the theurgical mechanism of its effectiveness. According to Moebes, repeating nine "petitions" of the Lord's Prayer, the meditating one runs, as it were, through nine levels of Sefirotic Tree, from Keter to Yesod. The culmination of the prayer is the so-called closing doxology used in the Orthodox liturgy: "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever, Amen". As Moebes tries to show, these words symbolize the manifestation of the first Sefirah, Keter, in the tenth Sefirah, Malchut, i.e. the completion of the cycle of emanation (Moebes 1912, 83–85).

Moebes also explains how to apply the Sefirotic system to the lower levels of being: each Sefirah is to be associated with certain organ of the human body for the sake of activation of the corresponding sort of energy. This chapter of Moebes' book elaborates a kind of kabbalistic Yoga. In Moebes' view, the system of Sefirot can be used to explain any "closed system", from the lowest level associated with the physical body of man, to the level of theoretical thinking. Thus, Moebes shows as an example how it might be used to clarify the meaning of a sophisticated problem of ethics – an abstract concept of virtue (Moebes 1912, 87–88).

What does Moebes mean by Kabbalah? And how are we to understand the relationship between Kabbalah and Tarot? As for many other occultists, Kabbalah is for him an ancient tradition probably of Egyptian origin. The ultimate basis of Kabbalah is the sacred language. Kabbalah is an ancient teaching about the disclosure of the holy Name, Tetragrammaton, in the form of the sacred, initiatory alphabet. This is both a mirror that reflects everything that happens in the universe and at the same time an active force: a permutation of letters and words causes a change in the world. "If we deliberately operate with signs and formulas, with a full understanding of them, using Kabbalah, these operations are reflected in a certain way in the course of actual events, and bring about some changes in the astral patterns and even mental currents" (Moebes 1912, 105). It is not surprising that with such an understanding of Kabbalah, "Sefer Yetzirah" was especially important for Moebes, with its doctrine of

the creation of the world by means of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet and its idea of the correspondence between the two-letter combinations and different elements of the universe. These topics are really essential for the Jewish mysticism, and Moebes discusses them extensively in his lectures, talking about 231 primordial Hebrew radices and different methods of combining and rearranging letters of the divine names (Moebes 1912, 109). Explaining in detail the meaning of different names and their relation to the Sefirot, he claims that ten holy names corresponding to ten Sefirot represent a single formula that includes “everything that has been produced, and all that can be produced. This is an overall reflection of the subjective understanding of the mysteries of the universe by mankind expressed by means of the initiatory alphabet and the sounds of the initiatory language [...]” (Moebes 1912, 113; cf. Moebes 2007, 225–234). He emphasized that “a solid knowledge of the Sefirotic names is necessary for every student [of occult doctrine] [...]. It gives him the opportunity to fasten his volitional impulses by the formulas linking him with the immortal Egregor of the Great Chain of holders and custodians of the Kabbalah of the White Race” (Moebes 1912, 113). (In modern occultism, the term “egregor” usually means a “thought-form”, or “collective group mind”, that is an autonomous psychic entity made up of the thoughts of a group of people and at the same time influencing them; in the books of Daniel and Enoch, egregors are guards or watchers, good and bad angels.)

Thus, the purpose of Kabbalah as an esoteric practical method is twofold:

- 1) it makes it possible not only to extract from ancient sources written in the ‘initiatory-hieroglyphic language’ the meaning read into the text by its author, but also to gain further and deeper understanding by means of occult abilities of the individual;
- 2) Kabbalah allows us also to make pentacles [i.e. an amulet used in magical evocation – K. B.] and mantras for concentration of willpower and magic activity. (Moebes 1912, 110)

According to Moebes, seventy-eight cards of the Tarot are to be understood as a symbolic exposition of the kabbalistic doctrine of universal transformations and transitions. They were entrusted both to profane (i.e. Gypsies) and to initiate adepts for preservation and transmission. Fifty-six minor arcana represent the manifestation of the Tetragrammaton in the world of the human race that had not fallen yet, that is before the Fall from grace, whereas Major Arcana are a set of notions and representations of the fallen man, who has

to purify himself by the sweat of his brow. Making numerous mistakes, he should strive to achieve first relative truths, and only then he would be able to ascend to the knowledge of the Absolute, i.e. Tetragrammaton. Minor Arcana are metaphysically cleaner than Major or Great Arcana. Besides, they are metaphysically separate and structurally perfect, whereas Major Arcana are largely uncertain, they generate each other according to some vague laws, they are adapted to the world of illusions. However, this is the only way for modern man, by which he can rise to the truth (Moebes 1912, 91). The so-called “Kabbalistic Code of the Western School”, discussed by Moebes, resembles similar Masonic lists of the allegedly kabbalistic works. Following Papus, Moebes mentions among the main sources of the Tradition (i.e. Kabbalah) “Sefer Yetzirah”, the Torah “as a part of the chain of transmission of the Lore of the White Race”, the Zohar, some parts of the Talmud, “Claviculae Salomonis” (a treatise on ceremonial magic), the New Testament (noting that Apocalypse and the Gospel of John contain descriptions of the Major Arcana) (Moebes 1912, 110–111). Thus, we can identify two main features of the doctrine proposed by Gregory Moebes: 1. The key to the knowledge of the truth, or the law of Tetragrammaton are the cards of Tarot and corresponding tradition based on Kabbalah; 2. Theoretical knowledge of the occult is considered something accessory, supplementary, while the main task of Moebes’ school is its practical application on the different levels of existence.

MOEBES’ DOCTRINE AND ITS FAME

As it turned out, Moebes as a teacher of the esoteric doctrine has remained virtually unknown outside Russia and the Russian occultist groups in exile. This may be explained by the fact that he had never sought to publish his ideas. His main work, the “Encyclopedia of Occultism”, was printed as a manuscript (not for publication) for the students and – with only one exception – has never been translated and published in other languages, although there is evidence that Russian immigrants in South America translated it into Spanish in the 1930s. This book became, however, the most important source of knowledge about the secret sciences in Soviet Russia of the 1920–1930s (Nikitin 2004, 68, 91–92; Burmistrov 2011, 60–63). Moebes’ ideas formed the basis for the doctrine of the most effective and original group of Russian émigré occultists, the so-called “Russian occult center”, established in 1936 in Shanghai by a poet and journalist Kirill Baturin (1903–1971; in 1949 Baturin was forced to flee

to Brazil and later immigrated to the United States), and the reputed Harbin occultist Vyacheslav Piankovich (1881–1936), who composed his own course of lectures on occult matters largely based on Meebes' encyclopedia (Pyankovich 1924). Since 1915, Pyankovich was Meebes' favourite student in St. Petersburg. After the revolution, he lived in Irkutsk, and in 1919 moved to Harbin. He translated into Russian about fifteen books on esotericism, including the works of Eliphas Levy, Stanislas de Guaita, Fabre d'Olivet and Rudolf Steiner (Pyankovich 1937).

According to its leaders, the center had about one hundred members and two branches in Harbin and Berlin. The printed organ of the center was the magazine "Ogon'" [Fire: A collection of bulletins and articles reflecting the point of view of the Russian occult center on various issues] (in 1937–1939, six issues had been published), and the most important goal of its activity was the publication of occult literature (Burmistrov 2018b, 110–113). Members of the group re-published Meebes' "Course in the Encyclopedia of Occultism" and supplemented it with illustrations of Tarot cards made by the famous Russian artist Vasily Masyutin (1884–1955). The influence of the Meebes' school can also be found in the main work created by the members of this center – a two-volume guide to occult matters called "Istoki taynovedeniya: spravochnik po okkultizmu" [The Origins of Secret Science. Handbook of Occultism] (Istoki 1938/1939), which covers a variety of topics related to the ancient secret religions and cults, Gnosticism, Hermeticism, Kabbalah, Renaissance and modern occultism, Freemasonry etc.

In 1921, a complete Polish translation of his *magnum opus*, made by Karol Chobot (1886–1937), was published in Cieszyn, a small border-town in southern Poland (Chobot 1921). In contrast to the 1912 Russian edition, that does not contain the images of Tarot cards, the Polish translation was illustrated: three cards in it were borrowed from the Tarot of Oswald Wirth (1889), and the rest from Arthur Waite's Tarot. However, the actual popularity of this interpretation of Tarot in the West was the result of the activities of the famous writer and occultist Mouni Sadhu. As it is known, the real name of Mouni Sadhu (the pen name Mouni Sadhu (Sanskrit) means "Silent Holy man") was Dmitry (Mieczysław Demetriusz) Sudowski (1897–1971). He was born and got his education in Russia, took part in the Civil War on the side of the White Army, and then was living in Poland until the outbreak of World War II. As a soldier of the Polish Army he was imprisoned and spent about seven years in Soviet and German concentration camps. Later he went to Brazil

and eventually settled in Australia. He became known as an author of a number of books on Western and Eastern spirituality and occultism, including Hermeticism, and the Yoga tradition of India. In the 1920s and early 1930s, Sudowski belonged to a Rosicrucian group in Poland and in 1927–1928 published a number of articles on the Tarot and Hermetic philosophy in the occult magazine “Odrodzenie” [Renaissance] dealing with Esotericism and spirituality. Apparently, the Tarot continued to fascinate him in the following decades. In 1962, Sudowski published in English under the pseudonym Mouni Sadhu a bulky volume, “The Tarot: A Contemporary Course of the Quintessence of Hermetic Occultism” (Mouni Sadhu 1962). This book has been reprinted many times and translated into almost all European languages. In his introduction, Mouni Sadhu states that he wrote it as a means to expound on the Tarot as a “useful instrument of cognition” (as described by Eliphas Levi), as well as to provide a practical manual. He admits that his understanding is taken not only from classical Tarot works, but also from his personal study of Hermeticism, as well as from the book by Gregory Moebes:

As a basis for the lectures, I used, apart from the works of other competent exponents, the unique book by Prof. Gregory Ossipowitch [sic! should be – Ottonovich – K. B.] Moebes, a leading authority on Hermeticism in Russia prior to 1917. Actually, it was not even a proper book, but rather a series of lectures duplicated on very large sheets of thick paper (about 12” x 15”), with all the diagrams made by the author’s own experienced hand. It was never for sale on the open market as a book and only a few initiated circles of students were lucky enough to get a copy. We bought ours from a Russian refugee who brought the book with him in 1919, when fleeing from his country which had just fallen into Communist hands [...] to the present time there is no adequate and original work in English dealing with the Tarot, and the last major works in other languages are more than fifty years old. Only one of these, the previously mentioned encyclopedic course by Prof. G. O. Moebes, seems to satisfy – to a certain extent – what I would term a ‘practical exposition’ of the subject. (Mouni Sadhu 1962, 12–13)

Actually, the book by Mouni Sadhu is just a loose translation of the Moebes’ lectures with minimal permutations and additions. All the material in the book concerning Kabbalah was just taken from Moebes, along with charts and diagrams. It is unlikely that Sudowsky was personally acquainted with Moebes, although he certainly knew the aforementioned Polish translation of his book.

At the same time the fact that the teaching of Russian esotericist and Martinist Gregory Moebes became known in Europe thanks to the Poles did not seem strange. It is well known that the Poles played a significant role in the history of Russian Freemasonry and esotericism (Ryabinin 1915, 226–244). It is known that Sudowski was acquainted with Stefan Ossowiecki (1877–1944), a famous Polish clairvoyant who was born and lived in Moscow and St. Petersburg and possibly belonged to the circle of Russian esotericists associated with Moebes. The actual founder of the Russian branch of the Martinist Order was also a Pole Czeslaw (von) Chinski, a chiromancer and magnetiser, a man with a very confusing biography. Thanks to Dmitry Sudowski and his book, there are now many popular books and manuals on Tarot written in various languages that used the ideas of the Russian esoteric thinker Gregory Moebes – as a rule, without any reference to their real author.

CONCLUSION

As we have seen, Kabbalah had an essential, often decisive significance for the teachings and practices of a number of esoteric schools in Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century. Certainly, we are not talking about the Jewish esoteric tradition, which is an integral part of Judaism, but about an “occult Kabbalah” (often called Cabala) that borrowed some ideas of the original Jewish lore, transformed them and mixed them with other ideas of the so-called “secret knowledge”. Being so important for some schools of western European occultism, the Cabala of Tarot, divine names and Sefirot became the foundation of the teachings of the most original trends of Russian esotericism of the first two decades of the twentieth century, virtually destroyed during the communist repressions of the late 1920s and 1930s. After the fall of the Soviet regime, the legacy of Russian esotericists of the early twentieth century served as the basis and starting point for a new revival of esotericism in Russia and former Soviet republics. Many works of Russian esoteric authors, including those who developed the ideas of the occult-Kabbalistic tradition, were republished (or even published for the first time). Nowadays, the works of Gregory Moebes and Vladimir Shmakov have become the classics of Russian esoteric thought and attract attention not only of the practitioners of secret wisdom, but also of academic scholars.

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RUSSIA'S MYSTICAL ANARCHISM: THE CASE OF ALEKSEJ SOLONOVICH (1887–1937)

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ABSTRACT

The name of Aleksej Solonovich is hardly ever heard of in Russian studies, nor is his philosophy of “Mystical Anarchism”, although they both stirred up the esoteric and dissident underground of early Soviet Russia. This paper sheds light on the biography and personality of this controversial mathematician, anarchist, and esotericist whose ideas contributed to the final collapse of the Russian anarchist movement. At the same time, it dwells upon the encounter of “mysticism” and “anarchism” in post-revolutionary Russia, which engendered not only a philosophy but also a movement of social protest and a secret society of Knights Templars. Approaching Solonovich’s “mystical anarchism” from a cultural and translation studies perspective, the author takes into account the semantic baggage and scope of cultural concepts, narratives of tradition, and the political mythology of leftist thought. Focusing on the beginning of the twentieth century, the paper offers a long-durée perspective on the development of the Russian New Age culture and a nuanced understanding of its syncretisms.

Keywords: Russian anarchism, mysticism, Knights Templar, translation studies, cultural analysis, travelling concepts, Silver Age

INTRODUCTION

At first sight, the compound “mystical anarchism” strikes as odd. It is neither transparent nor self-explanatory, given that two seemingly unrelated if not opposing terms form a linguistic unity.

Indeed, when looking at the terms’ histories, one finds great divergence in both the context of origin and semantic baggage: “Mysticism” arose from the mystery cults of Greco-Roman antiquity (Bouyer 1949, 5) and came to signify the individual experience and direct knowledge of the transcendent in the history of religions (Wilke 2006, 1279). Since the Enlightenment, however, it has been frequently used in popular parlance as a “weapon to stigmatize” (Lamm 2013, 2) something as pre-scientific and irrational. While the English word implies both aspects, other languages, such as Russian, German, or French, distinguish between *mistika* and *mistitsizm*, *Mystik* and *Mystizismus*, *mystique* and *mysticisme*. In the early twentieth-century Russia, while mysticism was glorified by the Symbolists, its pejorative usage as *mistitsizm* prevailed over its original meaning. In 1901, the Russian philosopher Aleksandr Vvedenskij (1856–1925) noted that the word *mistitsizm* is “often used, especially in order to politely phrase the most severe disapproval” (Vvedenskij 1901, 43f.). In Soviet times, mysticism turned into a convenient “ideological target”, being academically presented as a misleading, pseudoscientific, and therefore “false ideology” (Malevich 2015, 183).

Turning to anarchism, the tinge of pseudoscientificity appears to vanish, for anarchism is usually considered a relatively recent product of the Age of Science. By both etymology and idea, anarchism is actually rooted in Greek political philosophy (Marshall 2018, 66 ff.), though it was not before the nineteenth century that it developed into an “organized movement of social protest” (Avrich 2005, 3) in Central Europe. Anarchists’ suspicion towards and substantial criticism of religion as the belief in a supernatural authority led to the association of anarchism with atheism, a connection that was enforced in public imagination by the political dismissal of anarchism as terrorism, violence, chaos, and moral degradation (Marshall 2008, 74; Christoyannopoulos and Apps 2019; Bantman 2019). Up until today, Mikhail Bakunin (1814–1876), one of the fathers of anarchism, is read, interpreted, presented, and even celebrated by some as the prime example of a “convinced and fervent atheist” (Carr 1975, 304), whose “passion for destruction” aimed at

abolishing God himself. In Russia, the anarchist movement gained steam only at the beginning of the twentieth century, and its emergence, development, and fate were tied to the revolutions of 1905 and 1917 (Avrich 2005, 3f.). The theory of anarchism appealed especially to Russian intellectuals and presented a “lively intellectual force” (D’Agostino 2019, 409) that offered an elaborate, radical, and economic (and thus “scientific” and down-to-earth) criticism of the state, bureaucratic tyranny, and capitalism.

