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Oriental Afterimages: The Reproduction of Postcolonial Discourse in Polish Exiles' Ethnographic Texts on Siberia**

Abstract

The expansion of the Russian Empire created new possibilities for transcultural interactions within the colonial system. The strategies employed by nineteenth-century ethnographers – both professional and amateurs – to collect and systematize information on social organization, mythology, folklore, history, and traditions of its "foreign" subjects served as practical tools for improving colonial administration and control, thus helping to maintain dominance over subjugated territories. In my study, I will examine the research methods used by Polish exiles in the service of the Russian Empire, as well as their cognitive mechanisms and strategies for depicting their experiences during expeditions to the Central Asian steppe in personal journals, correspondence, and official reports. My focus will be on ethnographic private documents and printed texts created by three Polish exiles: Adolf Januszkiewicz, Bronisław Zaleski, and Seweryn Gross. By analyzing selected texts, I aim to demonstrate how writing itself and various writing practices acted as crucial tools for exercising imperial power by Russian authorities in Central Asia, while also facilitating the region's scientific and discursive subordination.

Keywords: Russian imperialism, Central Asian steppe, Polish exiles, travel journals and correspondence

Słowa kluczowe: imperializm rosyjski, stepy Azji Środkowej, polscy zesłańcy, dzienniki podróży i korespondencja

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Once Again on "Orientalism"

The encounter with "exo-tic"[1] cultures during the rapid expansion of European empires forced their elites to reassess the existing "constellation of beliefs and fears, predilections, prejudices, and needs of European society itself."[2] This reassessment resulted in the emergence of the concept of "Orientalism." As Edward Said pointed out, Orientalism embodied a set of epistemological and ontological structures that organized knowledge about the East, produced by travelers and professional researchers for the benefit of colonial powers.[3] The purpose of this paper, however, is not to list popular nineteenth-century ideas about the Orient reproduced in the Russian Orientalist discourse, nor to enter into a discussion with the pervasive body of criticism of Said's assumptions, but to examine the interplay of "latent" and "manifest" Orientalism in the processes of Orientalization[4]. To achieve this goal, I will focus on private documents, official reports, and their printed versions, where factual information, imagination, and self-creation were intertwined.[5] I will trace the dialogical intertextual dependencies,[6] changes in content due to a switch in medium, and editorial corrections made to the original materials. The proposed method, apart from applying the categories of "latent" and "manifest" Orientalism, relies heavily on the theory of orality and literacy,[7]

[1] Here, I use the hyphenation of the term "exo-tic" to highlight its etymology, recalling that the Greek prefix *exo* means "outside." This distinction is intended to separate it from the common understanding and usage of the word.

[2] M. Bassin, *Inventing Siberia: Visions of the Russian East in the Early Nineteenth Century*, "The American Historical Review" 1991, vol. 96, no. 3, p. 764.

[3] E.W. Said, *Orientalism*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1978, pp. 2–3.

[4] Edward Said observed a significant tension between academic literature and fiction, as well as the prevalent Western perceptions of the East. To illustrate this relationship, he introduced the concept of "manifest" Orientalism, which refers to explicit and clearly defined opinions. In contrast, "latent" Orientalism denotes an almost "unconscious positivity" shared by Western societies about the nature of the "Orient." As Said explained, "Whatever change occurs in knowledge of the Orient is found almost exclusively in manifest Orientalism; the unanimity, stability, and durability of latent Orientalism are more or less constant." The oscillation between manifest and latent forms of Orientalism has sustained the concept of the Orient itself, shaping both the academic discussion surrounding Orientalism and the popular ideas and common stereotypes associated with it. Ibidem, pp. 201–206.

[5] E. Winiecka, *Śladami wspólnoty wyobrażonej. Jerzy Borowczyk, "Zesłane pokolenie. Filomaci w Rosji (1824–1870),"* "Poznańskie Studia Slawistyczne" 2016, no. 10, p. 471

[6] M. Bachtin, *Estetyka twórczości słownej*, trans. D. Ulicka, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 1986, pp. 359–361.