And yet, despite this apparent semantic dichotomy, history records the encounter and alliance of mysticism and anarchism amidst postrevolutionary turmoil in Russia’s capital. They met for the first time in 1906 in the form of an aloof and short-lived “manifesto” formulated by the Symbolist writer Georgij Chulkov, only to be united again more than a decade later into a syncretistic philosophical teaching and a secret society that adhered to this teaching. That secret society presented itself as the successor of the medieval Order of Knights Templar, thus below the surface, the discussion is complemented by the idea of templarism.

The founder and first “commander” (Nikitin 2003a, 26) of the anarcho-mystical Moscow Templar Order is said to have been the anarchist theorist Apollon Andreevich Karelin (1863–1926), a little-studied political figure shrouded in mystery and legend. Karelin, a lawyer by profession and populist revolutionary by conviction, had repeatedly been arrested and disbarred due to antigovernment activities when he escaped Siberian confinement by fleeing to Paris in 1905 (Sapon 2015, 40). There, he spent twelve years in intellectual and anarchist circles of Russian exiles, before he returned to Russia in the summer between the two revolutions (Ibid., 75). Legend has it that Karelin had been initiated into a Parisian Templar Order, had received the task to establish an Eastern branch of the Order in Russia, and had brought with him an ancient teaching and the memory of more than one hundred esoteric legends of equally ancient origin (Nikitin 2003a, 13). What can be said for sure is that Karelin had maintained relationships with renowned Russian Freemasons (Sapon 2015, 40ff.) during his time in Paris, though it cannot be proven, whether he himself belonged to a masonic or any other esoteric organization. Be that as it might, around the year 1919, an underground Templar Order was formed in Moscow, the members of which were not all anarchists but “represented the cream of the contemporary intelligentsia working in the humanities” (Burmistrov 2011, 75). Among its ranks it counted the theater actor and director Iurij Zavadskij (1894–1977), the prose writer Georgij Shtorm (1898–1978), the art historian Aleksej Sidorov (1891–1978), the Orientalist

Iulian Shchutskij (1897–1938), and the composer Sergej Kondrat'ev (1898–1957). In the years to follow, the Order developed a hierarchical, secretive structure and expanded by four additional branches in Leningrad, Nizhnij Novgorod, Sochi, and Batumi. Its Moscow center was located in the Kropotkin Museum, an important meeting point of anarchist groups in the 1920s. There, the members of the Order organized public soirees, talks, and lectures that aimed at presenting anarchism as a perennial wisdom and the “religion of truth” (Solonovich in Kanev 1974, 397) that constituted the unrecognized essence of Jesus Christ’s teaching.

It comes as no surprise that their interpretation of anarchism met with severe resistance on the part of those who saw themselves as preserving the legacy of “the materialist and positivist Kropotkin” (*Delo Truda...* 1928, 21), not only because of “mystical anarchism’s” religious dimension but apparently also because of its popularity: by 1925, the Kropotkin Museum had become the “bastille of the mystical anarchists” (*Ibid.*; *Delo Truda...* 1929, 25) and thus scene of a bitter fight for supremacy that would permanently divide Moscow’s anarchist community. The dispute was carried out publicly in the years 1928 and 1929 in the monthly anarcho-communist newspaper “*Delo Truda*”, testifying to the open vilification of the “mystics” (*mistiki*) and the “non-mystics” (*nemistiki*) efforts to “purge the museum of the mystics’ dominance” (*Ibid.*, 24). It is important to consider the possibility that “mystical anarchism” did not constitute a mere self-designation but received its name as a derogatory label by its opponents. Their main target, however, was not Karelin, who had died in 1926, but his closest associate and successor as head of the Order, Aleksej Aleksandrovich Solonovich. Solonovich, a philosopher and mathematician, was identified and assaulted as the “mastermind” behind the teaching and the “undisputed leader” (*Ibid.*, 27) of the anarcho-mystical movement. He was accused of propagating a “pernicious and dangerous” reactionary ideology “in the guise of a liberating philosophy” (*Ibid.*). Despite all efforts, the “mystics” appear to have won the fight over the Kropotkin Museum, since even the great anarchist’s widow Sof’ia Kropotkina (1856–1941) sided with them (*Ibid.*). Nevertheless, within the emergent Stalinist system the flourishing of “mystical anarchism” was short-lived. Already in 1930, Solonovich was arrested and sent to Siberia. While in exile, he tried to uphold ties to his Moscow organization with the help of his wife and relentless co-worker Agniia Solonovich (1888–1937), however, in the course of the 1930s, almost all of the members likewise fell victim to state repressions. The Order of

Templars was destroyed, its teaching faded into oblivion, and its leader never returned from exile.

For several decades, Russia's "mystical anarchism" had remained forgotten, the proof of its existence safely hidden in the classified KGB archives. Only in the 1990s, after the Soviet Empire had collapsed and when state archives were gradually opened to the public, the existence, philosophy, and suppression of the anarcho-mystical Templar Order was first documented and inscribed in history.

This paper endeavors to present both the ideational foundation and the actual originator of Russia's "mystical anarchism" for the first time to the Western public. Also, it will offer an unconventional interdisciplinary methodological approach to analyze this complex historical phenomenon that drew upon political philosophy, esoteric Christianity, legendary historiography, and mythopoetic imagery. In order to point out the importance of adjusting the methodological perspective, I will first go into previous research on "mystical anarchism" and point to the dead ends to which it has led. Following the theoretical digression, I will turn to Aleksej Solonovich, the person everything begins and ends with. His biography and belief system will be set out to provide an insight into a worldview profoundly at odds with the world by which it was engendered, and guided by a Faustian revelation saying that anarchism is what "binds the universe together".

Outlining "mystical anarchism" will illustrate that the later Soviet and post-Soviet New Age culture can no longer be seen and studied as an "imported" post-war phenomenon but must be understood as a conceptual progression from its early-twentieth-century esoteric precursors. "Mystical anarchism's" typological features allow for a *longue-durée* perspective on Russian New Age that cannot but admit to certain native Russian traits of New Age.

HOW TO ANALYZE MYSTICAL ANARCHISM?

All that is known today about the Order, its members, and its teaching of "mystical anarchism" stems, on the one hand, from the memoirs of the Russian philosopher and mathematician Vasilij Nalimov (1910–1997) (Nalimov 1994), a former initiate of the Order who had survived imprisonment and twenty years of exile. In the last years of his life, Nalimov reflected upon and extended the ideas he had come into touch with in his youth (Nalimov 2013; Idem 2015). On the other hand, the contemporary knowledge is due to the life work of the Russian historian Andrej Nikitin (1935–2005), who

unearthed the evidence of the Order's existence in the depths of the Moscow FSB archives and who was the first to review, publish, and interpret this evidence. Nikitin's collection of material (Nikitin 1998; Idem 2002; Idem 2003a-c) comprises poetry written by the Order's artistic members, theatrical plays attributed to Karelin, philosophical lectures held by Solonovich, numerous interrogation protocols from 1931 onward, and finally 137 esoteric legends of unknown but allegedly ancient origin. According to Nalimov, these legends had never been written down before they were published, for they had to be transmitted orally and exclusively to initiates in order to have a lasting revelatory effect on the audience (Nalimov 1994, 313f.). Being an intrinsic part of the Order's rituals, they were told during gatherings and initiation ceremonies and were supposed to support the adepts' inner work towards self-perfection.

The source material presents the researcher with the image of hoary tradition: Apparently, the medieval Order of Templar Knights had continued to exist, operating clandestinely in European and Russian underground, and in possession of texts, rituals, and a teaching that had been passed on through the ages. Previous research on Russian "mystical anarchism" has been hooked on this idea of sacred tradition. Although Nikitin's academic contribution is beyond question, one cannot fail to notice his efforts to find a possible link between the historical Knights Templar and their twentieth-century Russian "successors", as a result of which he was misled by a nineteenth-century German forgery.¹ His approach to his object of study can only be understood in the context of his own biography: Nikitin's parents had both been initiates of the Order, and he had lost his father, the artist Leonid Nikitin (1896–1942), to the political regime at a young age.² It is therefore as comprehensible as it is undeniable that Nikitin shared the adherents' emic position in spite of his academic background as a historian. His focus on historical continuity made him single out Karelin, whose rather blurred biography and

¹ In "Mistiki, rozenkrejtsery i tampliry v Sovetskoj Rossii" Nikitin hinted at a historical foundation by including an article from 1878 reporting the discovery of a secret Templar Rule that had apparently been found by the German masonic scholar Theodor Merzdorf (Nikitin 1998, 277–300). The Rule implied the existence of an esoteric belief system, which led Nikitin to believe in its continuity. However, as Peter Partner emphasizes in "The Murdered Magicians", Merzdorf's "Geheimstatuten" were "one of the last major Templar forgeries" (Partner 1982, 161).

² The family history was written down by Nikitin's mother Vera Nikitina in "Dom oknami na zakat" (1996).

Western contacts provided the missing link in the narrative of tradition, and identify the legends as “translations” from French (Nikitin 2003c, 4). However, going further down that road, one reaches an impasse – any affiliation with French secret societies as well as a possible French origin remain unproven.

Instead, analysis can only be fruitful when claimed historiography is acknowledged as a means to confer legitimacy to recent innovations. As James Lewis and Olav Hammer have pointed out in “The Invention of Sacred Tradition”, “claim and documented historical reality need not overlap” (Lewis and Hammer 2007, 1), when it comes to narratives of tradition, which are a common feature of New Age lore. Shifting the focus from documented to claimed history allows to re-read and re-evaluate the material at hand. My own research in France and Russia, my scrutiny of all the documents available, including unpublished material that to some extent had been neglected by Nikitin³, finds that the teaching of “mystical anarchism” was not “imported” but developed on Russian soil. While nothing points exclusively to Karelin, numerous intertextual references, similarities in terminology and content, implicit allusions, and at first glance hidden patterns point to the man in the former’s shadow, Aleksej Solonovich.

Still, important questions remain: What could anarchism possibly have to do with mysticism? How do the Knights Templar, belonging to an age-old chapter of history, fit into this twentieth-century conglomerate? How can one approach this phenomenon ranging on the borderline between disciplines?

Proceeding from my own background in cultural and translation studies, I perceive “mystical anarchism” and its remake of chivalry not so much as “inventions” than as zeitgeist-specific adaptations or re-translations of cultural concepts, most notably of mysticism, anarchism, and templarism. I hereby draw upon the Dutch cultural theorist Mieke Bal’s notion of “traveling concepts” (Bal 2012). As the title of her work already suggests, Bal’s cultural analysis of cross-disciplinary terminological encounters and semantic controversies focuses on the humanities. In this article, however, her interdiscip-

³ The Russian State Archive of Literature and Art (RGALI) in Moscow preserves a document titled “Hristos i Hristianstvo” [Christ and Christianity] that is kept in Karelin’s file (122/2/215) but must be attributed in form and content to Solonovich. The document contains insightful information regarding the belief system behind “mystical anarchism”, provides in part an explanation of the legends, and points to their Russian origin. Nikitin is listed as having inspected the document, though he did not even mention it.

linary methodological approach is taken out of its original scholarly setting and is being applied in a philosophical and intercultural context. What is of interest to the present study is Bal's view on concepts, which are seen as elastic instead of static, contextual instead of autonomous (Ibid., 22ff.). To visualize the dynamics and mutability of concepts, Bal uses the metaphor of travel, by which she demonstrates that concepts always leave their context of genesis behind and change over time and space, within spheres and networks. Approaching mysticism, anarchism, and templarism as concepts instead of as mere linguistic terms involves taking a step back from the images these terms usually convey in Western culture, and disengaging from a fixed perception of what they are "supposed" to mean. Concepts are not tantamount to words with clear-cut and common meanings; they transcend ordinary language, in that they entail the whole manifold of possibly related aspects, every one of which correlates with and appears within different social contexts and cultural settings.

What Bal refers to by "traveling" is a never-ending "process of becoming" (Ibid., 51), a process of crossing over, transmutation, and realignment. In other words, concepts are constantly being retranslated. Translation in its broadest possible and philosophical sense is not bound to words but to the conveyance of meaning.

Bal's approach operates on a broad understanding of translation that conventional translation studies still struggle with. It has however been repeatedly voiced by the Russian philosopher and translator Natalya Avtonomova⁴ who has reflected on the idea and meanings of translation. She defines translation as "the dynamic of transition, the transfers between different layers of human experience" (Avtonomova 2013, 103), including in it every form of "articulation of non-verbal experience" (Avtonomova 2008, 11). Avtonomova's reflections, like Bal's, are based on her professional experience – in this case, the translation of linguistic texts – and like Bal, she offers the methodological tools for a cultural study. Drawing upon Bal's notion of "traveling concepts" just as upon Avtonomova's philosophical definition of translation, I argue that "mystical anarchism" as teaching and organization had come into being due to a perpetual retranslation of concepts.

⁴ Natalia Avtonomova deserves credit for her Russian translations of French philosophers, such as Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Jean Laplanche, and her innovative linguistic work that transferred French philosophical thought into the Russian language. I am indebted to Irina Pohlan, PhD, my teacher and colleague, for introducing me to Avtonomova's works.

In the context of Russian culture, mysticism and anarchism did neither have to be interpreted anew nor forcefully adapted to one another. What surfaced in Solonovich's teaching had already been contained in the concepts' semantic fields: regardless of mysticism's "bad press", Russian cultural and intellectual history had long/always been closely entwined with mystical thought, and yielded various facets of mysticism, such as Orthodox monastic mysticism, sectarian mysticism, or religio-philosophical mysticism. A closer look at these three aspects of mysticism reveals a faint and discontinuous, though discernible trace of anti-authoritarianism. It is found in the group of the hesychast "Nonpossessors" (Bolshakoff 1950, 31f.) and the dissident imiaslavie movement (Graham and Kantor 2009, 7ff.); it manifests most clearly in the anarcho-communist traits of the Khlysts, Skoptsy, and Dukhobors (Jetkind 2013), and can be discerned in the musings of Russia's religious philosophers, to whom the mystical experience of absolute freedom legitimized the philosophy of anarchism (Vvedenskij 2016; Berdjaev 1994).

Russian anarchism in turn has always dovetailed with the semantics of mysticism: Lev Tolstoj, Peter Kropotkin, and even Mikhail Bakunin, whose ideas constitute the pillars of not only Russian anarchism, all referred to a transcendent dimension and the ideal of natural union – despite their undeniable ideological divergences: Tolstoj was convinced that "the divine nature [] exists in every man's soul" (Tolstoy 1894, 99) and that it was the "rational" life task of every man to "merge his life with the life of the Father" (Ibid., 95). Kropotkin identified the "desire of unity" (Kropotkin 2002, 22) and "mutual-aid inclinations" (Idem 2017, 229) as an "ever-living tendency" (Ibid., 282) of human nature. Bakunin believed that human beings were "endowed" with an "instinct of natural interconnectness" (Bakunin 1987, 270) and based his theory of anarchism on the faith in a benevolent, harmonious, eternal, and self-regulated universe (Bakounine 2010).

The aspects enclosed in mysticism and anarchism were eventually "liberated" in resonance with the cultural context of early-twentieth-century Russia. The concepts thus underwent re-translation. The same is true for the concept of templarism, though its development must be regarded in the light of not only Russian but Western culture.

Templarism was born in the Middle East during the time of the Crusades in reference to a military organization of monastic knights that had existed until 1314, and was lastingly informed by both the image of holy warriors ready to fight, suffer, and die for Christ, created by the medieval abbot Bernard of Clairvaux, and the allegation of

heresy and malice put forth by the French King Philip IV at the notorious Templar Trial (Partner 1982). Ever since the dissolution of the Order, public discourse has not ceased to revolve around the question of Templar guilt or innocence. Numerous figures of history took a position on the nature of events⁵ (Ibid.; Barber 2012; Josserand 2020; Wildermann 1971), and the concept of templarism has assumed many shapes. A close study of these shapes reveals that what lies at the core of templarism is the struggle of good versus evil, and whatever the concept's appearance, it always responds to this antagonism. The numerous re-translations of templarism have been traced by Peter Partner in his "The Murdered Magicians" (1982). Partner's analysis finds the Templars to function as equally convenient players for conservative, radical, and esoteric accounts of history. As a consequence, different narratives have developed, featuring the Templars as either righteous protagonists or evil antagonists. The narrative of importance with regard to "mystical anarchism" presents them as one link in an ancient tradition of alternative belief.

While speculations concerning a possible connection between the Templars and what were then seen as "heretic" groups had already been expressed during the trial, a coherent narrative started to unfold only in the sixteenth century, when the French political theorist Jean Bodin (1530–1596) aligned the Templar case with the fate of other victimized minorities, such as the early Christians in the Roman Empire, Gnostic groups vilified by institutionalized Christianity, and the Jews in France and Spain to sustain a line of argument against governmental injustice (Wildermann 1971, 122f.; Partner 1982, 93f.) In 1766 then, the French Enlightenment philosopher Voltaire (1694–1778) similarly compared the Knights Templar with the Manichaeans in the Byzantine Empire, the Jews and Albigensians during the Crusades, and the Huguenots in France in having fallen prey to the conspiracies by tyrants against peoples (Voltaire 1877–1885). Some decades later, Voltaire's conspiracy myth was reversed by the Jesuit Abbott Augustin

⁵ Among them were Dante Alighieri who in his famous "Divina Commedia" (1321) charged the French king with cupidity, the Catalan philosopher Ramon Llull who was convinced of the king's rightness to destroy the Order; the French historian Étienne Baluze who justified the actions of the French government; the French dramatist Francois Raynouard who displayed the innocence of the Templars in his successful verse play "Les Templiers" (1805), the French painter Fleury Richard whose painting "Jacques de Molay" (1806) created an archetype of the Templar's grand master, and even Napoleon who denied the possibility of crime committed by politicians (while his wife bought Richard's paintings).

Barruel (1741–1820), who proclaimed that the Knights Templar had followed a subversive teaching that had originated with Manes, the founder of Manichaeism, had been shared by the Bogomiles, the Beguines, and the Cathars, had then passed on from the Templars to the Jacobine Freemasons and the Bavarian Illuminati, resulting in the overthrow of the French monarchy in 1789 (Barruel 1789a-b; Barber 2012; Strube 2016). Barruel represents a key figure in this context, as does the French pharmacist Charles-Luis Cadet de Gassicourt (1769–1821) who also set up his own theory of an ancient tradition of conspirators, for both of them claimed that the subversive teaching was anarchist in essence (Gassicourt 1796; Partner 1982, 130). This semantic charge also became manifest in the writings of the Austrian orientalist Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall (1774–1856), who also maintained that the Templars had shared the beliefs of the Gnostic Ophites and Manichaeans, the Albigensians, and the Freemasons, and even resembled the Eastern Assassins “in their spirit of political interference and secret doctrine” (Hammer-Purgstall 1835, 76). In order to prove both the tradition and the transmission of secret knowledge, the German Masonic scholar Theodor Merzdorf even forged a Templar Rule (the one Nikitin fell for), and it is barely surprising that the potential of this esoteric aspect was indeed exhausted within eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Freemasonry and was revived in numerous rites and orders⁶ (Le Forestier 1970; Mazet 2006; Mollier 2006). At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Austrian esotericist and founder of Anthroposophy Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925) discussed the Templars along with the Rosicrucians, the Albigensians, and the Cathars as the joint enemies of the Catholic church and interpreted this enmity as the manifestation of a fight between “spiritual tenets” (Steiner 1991, 78). According to him, this clash had already appeared in the opposition between Augustine and Mani and was resurfacing in the conflict between the Jesuits and the Freemasons who, as the Templars, had shared the spirit of Mani.

This short digression into political mythology pursues three objectives. First, it aims at reconstructing the historical baggage of templarism and setting out the historical context, within which it

⁶ The narrative gave rise to Karl Gotthelf von Hund’s “Rite of Strict Observance” and Johann August Starck’s “Templar Clerics” was retold with Jean-Baptiste Willermoz’ order of the “Chevaliers Bienfaisants de la Cité Sainte”, and reinterpreted in the nineteenth century by Bernard-Raymond Fabré-Palaprat who unearthed a charter of continuous succession and a fifth gospel called the “Levitikon”.

was revived. By the time templarism “arrived” in Russian anarchist circles, it was enjoying great popularity within esoteric and (pseudo-) masonic milieus in Europe. Second, it is meant to illustrate the flexibility and translatability of concepts. Since its “departure” from the Middle East, templarism has repeatedly traveled between agitators and recipients, has wandered political discourse, and even dovetailed with anarchism and dissidence, has encountered the idea of perennialism, and acquired a Gnostic coloring with the dust of antiquity. Third, it demonstrates the power of narrative, for the connection between templarism and leftist political thought rests in narrative alone.

This finding is substantiated by a recent study presented by the historian of religion Julian Strube. Strube’s evaluation of the nineteenth-century French socialist historiographies (Strube 2017) revealed not only that socialism historically builds upon a forgotten religious foundation, which had barely been taken into account by the twentieth-century historiography, but also that the historical closeness between religious and leftist political thought is also tightly anchored within the narrative of dissident tradition. When the first socialist schools of thought emerged in the early nineteenth century, the contemporary establishment perceived the socialist reformers as belonging to an ancient heretic tradition that had its roots in the Gnostic groups of late antiquity and was believed to aim at subverting the existing social order. The socialist reformers, for their part, employed the same narrative, though reversed the perspective: From their point of view, they were not heretics but the legitimate heirs of true, pre-institutionalized Christianity, and social reform was, by necessity, to go hand in hand with religious reformation (Ibid., 51).

In addition to a conceptual, translational, and narratological perspective, a glance into the political theology of leftist thought offers another key to approach “mystical anarchism”. According to the anthropologist Erica Lagalisse, leftist political theories, including socialism, communism, and anarchism, develop along “a particular theological thread” (Lagalisse 2019, 17). She points to the German political theorist Carl Schmitt, who in the early 1920s had already assumed such a thread to exist. Schmitt had stated that “all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts” (Schmitt 1985, 36) for “every political idea in one way or another takes a position on the ‘nature’ of man and presupposes that he is either ‘by nature good’ or ‘by nature evil’” (Ibid., 56). When applying Schmitt’s somewhat generalizing claim to Western political theory, it follows that the assumption of a flawed and vicious human

nature demands for guidance and control by a government. This conservative or right-wing position is opposed by leftist endeavors, most notably by anarchism as its radical other, which, in Schmitt's opinion, operates on the premise that "man is decisively good" (Ibid.).

Thus, Western political theory is traversed by an apparently insurmountable anthropological dilemma. To the cultural anthropologist Marshall Sahlins this conflict is the cosmological consequence of Western mythology and can be traced back to the biblical tradition. The Book of Genesis reports that man had sinned as soon as he was created and had thus given proof of an "inherently wicked humanity" (Sahlins 1996, 396). From this moment on, the gates to Paradise had closed, and God had departed, leaving man in lack and need of guidance and control. In God's absence, Sahlins deduces, humanity's wickedness must be dealt with by his conceptual representatives, e. g., by state institutions. Complementary to the theological preoccupations of authoritarianism, deriving from the idea of divine transcendence, Lagalisse now suggests approaching "modern 'anti-authoritarianism' with the same lens", proposing that antiauthoritarianism "behold[s] the immanence of the divine" (Lagalisse 2019, 17f.) instead.

In principle, this is the lens I am going to apply here, though my approach requires some more nuanced clarifications. First, what Lagalisse doesn't take into consideration is that equating the authoritarianism-vs.-antiauthoritarianism controversy with a transcendence-vs.-immanence opposition leads to an essentialist perspective. It is however important to clarify that philosophical anarchist discourse criticizes essentialist premises. As the British political scientist Benjamin Franks points out in "Anarchism and Moral Philosophy" (2010), essentialist accounts are rejected by practical anarchism and not consistent with the idea of anarchism itself, since they imply the existence of "forces beyond human control" and thus "deny (or severely restrict) human agency and freedom" (Franks 2010, 154). Franks' remark safeguards the very core of anarchism; still, I am inclined to relativize it. For obvious reasons, essentialism cannot be a typological feature of anarchism; however, my research of Russian anarchism shows that the latter cannot do without it either. This leads me to my second clarification. This is not a general backlash against established research on anarchism but a targeted re-view of Russian anarchism with respect to its development in the early twentieth century. Now, a close reading of Bakunin, Kropotkin, and Tolstoj reveals such essentialist traits, a superficial overview of which has been shown above. True, none of them had insisted on a purely

benign human essence – on the contrary: Tolstoj saw that people could become corrupted by life (Tolstoj 1894, 267); Kropotkin acknowledged the existence of “two currents of human life” (Kropotkin 1989, 117) running side by side and equally powerful, both the feeling of solidarity and the “self-assertion of the individual” (Ibid., 295). Bakunin admitted that “man often is evil and stupid” (Bakunin 1987, 258), since “every human individual is the involuntary product of the natural and social environment within which he is born” (Idem 1972, 149f.). Nevertheless, it cannot be ignored that they all based their visions of social reform on the belief that human beings are invested – whether by divine assistance, evolution, or primordial instinct – with a sense for harmony, on the belief that harmony is immanent in creation (a transcendent reference that can hardly be overlooked, either).

Without disagreeing with Lagalisse’s anthropological point of view but proceeding from my own background in cultural and translation studies, I like to think of this theological dialectic underlying Western political theory as two different perspectives on or “translations” of divinity. Drawing again upon Bal, I propose, albeit roughly, that the concept of divinity has “traveled” out of Christian theology into the political sphere, and somewhere along its journey, has found resonance with anarchist thought due to a change in focalization (a term I import from narratology). Russian anarchism did not ban the concept of divinity, as is widely assumed; it rejected the disempowering implications of its authoritarian use, and thus transformed it into an empowering potential. No longer resorting to the image of an anthropomorphized deity detached from its creation, Russian anarchism deified creation itself, while keeping the conceptual implication of an ideal that transcends human knowledge and existence but functions as regulative principle that ensures social order and ethical conduct. The most representative illustration of this shift in focalization is found in one of Bakunin’s latter and most celebrated writings, “God and the State”, in which he begins his argument by reversing the biblical Fall, turning the tale of the Original Sin (“this crime of treason against humanity” (Bakunin 1970, 11)) into the tale of Original Rebellion, thus bestowing upon man an unknown omnipotence.

These remarks were made to set the focus for what “mystical anarchism” might disclose to the study of culture, anarchism, and New Age, when looked at from a different angle.

ALEKSEJ SOLONOVICH'S ANARCHIST KNIGHTHOOD

As has been indicated above, “mystical anarchism” appears to be the creative product of one man, whose name is hardly ever heard of, if anything in detailed studies on Russian anarchism. Aleksej Solonovich was born into a family that belonged to the Russian nobility (Memorial) but was resident, at the time of his birth, in Kazimierz-Dolny, Poland (Nikitin 2003b, 140). His father and uncle both were high-ranking officers in the Imperial army (Orlovskij gubernskij statisticheskij komitet 1897, 194f), and Solonovich, too, was sent to military school, after the family had moved to Karachev in Russia. From 1907 to 1914, Solonovich attended Moscow State University, studying at the Mathematics Faculty, which at that time employed today’s renowned mathematicians, such as Pavel Nekrasov (1853–1924) and Dmitri Egorov (1869–1931). After he had obtained his university degree, the faculty offered him a teaching position; later, he also taught mathematics and mechanics at Bauman Technical University (Nikitin 2003b, 141).

In the aftermath of the February Revolution, Solonovich appeared on the public scene: Having avowed himself an anarchist, he started publishing political articles (Solonovich 1917a-b), joined anarchist associations (Nikitin 2003b, 141), and gave philosophical lectures on anarchism as a worldview – first to private audiences only, then, from 1921 onwards, he lectured publicly in the Kropotkin Museum. His acquaintance with Karelin and affiliation with the Moscow Templar organization must have taken place around the year 1919, when Solonovich became a member in Karelin’s All-Russian Federation of Anarchist-Communists (Ibid., 140). Apart from his political activity, another crucial biographical aspect is his involvement with the Moscow Anthroposophical Society, of which he had been a member sometime before he went into politics (Gorinevskij 1993, 219). Even though he eventually (not later than the 1920s) “drastically broke with Anthroposophy and became its uncompromising opponent” (Zhemchuzhnikova 1988, 43), his ideas remained heavily influenced by Rudolf Steiner. Probably due to his affiliation with Anthroposophy, he was well-known in Symbolist circles; however, his teaching of “mystical anarchism” had nothing to do with the doctrine of the same name that had been postulated by the Symbolist writer Georgij Chulkov⁷

⁷ It needs to be highlighted that early twentieth-century Russia saw the postulation of two theories of “mystical anarchism” that, however, had not

in 1906, “for which Solonovich had nothing but contempt” (ibid., 42).

Despite his family’s ties to the Tsarist Establishment, Solonovich early on found himself in confrontation with state authority. He first got in trouble at the age of seventeen for engaging in anti-government activities. In 1911, he participated in student riots, as a consequence of which he was temporarily excluded from Moscow university. Three years later, he had to stand trial for his first book “The Wanderings of the Spirit”. In 1925, then, he was first arrested on charge of conspiratorial anarchist activities but soon released, only to be arrested again five years later as head of an anarcho-mystical organization and to never return from exile (Nikitin 2003b, 140ff.). One of the main charges against him was his authorship of a six-volume treatise titled “Bakunin and the Cult of Yaldabaoth”, which presented anarchism’s prime atheist as a deeply religious man who would have fought for the liberation of mankind from communist and Soviet power (*Delo Truda...* 1926, 5). Unfortunately, his scandalous work is nowhere to be found,⁸ though its title alone bears witness to the unconventionality of Solonovich’s anarchist thought. Despite the absence of Solonovich’s magnum opus, the surviving and largely unpublished material allows for a reconstruction of the teaching he developed. Its complexity makes it impossible to present it here in its entirety, which is why this article focuses on the conceptual basis “mystical anarchism” was built upon.

Now, what actually is “mystical anarchism”?

“Mystical Anarchism” is neither a religious doctrine nor a political ideology. It can rather be described as a social and cultural theory that was meant to offer an alternative to an increasingly Westernized world. Its main target was not so much the state as such as it was a state-approved positivist scientism engendering a rationalist, mechanistic, and deterministic worldview deprived of any spiritual dimension whatsoever. Its “dissatisfaction with the approaches to reality” (Hanegraaff 2013, 42), forwarded by official culture, and search for alternatives brings it close to the post-war New Age counterculture.

been connected. Although Chulkov’s vision was short-lived and never brought to life, it is his name that in academic circles is generally associated with “mystical anarchism”, which is probably due to the supportive foreword to Chulkov’s anarchist manifesto written by the famous Symbolist poet Viacheslav Ivanov.

⁸ It is probably preserved in the FSB archive of Tomsk region, Solonovich’s last station in exile.