[7] See, G. Godlewski, *Słowo – pismo – sztuka słowa. Perspektywy antropologiczne,* Communicare, Warszawa 2008; J. Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1977; J. Goody, *The Logic of Writing and the Organization of Society*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1986; M. McLuhan, *Understanding Media. The Extensions of Man,* The MIT Press, Cambridge/London 1994; D.R. Olson, *The World on the Paper. The Conceptual and Cognitive Implications of Writing and Reading*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1994; Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, Routledge, New York 2002; M. Rakoczy, *Słowo – działanie – kontekst. O etnograficznej koncepcji języka Bronisława Malinowskiego*, Warszawa 2012.

with an emphasis on writing and print as specific forms of communication. I will explore the writings of three nineteenth-century Polish exiles who were sent to the Siberian and Central Asian borderlands: Adolf Januszkiewicz,[8] Bronisław Zaleski,[9] and Seweryn Gross.[10] Each was coerced into either the imperial administration or military service, indirectly or directly contributing to the expansion of the Russian Empire in Central Asia.

In further analysis, I will address the following questions: To what extent did serving the empire and engaging with archival documents, scientific publications, philosophical essays, travelogues, fiction, and poetry shape the perspectives of the Poles under analysis during their direct interactions with the steppe dwellers? Were they able to move beyond preconceived notions, established categories, or common ideas about the Orient? To what degree did Orientalist discourse influence the final texts prepared for publication? I argue that "polishing" the original field notes by removing "imperfections" and adjusting the content to meet the standards of printed texts and readers' expectations substantially altered the meaning of the initial messages. Moreover, the continuous reference to earlier works and the reliance on popular concepts and classification patterns – which contained both scientific "objective" methodo-

[8] Adolf Januszkiewicz (1803–1856) was sentenced to indefinite exile in Western Siberia in 1832 for his involvement in the November Uprising. He lived in several locations, including Tobolsk, Ishim, Omsk, and Nizhny Tagil. From 1842 to 1849, he served in the imperial borderland administration. During this time, he undertook three journeys into the steppes, including a six-month diplomatic expedition from May to September 1846. His private correspondence and the diary from this expedition were collected by Gustaw Zieliński (1809–1881) and posthumously published by his brother, Eustachy Januszkiewicz (1805–1874) and Feliks Wrotnowski (1803–1871), in Paris in 1861 under the title *Listy ze stepów kirgiskich i dziennik podróży* (*The Life of Adolf Januszkiewicz and His Letters from the Kyrgyz Steppes*). The most recent edition, published in 2013, was prepared and edited by Halina Geber.

[9] Bronisław Zaleski (1820–1880) was conscripted for forced military service in the Orenburg Line in 1848, where he spent nine years. During this time, he was involved as a draughtsman in two scientific expeditions thanks to his artistic talents (1851–1852) and a military campaign to capture the Aq-Masjid fortress in 1853, known as Ak-Mechet in Russian. After being pardoned in 1856, he settled permanently in Paris in 1860, where he worked at the Polish Library until his death. In 1865, he published a work titled *La vie des steppes Kirghizes* in Paris, which included illustrations he created during his expeditions. His diverse literary works related to his period of exile were collected in 2008 in a book titled *Wspomnienia z Uralu i stepów kazachskich* (*Recollections from the Ural and the Kazakh Steppes*), edited by Andrzej Zieliński.

[10] Seweryn Gross (1852–1896) was arrested in 1880 for his anti-Tsarist propaganda and sentenced to five years of exile in Semipalatinsk, where he worked at the regional statistical committee. During his exile, he compiled a comprehensive study on Kazakh customary law with the help of the Kazakh poet Abai Kunanbauly (1845–1904). This study, titled *Materials for Studying the Kyrgyz Legal Customs* (*Материалы для изучения юридических обычаев киргизов*), was published in 1886. For a long time, this work was mistakenly attributed to Gross's superior, Piotr Makowiecki. After returning from exile, Gross began translating his work into Polish as an article. The unfinished version, titled *From the Steppes of Central Asia* (*Ze stepów Azji Środkowej*), was published posthumously in 1899 under the name of his friend, Jan Witort (1853–1903).

logy, "folk theory,"[11] and "stereotypes"[12] – were crucial for understanding how writing shaped perceptions of distant lands and contributed to the persistence of Orientalist language through these discursive practices.

The Muse Learns to Write[13]

Media of writing and print, understood according to Marshall McLuhan as the "technological extension of man,"[14] brought both new opportunities and limitations, by enabling the systematization of information on the page (such as tables and charts), promoting the development of a classification system that minimized ambiguities. Written materials conveyed information in a fixed form, both in time and space. The institution of the archive was an integral part of the bureaucratic systems of early modern European empires.[15] It played a crucial role (together with libraries) in elaborating new ideas about the world by virtue of its capacity to quantify, store, and distribute data in the form of manuscripts, official documents, and printed publications on an unprecedented scale.[16] The inherent necessity for continuous updating of archival resources indicated both the starting and final points of the process of generating archival knowledge. The initial stage of Orientalization thus involved reading texts from distant colonies and adopting Orientalist language, which provided a conventionalized way of perceiving the subject "in an oversimplified manner."[17] In Orientalist discourse, one could find pre-existing, popular, simplifying hierarchical-tabular binary schemes, such as Occidentalism versus Orientalism, civilization versus barbarity, modernity versus backwardness, productivity versus laziness, future versus past[18], masculine versus feminine,[19] and so on, which also resulted from the rise of literacy and remained a fundamental, deeply internalized method for systematizing both existing and newly acquired

[11] G. Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal About the Mind*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1987, p. 116.