Solonovich's chosen archenemy was Marx, more precisely, his theory of historical materialism. His critique of Marxist philosophy serves to open up a conceptual analysis of "mystical anarchism". Since Marx regarded German philosophy as gridlocked in the Hegelian tradition and stuck "upside-down" in Hegel's Spirit, he set about placing it back on its feet by arguing that material conditions alone – not abstract ideas – were the true engine of social change, evolution, and progress. Keeping Hegel's dialectical approach, Marx believed historical progress to be contingent on overcoming the contradictions, i.e. the injustices inherent within every economic system, which at some point would eventually lead to a more advanced economy, beneficial material conditions, and social justice. The ultimate level of social development would be reached with communism. By predicting the evolutionary stages of man and society, Marx formulated a law of history, which Solonovich perceived to be nothing but presumptuous. If Marx claimed to have found a scientific constant of evolution, and a materialist one on top of that, then Solonovich would hold science against him. In one of his lectures, dedicated to the "Criticism of Materialism" (and Marxism per se), Solonovich explains to his students:

Let us think about how matter was pictured at that time and is still pictured today. Matter was pictured in atomistic form, but if we take this point of view, if we agree that everything consists of atoms and their combinations, then things differ from each other only insofar as there are different atomic combinations. [...] And since matter is not characterized by consciousness but by expansion, a dialectical process is not possible here, for one atomic combination cannot contradict another – that is nonsense. (Solonovich in Nikitin 2003c, 447) [translation by the author]

Having pointed to the error in Marx's materialist reasoning, Solonovich concluded that any theory of evolutionism based upon materialist premises must necessarily be false, for he defined evolution as the coming into being of what has not been before. He countered Marx's historical materialism with a 'creation from nothing' – 'nothing' being the source of all existence and the transcendent impetus for evolution that Marxist philosophy was lacking. Solonovich's idea of a *creatio ex nihilo* is illustrated most vividly in the opening scene of his first publication "The Wanderings of the Spirit" (1912), devoted to the creative force of the transcendent. Using the language of mystical experience, he described it as the realm of "Nothingness" (*Nichto*), "Nonbeing" (*Nebytie*), and the Unmanifested (*Neprojavlennogo*)

that is “ineffable” (*nevyrazimoe*), “unfathomable” (*neob’iatnaia*), and “unknowable” (*neizvestnaia*) (Solonovich 1914, 9ff.). Every single particle existing in material reality has transitioned out of this realm, though it is emphasized that this transition is spontaneous, arbitrary, and unpredictable – in short anarchic.

The realm of the transcendent equals a fundamental omnipotence, harboring all “potentiality (the possibilities) of reality” (Solonovich in Nikitin 2003c, 445). The parallel to thermodynamics and its category of potential energy stored and conserved in an isolated system surely was not coincidental, since Solonovich referred to thermodynamics to demonstrate that life on earth, and thus human consciousness, is unpredictable, for every gas atom is “absolutely free” (*absolutno svoboden*), its movements “absolutely random” (*absolutno proizvol’no*) (Solonovich, lecture no. 10.1).⁹ Yet, he argued, just like the entirety of freely moving particles results in heat energy, every human being is an integral part of the whole and contributes to “a kind of consistency” (*Ibid.*, 8) in history. Therefore, although the course of history cannot be predetermined as Marx postulated, it is informed by natural consistencies, which remain transcendent to mankind but can be theoretically described by mathematical probability. Again pointing to thermodynamics, Solonovich reminded that, according to probability theory, the entropy, i.e. the number of possible particle combinations or simply the “state of disorder” in a given system, will increase over time – in Solonovich’s understanding, chaos would reign supreme; cultures and societies would eventually complete their cycle of life and perish, as it demands the ancient Hindu law of *kalpa*. Unless there was a supernatural counterforce that could change the course of history. Here, Solonovich referred to James Maxwell’s nineteenth-century thought experiment, according to which an increase in entropy could theoretically be obstructed, if an imaginary demon were to appear who was able to understand, guard, and redirect the motion of molecules. Maxwell’s reasoning is key to understanding Solonovich’s social vision:

So, these considerations tell us that in the case of humanity, concerning its sociological and historical reality, we need a kind of demon, a superhuman, who can understand the course of history, the laws of social reality, and is capable of giving impulses and directions. Such a genius can only be born out of pneumatism. (*Ibid.*, 9.)

⁹ The following lectures represent unpublished material, which I have received from Nalimov’s widow Zhanna Drogalina.

The vision that invigorated “mystical anarchism” saw the possibility to influence both the history and destiny of humanity by lending new “meaning” (*smysla*) to the course of events. However, these “impulses” (*impul'sy*) could only be initiated by those who had become enlightened by the spirit, whom Solonovich called “pneumatics” (*pnevmatiki*). Here, he employs the anthropological classification system of Gnostic theology, trisecting humanity into the lowest class of “hylics” (*giliki* – people of the flesh), the class of “psychics” (*psikhiki* – people of the soul), and the highest class of “pneumatics” (people of the spirit). Gnosticism proves to be a main aspect of “mystical anarchism”: the legends’ cosmological setting is clearly modelled on Gnostic myth, and Gnostic dualism is reflected in the all-pervasive idea of a cosmic struggle between good and evil. The use of Gnostic anthropology discloses the abyss gaping between Solonovich’s egalitarian vision of social justice and his intellectual elitism.

In Solonovich’s mental universe, pneumatics must abide by certain pneumatic principles, the implementation of which will set the “demonic” impulses needed for the benefit of the society. One principle is anarchism as the only “truly” socialist way of life (Ibid., 5) and necessary counterforce in the cosmos of violence and domination, created and reigned by the evil creator-god Yaldabaoth (Idem, lecture no. 10.2, 30). Solonovich’s reading of the New Testament perceived anarchism to lie at the core of Jesus Christ’s teaching, which, however, had been either deliberately ignored or simply not recognized by the apostle Paul, who, unwilling to part with the Jewish tradition, had been too ignorant and ambitious for power. In an 80-page inflammatory pamphlet titled “Christ and Christianity”, Solonovich constructs his own exegesis aimed at proving that Jesus had taught anarchist values, that the apostle Paul had distorted primitive Christianity, and that the apostle Peter had established a “satanic Church” (Idem., *Khristos i khristianstvo*: 16). The pamphlet discloses a religiously founded anti-Judaism that might explain why the legends principally exclude Jews from the possibility of pneumatic enlightenment (Nikitin 2003c, 50ff.; legend no. 22). Jesus is presented as an initiate of a powerful but secret organization that had somehow been “close to the Essenes” (RGALI, 35) and had prepared Jesus for his mission. Quite paradoxically, this nebulous background story is entangled with an often-literal exegesis, but serves to imply a spiritual tradition and perennial teaching that had been transmitted to Jesus and by Jesus to a group of secret disciples who then, in turn, had originated the Gnostic schools of thought. Similar to the socialist revolutionaries of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Solonovich attempts to sacralize anarchism and weave it into a history

of tradition by projecting it into a legendary past and presenting it as the continuation of the Early Church. In striking accordance with Tolstoj's religious views (Aleksandrova 2017), Solonovich holds that the essence of anarchism could not only be found in primitive Christianity but also in the ideas of Buddha and Krishna, who had taught "equality" (*ravenstvo*), "fraternity" (*bratstvo*), and "philanthropy" (*chelovechestvo*) (Solonovich, lecture no. 5, 13). Their ideas of non-violence (*nenasilie*) had repeatedly resurfaced in history, in the teachings of Joachim of Fiore, Thomas Müntzer, John of Leiden (Ibid., 14), had invigorated the deeds of the crusader knights and the Freemasons (Idem in Nikitin 2003c, 482), and had then reappeared in the visions of Bakunin, Kropotkin, and Tolstoj, whom Solonovich named "the three magi from the East" (RGALI, 3) and the greatest "precursors of the Paraclete" (Solonovich, lecture no. 5, 15).¹⁰ To him, the establishment of an anarchist society would erect the "Kingdom of Heaven on earth, coinciding with the state of anarchy" (Ibid., 14). Solonovich's "Kingdom of Heaven" presupposes an anarcho-communist society without domination or inequality in possession, though entitled to an individualism that, as he emphasized, had nothing to do with Max Stirner's "egoistic" individualist theory but finds expression in the "right to creativity" (*pravo na tvorchestvo*) (Idem 1917b, 35; Idem, lecture no. 2, 21).

Solonovich saw the legitimacy of anarchism in its "true realism" (Idem., lecture no. 10.1, 5), for the teaching of anarchism attended to the factual social conditions of the world of today – in marked contrast to Marxist philosophy, which merely promised "future well-being, a future socialist paradise," for which "one has to sacrifice the present" (Ibid.). It is the direct confrontation with reality that links anarchism with mysticism, another pneumatic principle.

Attention must be drawn here to Solonovich's mastery of language, by which he subtly shifts the semantic focalization of concepts. While presenting both anarchism and mysticism as capable of revealing the "true reality of human existence" (Idem, lecture no. 10.2, 18), he dumps Marxism into the dubious jungle of *mistsizm* labelling it as an "absurdity" (*nelepost'*) (Idem in Nikitin 2003c, 448), "nonsense" (*bessmyslitsa*), "rubbish" (*chepukha*) (Ibid., 454), and simply as a "lie" (*lozh'*) (Ibid., 485).

¹⁰ In Christian theology, "Paraclete", meaning "comforter", "consoler" or "Spirit of Truth", refers to "the figure that Jesus himself promised would come to fulfil his teaching" (Baker-Brian 2011, 53). In Gnostic theology, the term is commonly associated with the prophet Mani, whose visions gave rise to the Gnostic current of Manichaeism, and who identified himself as the Paraclete announced by the Messiah (see Ibid.).

The semantic dislocation is complemented by a typological classification, identifying four different types of mysticism: According to Solonovich, its most simple form was to be found in the “mysticism of the elements” (*mistika stikhijnykh sil*) as it was practiced by sorcerers and shamans, and by “hylics” in general. On a higher level he placed “human mysticism” (*mistika chelovecheskaia*) defined by the religion of the ancestors and the perception of reality shared by several “psychics” (*psikhiki*) in the guise of political figures, social reformers, and scientists, such as Auguste Comte, Karl Marx, and Rudolf Steiner. In the transitional stage from psychism to pneumatism, the most dangerous form of mysticism was likely to appear – the “mysticism of darkness” (*mistika t'my*) or the “mysticism of evil” (*mistika Zla*), which would become manifest in the “fight for power and pleasure”. Therefore, mysticism in its highest form could only arise from pneumatism, and would not arouse the thirst for power but lead to “sacrificial love”. This is what Solonovich called “the mysticism of light” (*mistika sveta*) (Idem, lecture no. 10.1, 2f).

Contemplative experience was meant to bring full awareness of reality, which would be followed by conscious deeds. To Solonovich, everyone who acted consciously was a mystic. However, conscious deeds could only result from the ability to distinguish between good and evil. Those who had acquired this ability and acted correspondingly were eligible for knightly status. Spiritual insight finding expression in ethical conduct constituted the core of Solonovich’s concept of templarism, a third pneumatic principle. It remains faithful to the antagonism of good versus evil that is at its core. The legends feature the Templar knights as protagonists who fight in the “army of light” (Nikitin 2003c, 72) against the forces of darkness. Ethics and spirit combined would then necessarily converge into “an anarchist knighthood and chivalric anarchism” (RGALI, 38), and these spiritual knights, assuming the role of vanguard warriors, would lead the way into the “Kingdom of Freedom” (Ibid.). Solonovich’s “translation” of templarism served the Order’s self-identification and legitimization. Furthermore, it represented a call to action (*delanie*). Since, according to him, “the last knights of freedom” (Solonovich in Nikitin 2003c, 482) had died with the Anabaptists in the German peasants’ war, new warriors needed to rise and “retake” the cross. Thus, templarism as a form of *imitatio Christi* implied the resurrection of pre-institutionalized, anarchist Christianity.

The conceptual triad of anarchism, mysticism, and templarism constitutes the ideational foundation of the teaching that went down in Russian history as “mystical anarchism”.

It proves challenging to give a general outline of and at the same time do justice to Solonovich's teaching. It is all-embracing and, after all, elliptic. It is open-minded and yet imperious, allowing of no deviation from its principles. It is both egalitarian and elitist, humanistic and sharp as a whiplash. It is strikingly elaborate, though contradictory in its very essence. Its contrariness oddly reflects its reception in Russia's political underground: Solonovich's fighting spirit, provoking eloquence, and uncompromising views breaking harshly with Soviet reality antagonized fierce adversaries but also attracted a whole regiment of ardent followers.

One of them, Vasilij Nalimov, Solonovich's close disciple and early representative of the Russian New Age, revived and elaborated on his teacher's ideas. Solonovich's views are scattered throughout Nalimov's philosophical works and form the basis of his probabilistic theory of culture. They were further carried on by the renowned Russian writer Vasilij Golovanov (1960–2021), who had been Nalimov's disciple for many years. In a radically different way, Solonovich's legacy still lives on: The Templar legends, most of which doubtlessly penned by Solonovich himself, have found their way into the neopagan "Rodnoverie" movement. At the end of the 1990s, Aleksandr Khinevich, the leader of the Church of Ynglings, published a collection of allegedly ancient "Slavo-Aryan Vedas", which contain some of the legends Nikitin claimed to have discovered shortly before (Slaviano-Arijskie Vedy 1999).¹¹

CONCLUSION

Some parts of the history of Russia's "mystical anarchism" still remain in the dark – what were the concrete influences giving birth to "mystical anarchism"? What was the scope of the movement? How did the Moscow Templar Order actually come into being? Nevertheless, the given outline has laid down the teaching's conceptual basis and offered a new methodological approach that regards culture, both mainstream and subcultures, as mosaics of concepts, each configuration presenting one potential translation thereof. Above all, it presented the hitherto unacknowledged mastermind behind "mystical anarchism", whose personality, thoughts, and social vision invigorated an intellectual movement of social protest and significantly contributed to the downfall of Russian anarchism.

¹¹ On Khinevich see Aitamurto (2016, 50ff.).

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PART II

AGENCY, SEXUALITY AND FEMALE IDENTITY IN “DISGRACE” AND “THE JOURNAL OF SARAB AFFAN”

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ABSTRACT

This paper compares concepts of female identity, sexuality and agency in South African novelist J. M. Coetzee's "Disgrace" (1999) and Palestinian novelist Jabra Ibrahim Jabra's "The Journals of Sarab Affan" (1992). It specifically employs Edward Said's ideas on humanism, resistance and agency. In analyzing the colonial dynamics that secure a sovereign subject status for the West, Said's critical works such as "Orientalism" (1979), and "Culture and Imperialism" (1993) have been studied from a cultural perspective, focusing on the way he reads Western cultural representations of itself and the Other, and adding significantly to the field of postcolonial studies. Yet, Said's works are accused for relegating gender and sexual issues to a secondary position. In this article, I refute such an accusation. I argue that for Said, sexual and gender differences, similar to cultural differences, are fundamental constituents of the Otherness that is placed in contradistinction to the colonial, racial or gendered sovereign subject. To overcome such deep-seated concepts of Otherness and difference, Said introduces the concept of humanism as to understand human history as a continuous process of self-understanding and self-realization devoid of any gender, racial or ethnic bias. The paper argues that Coetzee's "Disgrace" and Jabra's "The Journals of Sarab Affan" exemplify Said's humanism. The two novels represent the complexities of the violent colonial experiences and heritage, particularly for women, in modern South Africa and Palestine. For example, when white Lucy Lurie in "Disgrace" is gang-raped by black teenagers in post-apartheid South Africa, she neither tells the police about the identity of her rapists, nor leaves South Africa. Rather, Lucy realizes that rape is the price she has to pay to maintain the connection with her land and authentic South African identity under new power structures that still based on revenge, anger and discrimination. Likewise, highly educated and independent Palestinian Sarab Affan rethinks her identity as an Arab and a Palestinian woman as she undergoes disappointment and alienation in her patriarchal society. Sarab, like Lucy in "Disgrace", relates her personal sufferings to the wider political failure in Palestine as Hamas and

the Palestinian Liberation organization (PLO) fight over power in colonized Palestine while unarmed Palestinian youth die in the intifada. However, Lucy finds agency in staying in South Africa, while Sarab leaves the Arab world to live in France. The two women explore and resist sexist and racist structures, rethinking concepts of female agency, sexuality and identity.

Keywords: female agency, identity, sexuality, (post)colonial, humanism, patriarchy

INTRODUCTION: COMPLEX COLONIAL HERITAGE IN SOUTH AFRICA AND PALESTINE

In my understanding of its relevance today, humanism is not a way of consolidating and affirming what 'we' have always known and felt, but rather a means of questioning, upsetting, and reformulating so much of what is presented to us as commodified, packaged, uncontroversial, and uncritically codified certainties. (Said 2004, 28)

In the above quotation, Edward Said redefines humanism as a liberalising and human rights movement against all forms of racism and discriminations. Said refutes the traditional versions of humanist thoughts as reductive and didactic in nature and practices so that they were "often associated with very selective elites, be they religious, aristocratic, or educational", or "left open to every sort of unruly individualism, disreputable modishness, and uncanonized learning, with the result that true humanism [was] violated, if not altogether discredited" (Said 2004, 28). Moreover, Said refuses the dominant humanist view that interprets the past as "an essentially complete history" and sustains the view that the past is "still open to the presence and the challenges of the emergent, the insurgent, the unrequited, and the unexplored" (Ibid., 26). Said insinuates that though humanism is "centered upon the agency of human individuality and subjective intuition, rather than on received ideas and approved authority", it is "sustained by a sense of community with other interpreters and other societies and periods". Said confirms further that "there is no such thing as an isolated humanist" (Said 2003, 3).

In this way, Said regards humanism as a form of intellectual and physical resistance and a practice against various forms of patriarchy, isolation and discrimination. Said's arguments concerning the role of humanist thoughts in resisting deep-seated, and complex forms of racism and hierarchy in modern societies are relevant to the exceptional colonial situations in South Africa and Palestine. Despite the fact that the colonial struggle in South Africa and Palestine has taken different forms, native people in both countries have experienced similar systematic and collective processes of discrimination and segregation. Under the apartheid system, coloured and

black South Africans suffer oppression, physical and psychological abuse and displacement, and their rights are persistently misappropriated (Barnett 1999; Lodge 2009). Likewise, Palestinians are oppressed, inferiorised, segregated and displaced. Israeli military attacks target Palestinian civilians of all age groups and gender (Hammami 2006; Dann 2012). Native black and coloured South Africans and Palestinian are economically dependent on the white minority or the Afrikaner and Israelis respectively. Not only do native South Africans and Palestinians have to deal with the fact that the colonizers, Afrikaner in the first and Israelis in the second, have claimed permanent rights to their lands, but also have to overcome a chronic state of hatred, violence and rejection of the Other.

In such complicated situations, women in South Africa and Palestine face many challenges. Women become symbols of both oppression and resistance. In imperialist calls for civilizing the uncivilized "other" or savage parts of the world, both the colonized and the colonizer are established and stabilized as biologically and mentally opposite identities. The colonizer is always civilized, superior and powerful while the colonized is always submissive, inferior, and powerless. In naturalizing its hierarchies and discriminations among its own members, cultural difference becomes a "radical instrument to relegate the rights of others to an inferior or lesser status" (Said 1985, 40). In this way, the ideologies of racial difference were intensified by their incorporation into the discourse of art and science, forming "cultural identity", an identity that demands "the fetishization and relentless celebration of 'difference' and 'otherness'" (Said 1989, 17). Under the wider umbrella of racial difference, gender and sexual difference also turn out to afford effective methods of suppression of the Other. In "Orientalism", Said argues that colonial representations of "female sexuality" of the Other generally express "temptation", "self-sufficiency", and "emotional carelessness", and particularly Oriental women are seen as possessing "peculiarly luxuriant and seemingly un-bounded sexuality". These play a significant role in stereotyping the Other as both a source of "barbaric splendor and cruelty [and] exotic and strange pleasures" (Said 1979, 188).

Put this way, within colonial and patriarchal orders, sexuality serves as force for subverting and disrupting power relations, unsettling the paradigm of the oppressor and the oppressed. In discussing sexual as well as cultural modes of differentiation, Said indicates that "this differentiation is frequently performed by setting the valorized culture over the male Other" and by "subjugating women" (Said 1979, 47). Feminist critic Barbara Bush has agreed with Said that "while white men could assert power over white (and black)

women, black men, though they are subordinate to white women in race/class terms, have sexual power [over them]" (Bush 1988, 426). I have chosen to examine the novels of the South African novelist J. M. Coetzee (1940) and the Palestinian writer Jabra Ibrahim Jabra (1919–1994) in particular for a number of reasons. I argue Coetzee's "Disgrace" and Jabra's "The Journals of Sarab Affan" are particularly appropriate to a reading using Said's readings of humanism. The two writers engage with the colonial histories of their countries, are concerned with female characters and defend the rights of the oppressed.

As a white writer in a country like South Africa in a period of total repression and silencing of the majority of black people, the writings of white Coetzee have not only been judged for their political significance, but he has also had to persistently declare, if not justify, his attitudes towards the past history of apartheid and oppression. Coetzee's involvement with history and politics is intentionally blurred by his use of allegory, metafiction and semi-realist novels, a technique that not only suggests that "Coetzee's commitment [is] to the autonomy of his art" but also "ensures the political force of his novels" (Durrant 1992, 432). Coetzee undoubtedly identifies himself with the problems of the oppressed and the marginalized in South Africa. This is reflected in all his novels including "In the Heart of the Country" (1977), "Waiting for the Barbarians" (1980), "Life and Times of Michael K" (1983). In the majority of these novels, the South African polarities of master/slave, black/white, male/female, the private and the public and oppression/resistance are always dominant, upsetting the status quo and keeping the struggle alive. For instance, Michael K in "Life and Times of Michael K", Friday in "Foe", Magda in "In the Heart of the Country" and Melanie in "Disgrace" are marginalized citizens who are forced to retreat from society to their private worlds in the process of searching for an identity different from the one prescribed for them by society. Coetzee's novels represent elements of social resistance and armed violence as well. In novels set during the apartheid era, many coloured and black characters are shown to suffer oppression, physical and psychological abuse and their rights are persistently misappropriated. These victimized characters react differently. Some retreat and keep silent, while others actively join armed resistance groups (Attwell 1990, 579; Poyner 2006, 3).

If silence is the favoured tool of resistance utilized by Coetzee's oppressed characters, Jabra's characters are exceptionally talkative. Jabra himself believes that "language to the Arab is the means of giving substance to his dreams and defining those inner ways which lead to the cultural identity he seeks for himself" (Jabra 1981, 51).

Jabra, unlike Coetzee, is a politically committed intellectual whose main concern has been reforming Palestinian and Arab culture and politics. He is a liberal thinker but adopts socialist notions as well. "As a 'Third World' was being born", Jabra says, "writers were its prophets" (Jabra 1985, 88). For Jabra, there is a vital interaction between the literary text and its socio-cultural context and so Third World and Palestinian literature should both highlight and fight colonialism along with inherent forces of tyranny and oppression that have been prevalent within their borders for so long. In Jabra's novels, unlike Coetzee's "oblique" engagement with history and "elusive" characters, historical facts and events are directly presented and even discussed openly by characters. Jabra's oppressed and colonized men and women are revolutionary, voluble and challenge their enforced exile, alienation and marginalization through integrating themselves within host societies and through telling stories. They always talk about the past to keep it alive within their own and others' memories. Studying and living in the United Kingdom and moving between Iraq and Lebanon, Jabra, like his characters, is open to other cultures and aspires to get their support and even sympathy with the Palestinians. Jabra is worried that, with the disaster of 1948, "we became more and more politically alienated from the west", and as a result, "the idea of culture became extra-national" (Jabra 1985, 81).

This "extra-national" vision of the Palestinian struggle develops and changes throughout Jabra's novels. Jabra is convinced that the fate of Palestinian and Arab men and women is inseparable from worldwide conditions and the cultural hegemony of the West. To describe such interconnection, Jabra's novels embrace "hybridity as subject matter", a hybridity which directly "challenges the history of racial 'purity'" (Ghazoul 2000, 12). In "The Ship" (1970), Jabra's characters include Arabs, Europeans and Americans who all talk about both their personal life and their view of the world around them. They come from different backgrounds but all are involved in a similar historical desire for change, real human contact and liberty from repressive cultural norms. Similarly, in "In Search of Walid Masoud" (1978) and "The Journals of Sarab Affan" (1992), Arab and Palestinian men and women are open to Western culture and civilization; nevertheless, they see the world around them in relation to the Palestinian cause and the colonial experience of the Arab world. Both Jabra and his characters begin to consider the existing realities of the Arab world, realizing that the independence of Palestinian people requires them to have a separate plan of action on both

the military and the negotiational levels. A similar identity struggle dominates Coetzee's novels. He investigates the deep-seated processes of the construction of identity in South Africa, tracing its psychological and cultural repercussions on race and gender relations. Coetzee, like Jabra, believes that apartheid and racist systems worldwide establish the misconception that "humanity falls 'naturally' into three divisions, white, black, yellow, or into men and women" (Begam 1992, 426). Rejecting such fixed notions, Jabra and Coetzee suggest that identity has to pass through a continual process of redefining and compromise with other identities and within itself. This process is the outcome of the interaction between both the personal and historical dimensions of identity.

In the following analysis, I argue that Coetzee's "Disgrace" and Jabra's "The Journal of Sarab Affan" conform perfectly to Edward Said's definition of humanism, exploring the worldly connections of literary texts. I am interested in comparing and contrasting the ways humanism as a form of female political activism in "Disgrace" and "The Journals of Sarab Affan". I examine how the two novels involve and are involved with history and politics in South Africa and Palestine. I examine how female characters in both novels adopt humanist attitudes and perform acts that enhance their political agency and develop their roles in the process of decision-making.

PART ONE: FEMALE IDENTITY AND SEXUALITY IN "DISGRACE" AND "THE JOURNAL OF SARAB AFFAN"

RAPE IN "DISGRACE"

Not rape, not quite that, but undesired nevertheless, undesired to the core. As though she had decided to go slack, die within herself for the duration, like a rabbit when the jaws of the fox close on its neck. So that everything done to her might be done, as it were, far away. (Coetzee 1999, 25)

They were not raping, they were mating. It was not the pleasure principle that ran the show but the testicles, sacs bulging with seed aching to perfect itself. And now, lo and behind, the child! [...] What kind of child can seed like that give life to, seed driven into the woman not in love but in hatred, mixed chaotically, meant to soil her, to mark her, like a dog's urine? (Coetzee 1999, 199)

In the above two quotations from Coetzee's novel, "Disgrace", the character David Lurie, a white professor of communications, reflects on two acts of rape committed against two women in the novel, namely his black student, Melanie Isaacs, and his daughter, Lucy Lurie, respectively. For different reasons, Melanie and Lucy become sites of male sexual violence and revenge. The former is raped by David Lurie himself and the second is gang-raped by a group of black teenagers, instigated and motivated by Lucy's servant, Petrus. The two women are raped, but their rapists as well as their guardians evade classifying the aggressive acts as "rape". Thus, no-one is actually to claim complete responsibility or be properly punished for the appalling acts of rape. In this way, Lucy and Melanie are not only held partially responsible for their rape, but they internalize feelings of confusion and shame as sinners and victims at the same time. In the end, Lucy and Melanie are left to heal their psychological and physical wounds alone. In "Orientalism", Said argues that the colonizing mind views "itself and its subject matter [the colonized] with sexist blinkers", with "women usually the creatures of a male power-fantasy. They express unlimited sensuality, they are more or less stupid, and above all they are willing" (Said 1979, 208). In other words, as Wendy Pearson puts it, "colonialism's ideological underpinnings require the discursive construction of the bodies of the other not only as abjected components in racialized and gendered hierarchies, but also as units of exchange in economic, sexual, and cultural intercourse" (Pearson 2007, 183). Since in post-apartheid South Africa the state gives priority to political change without really reforming the apartheid-based, discriminative social relations and divisions of labour and wealth, the female characters in Coetzee's novel continue to struggle with gender stereotypes and the opportunistic cultural economy.

Coming from a middle-class black family and studying at the University of Cape Town, Melanie Isaacs symbolizes hope and ambition in post-apartheid South Africa. She is a young woman looking for fair and equal access to educational and social chances. However, Melanie discovers, as Gayle Rubin puts it, that "Sex is always political [...] especially in the world of the University" (Rubin 1984, 267). The racist past is not over yet and Melanie's racial and gender difference is still a hindrance in face of her ambitions. Her professor, David Lurie, by virtue of his racial inheritance, is placed by the apartheid government at the top of the social and political hierarchy in apartheid South Africa. As a privileged man of letters, David uses his knowledge and scholarly influence to serve the ideological aims

of his racist system. David's superior socio-racial background directly enforces his sexual power, "If he looked at a woman in a certain way, with certain intent, she would return his look" (Coetzee 1999, 7). Unfortunately, although David's "[sexual] powers fled" (Ibid., 7), as result of his old age and the decline of his political power in post-apartheid South Africa, he still figures out new ways of achieving domination in the new order, namely through his position and his money. Having an "eye" for Melanie, David pursues her, telling her that "a woman's beauty does not belong to her alone; [...] she has a duty to share it" (Ibid., 16). David understands sex as an "ungovernable impulse", so that once "Eros entered, [he] become[s] a servant of Eros" (Ibid., 52). Even if Melanie does not want to share her sexuality with him, he does not really care about her opinion. Shockingly, Melanie accepts David's sexual authority and claims as fact. She regards it as her duty to share her body and beauty with him. Edward Said defines the attitude of the colonizer towards the colonized as one of "dominating, restructuring, and having authority". Colonizers "gather knowledge about the Other" so that "through their cultural and literary representations, [they] alienate and stereotype that Other to fit their political and ideological aims" (Said 1979, 3). With his imperialist, racial background, David follows the same strategy with Melanie. He collects information about her, tries to exploit her youth in order to fill her head with his sexist ideas and finally succeeds in isolating her from her family and environment. After Melanie issues a complaint against him, David is surprised:

Melanie would not have taken such a step by herself, he is convinced. She is too innocent for that, too ignorant of her power. [Isaacs], the little man in the ill-fitting suit, must be behind it, [Isaacs] and cousin Pauline, the plain one, the duenna. They must have talked her into it, worn her down, then in the end marched her to the administration offices. (Coetzee 1999, 39)

Melanie is stereotyped by David as a weak, dependent and ignorant young woman who knows nothing about her rights as a university student, protected by university laws, one of which is "Article 3.1 [which] addresses victimization or harassment of students by teachers" (Ibid., 39). Melanie is not the only woman to be misjudged by men in "Disgrace". Reducing women's roles to the service of their own desires and needs, the majority of men in the novel practise sexual and moral double standards. They grant themselves greater sexual freedom and authority over women, whom they perceive as tools to prove their masculine superiority or political

domination. David sees no shame or wrongdoing in living in a “flurry of promiscuity” in which he “[has] affairs with the wives of colleagues”, with “tourists”, and with “whores” (Ibid., 7). His freedom to do so is based on a society of “gender polarization”, which Sandra Bem explains “aids and abets the social reproduction of male power by providing the fundamental division between masculine and feminine upon which androcentrism is built. This aspect of gender polarization manifests itself at three levels: the institutional, the psychological, and the ideological” (Bem 1993, 194). In “Disgrace”, then, sexual power has allegorical implications for broader systems of power and domination. It stands for the struggle over land ownership, racial domination and, above all essentialised gender polarizations. Regrettably, the political atmosphere in post-apartheid South Africa paves the way for old gender polarization and sexist ideas to continue and dominate. Melanie’s rape is an ideological, racial appropriation and subjugation of the female Other. Living in a period of political transformation and ideological re-organization of centres of power, South African men and women are required to fight for a better position or to readjust their interests to suit the new order. Still governed by the same laws created by the colonizers and expanded by the new post-apartheid government which, despite its attempts to equalize the position of all citizens, enables David, like many other white and black sexists, opportunists and power-seekers, still to find other indirect means of exerting their superiority, particularly over women: “If [David] want[s] a woman, he ha[s] to learn to buy her” (Coetzee 1999, 7).

The institutionalized nature of the sexual economy is highlighted through the character of Soraya. David is accustomed to visiting the Discreet Escorts Agency, where he pays prostitutes for sex. Classified under the category “Exotic”, Muslim prostitute Soraya fulfils the white professor’s need to conquer “exotic girls” (Ibid., 7). In seeing Soraya in the street with her two sons, David is shocked with her “double life”, something that he, ironically enough, thinks “would be unusual for a Muslim, but all things are possible these days” (Ibid., 3). David judges the morality of a Muslim woman and denies her the right to have a family and lead a normal public life, ignoring her denied economic rights and opportunities that force her to sell her body for money. Through its characterization of David Lurie, Coetzee’s novel indicates that double standards and gender inequalities are common in the post-apartheid era. Shaun Irlam suggests that such a representation is not inauthentic since he criticises the new South African society, claiming that it is merely an “international

media fantasy" that is widely sustained abroad but "belied at home, in the cities and townships of South Africa". Irlam argues that despite the "modest moves" toward integration, the new South Africa remains "deeply divided in racial relations, and the gulf between the poor and the rich never narrows" (Irlam 2004, 697). Karin Lombard agrees that "Most people in post-apartheid South Africa choose to forget the bitterness they suffered in the past, because issues such as the HIV/AIDS crisis, soaring crime rates, and prevailing poverty and unemployment gradually become the utmost priorities the new government has to deal with" (Lombard 2004, 186). According to these commentators, fighting poverty, social injustice, crime and chronic diseases preoccupies the majority of the South African public. If David Lurie's well-to-do life does not expose him personally to these dangers and problems, he receives a rude awakening when his daughter Lucy is impregnated through a gang-rape and is potentially infected with HIV/AIDS. Only when the situation becomes unignorablely personal, do David's views really start to change. Like Melanie, Lucy is reduced to a stereotype by the black worker, Petrus, as a vulnerable woman, with no male guardians, a weak point that Lucy herself confesses: "Objectively I am a woman alone. I have no brothers. [...] To whom can I turn for protection, for patronage?" (Coetzee 1999, 9).

To humble Lucy and to force her either to accept his protection and control over her land or to leave South Africa and emigrate to another part of the world, Petrus targets her sexuality. The aggressive attitudes of both David and Petrus towards women go beyond lack of individual morality to encompass intentional disrespect and transgression of the law. They choose to operate outside the boundaries of law, which is, as the white secretary Dawn explains, common: "Now people just pick and choose which laws they want to obey. It's anarchy. How can we bring up children when there's anarchy all around?" (Ibid., 9). Within such a chaotic situation, David and Petrus aim at upholding the patriarchal status quo. Consequently, their sexual atrocity tends to "[re-]domesticate" and "shame" the new, independent young women, Lucy and Melanie, so that "[their] place in the outside world would not constitute a significant challenge for the care and protection of the [patriarchal] nation and essential identity" (Yeegenoglu 1998, 125). Lucy classifies her rape as "fighting with death" (Coetzee 1999, 158). Petrus, similar to David, aims to quash Lucy's feelings of belonging, of dignity and of independence.

FEMALE INFERIORITY IN "THE JOURNAL OF SARAB AFFAN"

My identity is that I sometimes want to explode into shrapnel because I can no longer bear the kind of life I live. My identity is that my father loves me and is afraid of me and for me but does not understand me. [...] I am like other women my age, but I know that I am different from them and that my identity is my difference. [...] From this moment on, [Sarab] is in love, madly in love. She will also be a courageous fighter for her homeland, for freedom. She will love humanity to heal the wounds of people everywhere. (Jabra 1992, 6)

In the above quotations, the half-Palestinian, half-Iraqi character, Sarab Affan, reflects on her identity problems and her determination to resolve them. In the first quotation, she highlights her disappointment at her familial and societal relations. She lacks familial understanding and support, particularly from her doctor father, and finds difficulty in sharing her dreams, differences and aims in life with her people. She dreams of freedom not only for herself as an individual and her homeland, Palestine, but also for people worldwide. For Sarab, the route to freedom is realized through the concepts of humanism and love, which break cultural bondages and cross geographical boundaries to connect with human beings worldwide. Sarab, however, decides to devote the rest of her life to the service of the cause of freedom. However, she is concerned about which paths she should take, the support she can get and the knowledge she must have to be a qualified freedom fighter. Growing up and living in a patriarchal society and a phallogentric culture, where either her male guardian or oppressive systems control her behaviour and shape her life according to their goals and not hers, Sarab Affan is looking for "salvation".

Set during the first Palestinian intifada (1987–1993), "The Journals of Sarab Affan" tackles the theme of salvation in the face of inescapable loss, suffering and exile. Despite the fact that Sarab is a successful secretary and leads a comfortable life, she is not satisfied with it. On the personal level, Sarab is a repressed woman and an unacknowledged and marginalized writer. She lives in a patriarchal society, where she "[is] subordinated and victimized principally because she is a woman in Arab, Muslim society, or because she is a Palestinian" (Said 1993a, 78). It is a double process of marginalization where sexuality and political identity are inseparable. As a Palestinian exile, Sarab is never at home and, as a woman, she is

never an equal human being with men. Torn by her personal-political predicament as a Palestinian, Sarab sees the Palestinian cause with “humanist” eyes, exercising what Said calls an “act of reading” by “putting [her]self in the position of the author, for whom writing is a series of decisions and choices expressed in words” (Said 2004, 62). In relating and reevaluating her cultural and political affiliations, Sarab employs her unsettled political thoughts and unhappy emotions as a means of mastering the story of her own life and equally mastering her literary profession. She decides to challenge conformist ideas and traditional female roles through turning her alienation and marginalization into resistant writings promoting the values of freedom and human rights for all people. In this way, Sarab turns from being a receiver of cultural and literary ideas into a creator of her own distinct voice and viewpoints.

In “Humanism and Democratic Criticism”, Said proposes the concept of “readism”, as a method of measuring “the effect of structures of power and authority on the process of reading” (Said 2004, 60). The process of readism depends on two steps; reception and resistance. Said explains:

Reception is submitting oneself knowledgeably to texts and treating them provisionally at first as discrete objects. [...] Expanding and elucidating the often obscure or invisible frameworks in which they exist, to their historical situations and the way in which certain structures of attitude, feeling, and rhetoric get entangled with some currents, some historical and social formulations of their contexts. [...] Only by receiving the text in all its complexity and with the critical awareness, can one move from the specific to the general both integratively and synthetically. (Said 2004, 62)

Said’s theory of “readism” is perfectly applicable to Sarab Affan. In reading the novels of her ideal writer, Nael Imran, particularly his latest novel “Entering the Mirrors” and writing her journals at the same time, Sarab, I argue, takes the crucial decisions of becoming a political activist and of initiating her writing career. Rendered immune to his influence by her knowledge, independent opinions and humanist attitude, Sarab receives Nael’s opinions and traditional views with suspicion, criticism and resistance. Marginalized by her society and neglected by her father, Sarab, similar to Melanie in Coetzee’s novel, is confused. She looks for an inspiring example and a helping hand to take her away from her own sadness and loneliness within “her society fenced in by fear and stagnation” (Jabra 1992, 103). For her, Nael Imran, the famous, liberal author,

is the perfect model. Sarab confronts her society through knowledge and understanding. With Nael, Sarab voices the aspiration that "[they] will enter together into one mirror, into worlds of impossibilities" (Ibid., 45). She dreams of equality in love, work and happiness and envisions their future life as travelling to Paris, London and Rome, and Cairo and Baghdad, as "rebellious literati", lecturing together about "Jerusalem" and "freedom" and reading their "poems and novels" (Ibid., 44). Mohamed Shaheen interprets the love relationship between Sarab and Nael in terms of their almost contradictory artistic positions as "a female artist in her youth and a male artist in the heyday of his elderliness" (Shaheen 2001, 44). Thus, it is a relation between past and present, energy and exhaustion, illusion and reality, and irrelevance and timeliness:

Sarab Affan's passion is not born of a personal deprivation, nor is it the result of an emotional vacuum, but rather is the result of an awareness of a historical ordeal. [...] The meeting between Sarab and Nael is more than a meeting between a woman and a man. Rather, this is the first outlet outside of the siege, and the first opportunity on the way back to the origin of the ordeal. (Shaheen 2001, 44)

Nevertheless, Nael, who is supposed to be supportive of her independent opinions, betrays Sarab. As she approaches the exclusive male domain, she discovers that Nael is just "the straw man" and "the greatest producer of illusion" (Jabra 1992, 44). He wants to possess her body and aims at "shaping or reshaping [her] the way [he] like[s]" (Ibid., 46). Like the majority of Arab men in Jabra's novels, Nael leads a double life. His writings are liberal, progressive and radical while he is a defeatist whose personal beliefs are traditional, sexist and submissive. Nael criticises Sarab's revolutionary ideas and inhibits her will to act against oppression and political corruption: "Sarab, the creators of all the taboos and sanctions are the masters of our day – What are we able to do with our rebellious visions to stand up to those watchdogs?" (Ibid., 113). Nael who believes that "the body is a fundamental reality", endorses sexist thinking and is complicit with oppressive systems. He escapes his historical responsibility to fight for human freedom and human rights either to live in the past or to indulge himself in a life of masculine pleasures and sensual desires. Moreover, in his romantic relations, Nael Imran, like Walid Masoud and Wadi Assaf in Jabra's earlier novels, reduces love to sensual desire. For him, Sarab's looks – her breasts, lips, cheeks, and body – come before her intellect (Ibid.,

56). According to Luce Irigaray, in phallogocentric cultures, "It is crucial that [women] keep [their] bodies even as [they] bring them out of silence and servitude" (Irigaray 1987, 19). In such a culture, Sarab's duty, like Melanie's, is to submit her body to Nael. Nael has a wife, but looks for mistresses. When the wife is dead, he keeps her pure image in his head while seeing other women as sexual objects. In defying Nael's expectations as a submissive mistress, Sarab challenges his masculine superiority and authority over a woman's body and mind. Sarab achieves the love of her life with Nael as his intellectual and emotional equal. She even prefers in the end to refuse his suggestion of marriage, so that she may remain free and able to pursue a full life without the constraints of daily conjugal cohabitation. Irigaray clarifies:

Historically [women] are the guardians of the flesh. We should not give up that role, but identify it as our own, by inviting men not to make us into body for their benefit, not to make us into guarantees that their body exists. All too often the male libido needs some woman (wife-mother) to guard the male body. This is why men need a wife in the home, even when they have a mistress elsewhere. (Irigaray 1987, 19)

In this manner, Sarab, similar to Lucy and Melanie, is stereotyped as a body to amuse men and an idealistic writer who lives in a world of fantasies. For years, Sarab has been following the rules, shielding herself behind "walls of fears" while "suffering the pain of seeing" (Jabra 1992, 98). She thinks: "Was I scared of myself, knowing that inside me there femininity capable of things beyond [Nael's] imagination or mine? Was I destined to live my life torn between those endless contradictions?" (Ibid., 96). However, Sarab's problem as a marginalized and repressed female writer is not a private one. On the contrary, in discussing the general cultural attitude towards women's writing, Lillian Robinson refers to "the apparently systematic neglect of women's experience in the literary canon, neglect that takes the form of distorting and misreading the few recognized female writers and excluding the others" (Robinson 1986, 106). Robinson indicates more that the predominantly male authors in the canon "show sexist ideology – an aspect of these classic works about which the critical tradition remained silent for generations. The feminist challenge has not been simply a reiterated attack, but a series of suggested alternatives to the male-dominated membership and attitudes of the accepted canon" (Ibid., 106). Through the literary-personal relationship between Sarab and Nael, Jabra underlines the positions and hardships of Arab female writers in the second

half of the twentieth century. Sarab expects liberal, successful author Nael Imran to support her revolutionary literary ambition. Yet, Nael still has the same traditionalist, masculinist view of women. He reduces Sarab's roles in life to be his lover and wife, but denies her independent intellectual choices.

PART TWO: FEMALE AGENCY AND POLITICAL RESISTANCE IN "DISGRACE" AND "THE JOURNAL OF SARAB AFFAN"

Expressing social and sexual autonomy and fitting well inside the new South African order, Lucy threatens the exclusive connection between black women and authentic South African identity and the land. She says:

Maybe, for men, hating the woman makes sex more exciting. You are a man, you ought to know. When you have sex with someone strange – when you trap her, hold her down, get her under you, put all your weight on her – isn't it a bit like killing? Pushing the knife in; existing afterwards, leaving the body behind covered in blood – doesn't it feel like murder, like getting away with murder? (Coetzee 1999, 158)

In insisting on keeping the child of rape and refusing to report her rape to the police, Lucy survives her "death" to achieve legitimate and equal national identity with the Black South Africans. She realizes that the atrocious act unfairly punishes her for the apartheid regime's past crimes. Claudia Card suggests that Lucy's rape is a "case of genetic imperialism" that "undermines political and ethnic solidarity by obscuring the identity of the next generation" and "robs [Lucy of] the intimate control she had over her body and forcefully transfer[s] this control to her rapists" (Card 1996, 18). In a similar way, Elleke Boehmer argues that Lucy is presented as "always-already a creature of dumb animality" and displays "a continuation of subjection which it would be preposterous to propose as redemptive" (Boehmer 2002, 343). I disagree with Card and Boehmer. On the one hand, Card deprecates the humanist attitude and political awareness Lucy expresses as she "[is] determined to be a good mother" and confesses that leaving South Africa would mean to "taste the defeat for the rest of [her] life" (Coetzee 1999, 216). Lucy overcomes her feelings of betrayal and shame to raise a child of mixed ethnic background but one who shares the identity and nationality of a South African

man. In this way, the identity of the next generation is not at all obscured, but reshaped and humanized.

Lucy's humanist-political perception of her rape "as a purely private matter. In another time, in another place it might be held to be a public matter" (Ibid., 112), is a direct result of her way of living. Unlike her father, who lives in an ivory tower and perceives his difference from other humans and species in terms of superiority and consequently deals with the Other in terms of "generosity, not because [he] feel[s] guilty or fear[s] retribution" (Ibid., 74), Lucy is sharing life with the Other. She "share[s] the dam" with Petrus, "share[s] her house and life" with her father, and even "share[s] some of [her] human privilege with the beasts" (Ibid., 75). Lucy's and David's attitudes towards the Other reflect a completely different perception of the meaning of difference and human rights in South Africa. Said distinguishes between two ideologies of difference. The first is an exclusionary ideology "as an instrument to relegate the rights of others to an inferior or lesser status" (Said 1985, 41), while the second is "an awareness of the supervening actuality of 'mixing', of crossing over, of stepping beyond boundaries, which are more creative human activities than staying inside rigidly policed borders" (Ibid., 43). Said explains further that the two ideologies are inevitably grounded in, or affiliated to, a particular historical moment and a specific political situation. Being the privileged citizen of the apartheid regime, David believes in the separation of the populations into different, unequal groups and, after the rape, he asks Lucy "to turn the farmhouse into a fortress" (Coetzee 1999, 113). Quite the opposite, Lucy's humanistic attitude enables her to practically manage the historical reality of her country. She tells David: "We have our weak moments, all of us, we are only human" (Ibid., 216). In addition to this, Elleke Boehmer ignores the huge pressure and long heritage of hatred and abuse systematically practised against women in South Africa and thus, in blaming Lucy as "a creature of dumb animality" (Boehmer 2002, 343), she insults hundreds of thousands if not millions of Black and coloured women who kept silent about their abuses and violations to protect their families and have sacrificed their dignity to meet their responsibilities. In contrast to Boehmer, I see Lucy's silence as a Coetzeean way of paying respect to the unreported past acts of rape committed upon innocent Black and coloured women in South Africa. By making his white, female character act as she does, Coetzee condemns "European culture's silence and compliance" (Said 1983, 136) with the imperialist project. Coetzee and Lucy achieve independence from "Western civilization and morals, the reversion of originality to silence by the way of repetition"

(*Ibid.*, 136). Silence and violation are no longer related to non-whites. Lucy willingly overcomes her Western belief in her own superiority.

Within such a corrupt and sexist social order, women in "Disgrace" enter into a fierce battle against the old and emerging oppressive power of collective institutions and polarizations. Despite the fact that David abuses both Melanie and Soraya, they are both able to gather themselves and fight David's aggression back. Soraya leaves the Escort Agency and when David harasses her, she is able to defend her private life and her two sons: "I demand you will never phone me here again, never" (Coetzee 1999, 9). Soraya's shrillness, like Melanie's complaint, surprises David, who asks "what should a predator expect when he intrudes into the vixen's nest" (*Ibid.*, 10). Melanie's awareness that David's sexual-political rape "cut [her] off from everyone" and "made me bear [his] secret", is a confession that she experiences a retreat from being "just a student" or a human being, and is reduced into "a body", a "sexual object" and "a passive victim" (Sharpe 1991, 225). Issuing the complaint, Melanie cuts her bondage to the past and moves on with her life. On seeing her acting in a new play, David reflects how "she is altogether surer of herself than before – in fact, good in the part, positively gifted. Is it possible that in the months he has been away she has grown up, found herself? [...] Perhaps she too has suffered, and come through" (Coetzee 1999, 191). Similarly, Lucy's peaceful compromise to stay on her land under the protection of Petrus, though humiliating and subjugating, provides a practical solution to her loneliness and diverts feelings of anger and revenge. Moreover, Lucy's condition that her marriage to Petrus is on paper only and does not include any sexual obligations is another blow against her society's gender polarization and its judgement of her being lesbian as "unnatural". In "The Cultural Politics of Female Sexuality in South Africa", Henriette Gunkel argues that "post-apartheid homophobia further highlights that contemporary homophobia is, in effect, reintroducing a colonialist and racist discourse of sexuality into a postcolonial project" (Gunkel 2010, 28). My argument is that Lucy's compromise, her political marriage to Petrus, is a challenge to such post-apartheid homophobia. Lucy's identity is no longer constructed or naturalized in a polarizing link between gender and sexuality. Being a lesbian, mother and wife is certainly part of Lucy's life experiences and choices but her identity is South African. In countries with an intense, long history of racial struggles like South Africa and Palestine, Edward Said holds that "the fundamental problem is [...] how to reconcile one's identity and the actualities of one's own culture, society, and history to the reality of other identities, cultures, peoples" (Said, 1994, 69). Through

her political decision to stay in South Africa, Lucy achieves the awareness that her “[racial] group is not a natural or God-given entity but is a constructed, manufactured, even in some cases an invented object” (Ibid., 25).

Furthermore, Lucy has been struggling with her sexual identity. She tells her father that she had a relationship in the past and had an abortion. However, she is currently a lesbian. In reading Lucy’s sexuality in relation to her position as a woman within the political transformation in post-apartheid South Africa, Coetzee not only challenges the literary and culturally formative stereotypical image of “the lesbian female figure [as a source of] disruption, horror, and bodily grotesqueness”, but also “reformulate[s] this image of the lesbian into a figure of revolution and change” (Farwell 1966, 17). Lucy is a figure of change on the personal and ideological levels. As Jacqui Alexander points out, “women’s sexual agency, [their] sexual and [their] erotic autonomy have always been troublesome for the state” (Alexander 1997, 65). They pose a challenge to the ideological anchor that the heterosexual family is the cornerstone of society and the solidarity of the nation. As a result, for the state, sex and gender are a means of disciplining of the body and the controlling of the population. In reinventing her sexual identity, Lucy revolts against the patriarchy of the white man. Nevertheless, under the new order, post-apartheid South Africa inherits the same oppressive sexual ideas. Both David and Petrus view Melanie and Lucy, respectively, through the lenses of the past traditions, according to which Melanie is a black sex slave and Lucy is a pervert. Alexander explains that “formerly conflated in the imaginary of the (white) imperial hetero-patriarch, the categories lesbian and prostitute now function together within Black hetero-patriarchy as outlaw, operating outside the boundaries of law and, therefore, poised to be disciplined and punished within it” (Alexander 1997, 65). The sexual objectification of Melanie and Lucy into passive victim and sexual tool, however painful and humiliating, does not deny these two women’s right to a new South African identity. In commenting on Coetzee’s characterization of female characters in his novels, Pamela Cooper asserts that through all of Coetzee’s books, “the potency of women is often bound up with their mysteriousness; their strength depends on their unreadability” (Cooper 2005, 27). I partially agree with Cooper. However, I think that the unreadability of Coetzee’s characters lies in the fact that Coetzee does not offer comfortable solutions; rather, he leaves space for readers to discover their own ethics of reading. Moreover, Cooper reduces women’s strength in the face of patriarchy to their “mysteriousness” while ignoring that it is their resilience

that helps them survive. The fact that Melanie, Soraya and Lucy are able to collect themselves after rape and abuse and to claim a right to land and to their humanness is an admirable sign of resistance, a humanist act of defiance and a demand for justice. It may be that they cannot save the nation from acts of depravity and anger but they do initiate change within the close circle of themselves and their families.

Coetzee complicates the ethical reading of acts of rape and salvation in the novel. Since telling the truth or confession implies either responsibility or relief, the fact that Lurie confesses responsibility to Melanie's family but not to Melanie herself leaves him guilt-stricken forever so that mentioning the name of Melanie "unsettles him" (Coetzee 1999, 190). Similarly, Lucy's refusal to tell the truth about the rape can be taken as identification with the sufferings of other women who have sacrificed a great deal to maintain their possession of a place in South Africa. Melanie, Soraya and Lucy learn to act in defence of their rights as human beings, starting with their right to land as owners and natives, not as secondary citizens or foreigners. Like Lucy and Melanie in "Disgrace", what Sarab really misses as a writer and a female individual is an unbiased and progressive literary atmosphere and not just Nael's support. Sarab's personal liberation as a woman is, then, inseparable from what Said calls "intellectual and literary resistance" (Said 1994, 86). Sarab's personal experience with Nael opens her eyes to the realities of her society and her ability as a human being equal with men to fight her own battle and produce her own vision. Sarab takes the crucial decision to leave Iraq for Paris, searching for a freer literary medium:

When I am sober and my mind is clear, I realize that I want to get on with trying to break out of my old siege. It is as though my soul were a fenced-in city surrounded by enemies, and breaking the siege means getting away to other cities, other horizons, other desires. (Jabra 1992, 95)

In inventing the character of Randa al-Jouzy, "as the rational, balanced, logical one, and Sarab as the one refusing to be rational, balanced, and logical", Sarab does not merely resist Nael's "cheap flirtation" but empowers her own intellectual/literary authority over her life in order to fight her enemies. She is 'a lover and an intruder' (Ibid., 186). Sarab, like Lucy, learns to be cautious, practical and independent. Melanie, Sarab and Lucy lack a thoughtful and understanding father-daughter relationship. Doctor Affan, David Lurie and Mr Isaacs, despite their high level of education and open-minded attitudes, are still traditional in their attitude towards women and

consequently are participants in the oppression and sufferings of their daughters. Sarab confesses that “my father, with all his medical knowledge, was living in one world and I in another. In the last few years the divide separating us grew even wider” (Ibid., 14). As a result of her fragmented and lonely life, Sarab decides “It is my story. [...] So let me revel in my powers, so long as I am the one with the pen” (Ibid., 44). The stereotypical idea that the male guardian; father, brother, lover or even the state is the controller and protector of the female individual is challenged and turns into a fantasy. Sarab delves deep to the roots of her feelings of “slavery and siege”, to discover that it is a straw political creation. As Evelyn Accad states “if sexuality is not incorporated into the main feminist and political agenda, the struggles for freedom will remain on a very superficial level. A problem cannot be solved without going to its roots” (Accad 1991, 243). Sarab discovers that political and cultural systems isolate her from the rest of the world, designating her as the enemy. At the beginning of the novel, she thinks that “life is atrocious” and “expect[s] little of the human condition” (Jabra 1992, 29). Yet, after her experimentation in writing and love, Sarab reaches the conclusion that her “society doomed [her] to spiritual and intellectual closedness” (Ibid., 103), and sees her salvation in exploring the political roots of her oppression by her “search for truth [...] truth confined between the self and the other” (Ibid., 103). Humanity is her refuge. She decides to “care about the ordeals of others” (Ibid., 41) and to share her personal suffering and hopes with them as well. In so doing, she finds personal salvation in love but also in action, seeking collective salvation.

Sarab’s political awareness is inseparable from her readings and re-evaluations of the realities of her society. Living in post-Ba’athist Iraq, Sarab’s life and daily experiences “are driven very much by sectarianism and the concomitant religious politics” (Susser 2010, 16). Susser analyses the expansion of Islamist movements and ideas in the Arab world in the 1980s and their cultural-political repercussions on concepts of freedom, democracy, and the position of women in society. He argues further that post-independence state secularist movements in the twentieth-century in the Arab world, “[have] failed to produce secular societies” and that the “increasing economic mismanagement and corruption and rising poverty and income inequality, undermined the legitimacy of Arab regimes, creating the impression that the modernization project was failing” (Susser 2010, 52). As a result, new religious movements with mass followings have emerged, proposing a political-social substitute, based on Islamic justice and equality. Islamic movements have spread all over the Arab world; starting with the Muslim Brotherhood in

Egypt, Syria and Algeria to Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Palestine. However, all these movements designate to women the traditional roles of housewives and mothers. Despite demographic variations, Carla Obermeyer agrees with Susser that "in contemporary Islamic societies the link between gender relations and political structures seems more inextricable than it is elsewhere" (Obermeyer 1992, 52). She continues:

Traditional roles may thus come to be endowed with a positive political significance, as when veiling is used to express opposition to a regime or when producing many children is a forceful statement in a political struggle. Women can be caught between two conflicting loyalties – to their fellow-women and to their nation and may sacrifice some of their rights as women to reaffirm their identity as Arabs, Muslims, or nationals of a given country. (Obermeyer 1992, 52)

Sarab's personal struggle between either submission to, or independence from Nael is repeated on the national level. She has either to conform to the accepted norms or to be seen by society as an aberrant. Sarab does not hold a middle ground. She realizes that fighting gender stereotypes, masculinist ideas, patriarchal systems and above all supporting the Palestinian cause are the real salvation for her lonely and desperate life. The Other she has been looking for an honest and true contact with is the unexplored horizons outside her limited zones of work and love. Sarab summarizes her need to revive her belief in humanity and the humanist bond between herself and people all over the world:

The language of human understanding is doomed, and the life force is generated only in the innermost cores. [...] The same ferocious cycle is renewed every day [...] robbing all human movement from its humanity and turning it into empty, mechanical motion. And finally the hormone of feeling begins to dissipate little by little, disappearing down an ever steepening slope, to the bottom of swamps, the swamps of slavery. (Jabra 1992, 103)

Sarab leaves Iraq to join the Palestinian political resistance. A year after her departure, Nael finds her studying inside the library of the Pantheon in Paris, enjoying an intellectual respite from her activities in Palestine. In their discussions, Sarab mentions that she is a member of the Palestinian Liberation Organization. The fact that Sarab chooses the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO), the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, is significant.

The PLO officially endorses a two-state solution, contingent on terms such as making East Jerusalem capital of the Palestinian state and giving Palestinians the right of return to land occupied by Palestinians prior to 1948 (Said 2001, 14). Supporting the PLO, Sarab stands against the strict Islamism endorsed by Hamas. Working with the PLO, Sarab tells Nael: “everything I’m doing pours into the Intifada, the Revolution of Stones – Thawra al-hagāra – the revolution that has baffled the world” (Jabra 1992, 185).

In judging Sarab’s political decision to join the Palestinian resistance movement, Nathaniel Greenberg argues that she, “is a kind of product of the elite world that Nael introduces her to” and that “Sarab’s catharsis as an admirer of literature to a committed reader and finally a ‘freedom fighter’, delineates an often overlooked character type of postcolonial Arabic literature that is universal in essence” (Greenberg 2010, 6). I partially agree with Greenberg: Sarab is a universal figure who adopts humanism as a means of defending human rights worldwide, but she is not a member of the elite. As Said indicates, “there’s no isolated humanist” (Said 2003, 3); Sarab is willing to go to the Other and to find common ground. Yet, she is not in any way isolated from her people, nor does she come from an affluent family. Like Lucy, Sarab works and supports herself. She is exposed to the daily hardships of Arab women and is deeply concerned with the causes of her people. Such experiences increase her awareness of the realities and challenges facing Arab women in modern times. In parallel with Said’s definition of the humanist, Evelyne Accad argues, in relation to the contemporary Middle East, that: “If nationalism remains at a sexist stage, and does not move beyond ownership and possessions as final goals, the cycle of hell will repeat itself and the violence will start all over again” (Accad 1991, 246). Sarab’s political activism is not merely a reaffirmation of the admirable and sacrificial role of Palestine and Arab women in the historical struggle of their countries against colonialism and patriarchy, but a secular humanist stance towards life. Rather than alienation and hostility to her time and different cultures, Sarab decides to be part of the history of her country and to define the “connection between [her]self and the rest of existence” (Jabra 1992, 18–19). In doing so, she symbolises Said’s vision of “a new leadership [which] is already in evidence; a leadership not completely based on tribal roots or the web of clan affiliations” (Said, 1993a, 112). Confident, educated, and above all open to “the realities of Israel [and] the world”, Sarab “radiate[s] a kind of hopeful security. [Her] *sumud* (resilience) is real, concrete, solid” (1993a, 112).

Sarab's choice of Paris as a centre of her Palestinian activism hints that she is more on the side of a peaceful settlement and the politicisation of the humanitarian calamities of the Palestinian people, than an advocate of isolation and violence. Furthermore, Sarab's activism in Paris can be seen as intentional choice for confronting Zionist lobbies and organisations in the West that, for example, have pressured the French to transfer a United Nations international conference on the Question of Palestine in 1983 from Paris to Geneva (Said 1984, 32). Sarab, like Lucy, chooses to fight the powers of patriarchy and sexism through love and humanity, but from outside her country. It is a forward thinking idea that challenges traditional Palestinian nationalist narrative that expects women to stay in Palestine. Still in the process of mobilizing international sympathy and belief in the right of Palestinian people to have authority over their land, Sarab is not concerned with personal possession of land but with the collective right of her oppressed, displaced and exiled people. Moreover, the spread of strict Islamist ideas and politics marks an upsetting retreat for Arab women and freedom seekers in the Arab world. This fact encourages Sarab to fight for her cause from secular Paris. When Nael asks her to return to Iraq, she says:

Do you want me to go back to compulsion, blindness, and this accursed individualism in everything, the affliction of all Arabs? I'm here in the heart of everything now, and living life the way I like. [...] I'm breaking the siege and setting myself free, every day. And I write. I write a lot, and I don't need to put the scissors today to what I wrote yesterday, as I used to do every day, fearing some ignorant, unknown reader. (Jabra 1992, 185)

Impassioned and practical Sarab, like Lucy in "Disgrace", comes to represent the spirit of action missing from Arab society. In their final conversation Sarab explains: "can't you see, Nael, I've decided I would only face death with my full volition, when I'm still fully in control of my mental and physical faculties?" (Ibid., 186). Again, everything in life, including facing death, is not an emotional endeavour, but an intellectual one. Sarab's devotion to the Palestinian cause, like Melanie's and Lucy's struggles, is affirmative of the right of freedom and justice for all human beings. These female characters are acculturated into inferiority, but they are strong enough to re-accurturate themselves as equal human beings with men.

CONCLUSION

Coetzee's "Disgrace" (1999) and Jabra's "The Journals of Sarab Affan" (1992) suggest a decade of political transformation in South Africa and Palestine, respectively. Nevertheless, it is not by any means easy to identify the broader sweeps of such political transformation in the two countries. In post-apartheid South Africa or the "The Rainbow Nation", persistent political efforts have been meant to build a society of reconciliation, introducing multicultural diversity, interracial harmony and social equality. However, the desired transformations in the socio-political situation are far from real and the old inequalities, together with apartheid institutions, are actually still latent and effective. Similarly, late-1980s and early-1990s Palestine witnessed political troubles and fierce resistance against Zionist aggression. The First Intifada, the rise of Hamas and the divided opinions of Arab countries in relation to Israeli administration, along with the rise of political Islamism mark a turning point in the life of liberal and secular Arab writers and intellectuals, particularly women. Lucy and Melanie in "Disgrace" are educated women and have a reasonable degree of economic stability and independence. Their main challenge is a purely ideological fight for recognition of their humanness. Similarly, Sarab in "The Journal of Sarab Affan", is a determined, knowledgeable and independent woman who interweaves her personal interests and aims with the political conditions of her society. Female characters in the two novels share the admirable ability to balance and control their physical and mental faculties, even after violation and abuse. They know exactly what they want to do with their lives and choose to pursue their personal dreams. Rather than entering into useless conflicts with their male guardians and patriarchal society, they figure out a means to end patriarchal domination and coercion against them.

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THE CULTURAL UNIQUENESS OF PORTUGUESE-SPANISH BORDER LANDSCAPES

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to present topics for describing unique features of social relations and interaction in borderlands, as reflected in tangible and intangible heritage. Considering that there are phenomena that can only take place in border contexts, we examine the Lower Guadiana basin (on the Portugal–Spain border) as a potential case study for heritage enhancement. Historically, this territory is part of Europe’s oldest stable political border, as it was delimited in 1297 (Treaty of Alcañices). This condition was a determinant for the configuration of a unique historical human landscape, with villages founded for surveillance purposes, as well as buildings (fortresses or houses for guards) along the borders. In contrast, the separations created by the states provide clues about the development of unofficial social relations and hybrid manifestations (e.g., smuggling, language confluence). This article provides insight into the importance of interconnections and mutual influences in the formation and consolidation of unique cultural realities in borderlands that contradict the image of rupture and separation created by mainstream historiography. With this overview, it is possible to identify some topics for further research on borderlands, especially in the current geopolitical context, that is, after the elimination of border checkpoints in the Schengen Area and the loss of the political importance of these peripheral territories. This situation leads to the depopulation of border territories, especially in the hinterland, which can inspire the examination of the particularities of this human landscape from a multidisciplinary point of view. It should be noted that the Guadiana River is navigable between its mouth and Mértola, which has determined human occupation, interregional contact and its defence since the eighth century BC.

Keywords: borderlands, Guadiana River basin, Luso-Spanish border, heritage

INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to present topics for describing unique features of social relations and interactions in borderlands reflected on tangible and intangible heritage. Considering that some phenomena can occur only in border contexts, we examine the Lower Guadiana basin (on the Portugal–Spain border) as a potential case study. This navigable river separated two Roman provinces (Baetica and Lusitania); from the end of the thirteenth century onward, it separates Portugal and Spain between Vila Real de Santo António and Ayamonte and between Pomarão and Cañaveral (see Fig. 1). This condition is crucial for understanding the long tradition of contact between the main ports (Castro Marim, Ayamonte and Mértola) and the Mediterranean during the Iron Age. It also explains the protection and settlement of the riverbanks after the Treaty of Alcañices in 1297 to counter the permeability of border areas.

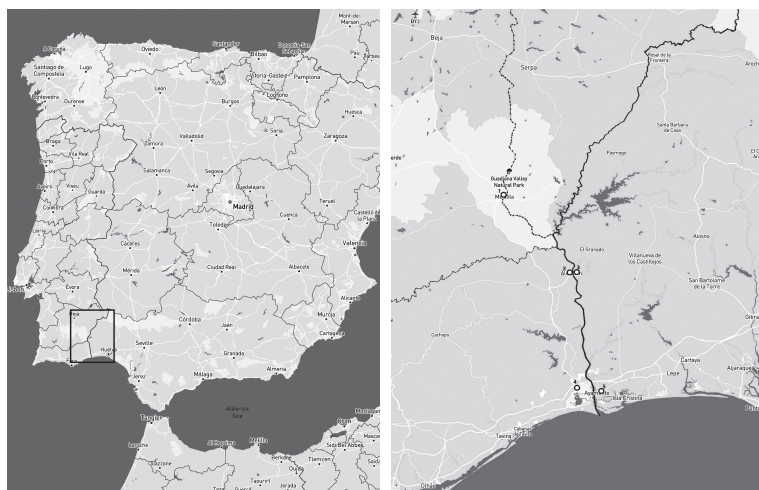


Fig. 1: The Luso-Spanish border in the Lower Guadiana Basin.

1. Mértola; 2. Alcoutim; 3. Sanlúcar de Guadiana; 4. Castro Marim; 5. Ayamonte; A. End of the international border on the Guadiana River (Source: Mapbox).

A recent research project conducted in this area focused on the archaeological examination of this territory, especially on the navigable section of the Guadiana River (between the river mouth

and Pulo do Lobo), to identify human settlements along the riverbanks between the eighth century BC and the first century AD (see Albuquerque et al. 2020).

Some of the main topics examined there include, firstly, the national narratives developed within the natural and artificial limits of a nation state. This means that the borders are perceived and described as remote peripheries that shape national territories and identities, and the other side is perceived as a culturally different and separated territory. In other words, the main historiography often ignores the particularities of the border territories and, especially, the social relationships that take place in them.

These statements explain the relevance of this no exhaustive and unambitious note on the cultural uniqueness of border landscapes. They intend to be a steppingstone for heritage enhancement or heritagization in the Iberian Peninsula, and particularly in the Lower Guadiana Basin, but also in other peripheral territories.

CONCEPTUAL REMARKS

“Border”, “boundary”, “frontier” and “territorial limits” are concepts that describe diverse types of reality, as they can be tangible, intangible, territorial, political, economic, natural, personal and so on. This paper deals with the political borders of national territories in the Iberian Peninsula that have been in place since 1297, human settlement along more than 1,200 km of shared territories and identity constructs between these two countries.

Ideas that are associated with those words include “rupture” and “differentiation” between two entities, as well as “defence” and “periphery”. In fact, states often define the limits of their sovereignty and stimulate the occupation of those territories. However, a historical examination of these realities must consider that there are communication strategies on both sides and unofficial interactions between them. At first glance, this seems to contradict the depiction of these peripheral or marginal territories as places that mark the limits of the cultural perception of “us” and “them”. The analysis of these phenomena can be related to what van der Vleuten and Feys (2016) recently called the border paradox, that is, flows and social or cultural realities that are determined by the separation created by states. These realities, as seen later, explain the uniqueness of borderlands phenomena.

Several aspects are relevant for contextualizing this subject. Some decades ago, C. Cavaco stated:

The border is not only the symbolic limit of a community's territory, linked by shared and internalized elements opposed to the Other. It is a space for encounters, influences, relationships, changes, complicities, cooperation, and solidarities because of their position in the extremes, on the outskirts of territories and national sovereignties.¹ (Cavaco 1997, 159)

Borders or frontiers are depictions, and their place, function or dimension can be changed. They are closely dependent on the historical circumstances and the social and cultural perceptions of territories and landscapes. They can mark a rupture and discontinuity as well as a transition and a locale where encounters take place. However, the (anachronic) perception of national histories often promotes the idea that people's space is delimited by natural frontiers (Castro and González 1989, 8; Sahlins 1990, 142). This perception, from the point of view of historical geography, examines borders as 'no man's lands' and as defensive barriers that structure political discourses and projects with no place for transitions or contact beyond border conflicts (e.g., Raffestin 1992; Cavaco 1997).

However, these peripheries share spaces and even identities. In the case of the Lower Guadiana Basin, it is evident that the river not only marks a separation but provides conditions for interactions. The Iron Age occupation of its riverbanks is a telling example of this (Albuquerque et al. 2020). Thus, borderlands can be regions or landscapes with unique humanization strategies, even when they are politically and administratively separated by a body of water such as the Guadiana.²

Borders are critical to understanding the history of the relationships between two countries. In some political contexts, they are used as barriers that prevent access to a territory and reinforce the control of territorial limits.³ In other words, the construction of sym-

¹ Translated by the author. "A fronteira não é apenas o limite simbólico do território duma comunidade, unida por elementos comuns e interiorizados, em oposição ao Outro, mas é espaço de encontros, de influências, de relações, de trocas, de complicitades, de cooperações e solidariedades, pela situação nas extremas, nos confins dos territórios e soberanias nacionais."

² For a careful examination of various phases of the Luso-Spanish Border, see Cosme (2014).

³ Situations in which a frontier is constructed for apartheid purposes here (e.g., the Kraków Ghetto wall or the wall between Israel and Palestine) are

bolic and tangible elements (a tower, a fortress, etc.) can reflect conflictive relations and tensions for short or long periods (Cavaco 1997). By contrast, their obsolescence and abandonment are a consequence of more peaceful political relations. For example, Duarte de Armas' manuscript, "Livro das Fortalezas" [Book of Fortresses], presented to Portuguese king D. Manuel in 1510, depicts and describes the defensive structures of the borderlands.⁴ This book is an important source for the evaluation of these structures and for the examination of the history of military architecture, for example, the evolution of construction techniques and weaponry. Furthermore, it must be remembered that in the sixteenth century, these territories were not clearly depicted on maps and were poorly known by rulers and outsiders.

However, the examination of borders is not restricted to political issues. As cultural inventions, human landscapes can be examined from an archaeological perspective on various scales (see Albuquerque and García Fernández 2019). The first (macroscale) has to do with the distribution of settlements along a territory. The second (mesoscale) deals with the possible relationship models between sites (for example, mutual surveillance) and the third (micro or nanoscale) focuses on the construction of social or intangible boundaries in food consumption, behaviour and practices (Rizo and Romeo 2006; García Fernández 2012, 721–722). These levels of interaction are critical for understanding why it is postulated that border contexts paved the way for local particularities that can be enhanced as a cultural (in)tangible heritage shared by both countries. In the next chapter, some general assumptions are presented in order to carry out further multidisciplinary investigations about these particularities.

THE UNIQUENESS OF BORDERLANDS

As stated above, borderlands are more than separation lines; they can be places where encounters, interactions and mutual influences take place, leading to the formation of hybrid realities or, in other words, of what can be called 'border identities'. These territories began to interest European scholars in 1958 (see the works of C. Raffestin in the 1970s), some years before Iberian researchers. It

not considered because they are extreme cases that are not suitable for the discourse of this paper.

⁴ <https://digitarq.arquivos.pt/details?id=3909707> (accessed 15th December 2021).

is telling that the first “Coloquio Ibérico de Geografía” (Iberian Conference on Geography, Salamanca, 1979) did not include communications about borderlands, but in the presentation, Antonio Cabo proposed the inclusion of this topic in the agenda of geographers (Cabo 1981). In fact, this event inaugurated a research avenue on the geography of borderlands and reflections on the effects of delimitation processes in local communities. Gradually, the idea of “border separation” gave way to the idea of “border cooperation”, which was consolidated when Portugal and Spain joined the EEC in 1986 (Albuquerque and García Fernández 2019).

After 1990, initiatives of local development such as INTERREG or FEDER programs tried to promote cross-border cooperation. This topic will not be examined in detail (see Medeiros 2009; García Fernández et al. 2017; Albuquerque and García Fernández 2019, 134 ff). However, the development of these programs was crucial for the study of borderland contexts, with new perspectives focused on the uniqueness of these communities and their identities.

In this context, studies have been conducted to outline these unique phenomena, such as the linguistic confluence that resulted in hybrid manifestations. This is the case with *Português Oliventino* (Oliventine Portuguese) and other hybrid dialects that are formed from Portuguese and Spanish words (Vasconcelos 1890–1892; Carrasco 2007). The formation of a unique linguistic landscape (Pons 2014; López de Aberasturi 2020) facilitates further research that can help to preserve this endangered heritage.⁵ New economic and political circumstances are leading to the progressive abandonment of these regions and the irremediable loss of older members of the population who have this knowledge and unwritten (i.e., oral) histories.

Recent works of anthropologists raise questions about the effect of new discourses and goals on community building and their role in the touristification of borderlands (see Hernández 2017). The historical description provided above is critical for understanding the discourse about these territories, whether it is focused on confrontation (that is, the construction of defensive structures) and whether it is centred in the common features developed in a shared territory. In other words, there is always a boundary between contrasts and convergences in the discourse about this landscape. Moreover, there is also a crucial difference between the touristic product and the way local communities perceive life in these spaces. Therefore, despite

⁵ It is worth mentioning the works of the project FRONTESPO (<https://www.frontespo.org/en>), which focus on the linguistic landscapes of borderlands.

the attractiveness of fortresses as visible monuments in the landscape, often providing spectacular views of the surrounding territory (see Fig. 2 as an example), other features, such as language or even archaeological records, are equally interesting to researchers. In this context, cross-border tourism is based on the perception of hybridity and cultural diversity, and border tourism is focused on differences, markers of separation and cultural homogeneity (Hernández 2017).



Fig. 2: Alcoutim viewed from the San Marcos Fortress (Sanlúcar de Guadiana). Photo by the author.

Archaeology can be a tool for understanding what is often lacking in written sources. This is especially true of periods when the Guadiana River played a key role in the circulation of products from other parts of the Old World, as the first millennium BC occupation of three ports demonstrates (Ayamonte until the seventh century BC, Castro Marim from that century onwards and finally, Mértola from c. the sixth century BC onwards). The archaeological records of these sites reveal that the navigability of this river determined the formation of apparently multicultural communities. This is especially evident in Mértola, a city located near the end of the navigable section (García Fernández et al. 2019; Albuquerque et al. 2020). Its navigability was crucial for promoting interaction, which led to the construction of ports in strategic places. This feature determined the construction of fortresses along the riverbanks when surveillance was needed in medieval and modern times. However, it must be noted that the construction of walled sites can be related to the protection of a trade route (see, e.g., Mértola) and is not always to surveillance of the borders.

This duality between border conflicts and the protection of trade and military routes determined the uniqueness of the border landscapes and also of cultural features and heritage assets. Some of these features, such as daily life or even language, can only exist in these regions, which is a strong argument for the developing studies to preserve and enhance knowledge about these phenomena. Moreover, it must be noted that this case also deals with rural territories, which is a strong stimulus for creating strategies to improve lifeways and sustainable development in peripheral areas.

TOWARD THE ENHANCEMENT OF BORDERLANDS' HERITAGE

It can be postulated that borders are historical constructs that configure unique landscapes and reflect political relationships between countries and interconnections between communities. There is a difference between the image promoted by states about their inner and neighbouring territories and the way local communities perceive themselves and the people from the other side. The peripheral condition within countries explains the lack of interest in the study of these territories, especially where political boundaries have lost their relevance, as in the internal borders of the Schengen Area.

As the oldest border in the world, the Luso-Spanish border has a rich heritage that can and must be enhanced. Through its long history, a unique human landscape has been constructed, which reflects the evolution of the relationships between the two Iberian nations and kingdoms, as well as centuries of contact, interactions and mutual influences. The study and interpretation of these interconnections and entanglements can promote heritagization, community building and sustainable development.

Mértola Vila Museu (Portugal) is a good example of community building and heritagization. It is an open-air museum project focused on the local development of a border territory with a substantial social impact. In this project, archaeological and ethnographic research is conducted with the participation of local communities, as described in several published works (Gómez et al. 2016, among others). The success of this long-term project shows that heritage can be a source of social, economic and cultural sustainability in peripheral territories. One consequence of the enhancement of archaeological and ethnographic heritage and collective memory is the prevention of the depopulation of rural areas (Del Espino 2020).

The examination and enhancement of intangible and tangible heritage must be holistic and multidisciplinary. The roles of historians, archaeologists, anthropologists and philologists are equally important for a broader view on the cultural uniqueness of borderlands not only in the territories discussed here but also in other countries around the world. As shown, surveillance and permeability are the obverse and reverse of the same coin, which determines what is (and what is not) border or cross-border investigation. By focusing on interaction instead of opposition, it is possible to enhance the cultural diversity of border contexts and composite or hybrid identities formed by the fact that human groups share and sometimes explore the same territory. In other words, it is possible to state that these communities can have more affinity with their neighbours than with the capitals of their respective countries.

Additionally, the dialogue or comparison between old and young borders in European countries can be fruitful not for constructing or reinforcing epistemological walls but for creating bridges and communication between communities, lifeways and cultures (Albuquerque et al. forthcoming). The border is, as we have tried to show, the place where these features meet, like a fence where two neighbours meet to talk.

CONCLUSION: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE OF BORDERLANDS IN A BORDERLESS EUROPE

The European dream of a borderless Europe focuses primarily on free circulation within a common market despite the conventions that recommend the implementation of territorial policies such as the “European Spatial Development Perspective” (see, e.g., Mora, Pimienta 1996-2003). The sense of strong protection of European external borders creates a sense of belonging to a system more than to a community. In the era of globalization, borders have lost their importance, leading to new ways of conceiving history as a complex web of communication between territories without considering territorial limits. However, the act of delimiting national territories paved the way, as shown above, for interactions and entanglements that go far beyond the official discourse. It also determined the construction of fortress and surveillance buildings along the border.

The loss of political relevance relegated these territories to a more evident peripheral condition, especially the rural areas that

became even more isolated and forgotten. However, cultural tourism can be a strategy to promote the resilience of local communities by enhancing their cultural uniqueness. The construction of border identities as a result of the confluence of lifeways can illustrate how these territories, as seen by local communities, are traditionally borderless and how they can be multicultural, even before the abovementioned European dream became relevant.

Therefore, by examining and enhancing the rich past of the Luso-Spanish borderlands, investigators from various scientific areas can contribute, along with local communities, to the sustainable development of rural peripheries. By intervening in the present, it is still possible to pave the way for the sustainable development of these forgotten (yet culturally, historically and archaeologically rich) territories.

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