[12] A stereotype is understood here as an idealized mental representation containing default values shared by a specific group of people regarding the world, which may not be accurate and may even be false.

[G.] Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things*…, p. 116.

[13] This refers to Eric A. Havelock's book on the origins and effects of the spread of literacy. E. A. Havelock, *The Muse Learns to Write: Reflections on Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to the Presen*t, Yale University Press, New Haven 1986.

[14] M. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*…, p. 46.

[15] J. Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. E. Prenowitz, "Diacritics" 1995, no. 2, pp. 9–10

[16] W.J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy*…, p. 127.

[17] G. Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things*…, p. 126.

[18] See, M. Hafez*, Inventing Laziness. The Culture of Productivity in Late Ottoman Society*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2022.

[19] As Susan Layton noted, in Russian Romantic literature, as well as in other traditions, one can notice a tendency to eroticize and feminize both the colonial realm and the land itself as a "bride-to-be." S. Layton*, Russian Literature and Empire. Conquest of the Caucasus from Pushkin to Tolstoy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp.16, 175–189.

data. Orientalism, as a perspective, focused on establishing "types," implying that selected social groups shared common qualities,[20] and led to the introduction of new classifications by highlighting characteristic features,[21] similarities and differences, and establishing new relationships between those "types."

Similarly, Polish exiles, before seeing the steppe for the first time, extensively studied materials available in Russian archives. Januszkiewicz's correspondence with his brother, January Januszkiewicz, reveals his various readings about the Orient and Siberia, such as Victor Jacquemont's letters from India and the travelogues of Józef Kobyłecki and Matwiej Hedenström. Additionally, he was familiar with monographs by prominent authors such as Alexey Lyovshin and Alexander von Humboldt. Zaleski and Gross certainly knew the last two authors. Moreover, Gross was well-acquainted with the writings of scholars such as Henry J.S. Maine, John Lubbock,[22] and earlier works on Kazakh customary law by Russian researchers, including the publication by Lew F. Balluzek, among many others. The Polish exiles examined in this study regularly assessed data obtained through direct observation or interaction with their research subjects by comparing their experience with information from administrative reports, published books, and articles that served as "an idealized cognitive model,"[23] and vice versa. Inevitable overlaps in cognitive perception and models became a crucial aspect of their interpretations, allowing for the construction of stable, hybrid images of the steppe. On August 22, 1846, Januszkiewicz noted in his diary:

> Among the Kyrgyz people[24], as Lyovshin writes, parental authority over children remains unrestricted until the children reach adulthood […]. Lyovshin also writes that on the banks of the Karakingir [river], there was supposed to be a dvorec [a palace] belonging to a descendant of Genghis Khan. I asked the local Kyrgyz, but they know nothing about it […][25]

An example of the use of ready-made cognitive structures is Zaleski's calendars, which featured a tabular layout where each cell was dedicated to corresponding time units, such as month, days, and times of day. This format likely

[20] G. Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things*…, p. 6.

[21] A. Wieczorkiewicz, *Czarna kobieta na białym tle. Dyptyk biograficzny,* Universitas, Kraków 2013, p. 93.

[22] More details on Gross's readings, see A. Milewska-Młynik, *Seweryn Gross wśród badaczy kazachskiego prawa zwyczajowego*, Muzeum Niepodległości, Warszawa 2012, p. 71.

[23] A. Wieczorkiewicz, *Czarna kobieta kobieta na białym tle*…, p. 126.

[24] Polish exiles in the nineteenth century mistakenly referred to Kazakhs as "Kyrgyz," following Russian authorities. Therefore, I have retained the notation "Kyrgyz" in quotes when referencing the Kazakhs.

[25] "U Kirgizów, jak to i Lewszyn pisze, władza rodziców nad dziećmi jest nieograniczona do pełnolecia […]. Tenże Lewszyn pisze, że nad brzegami Karakingiru miał być dworzec [pałac] jednego z potomków Dżyngishana. Pytałem się tutejszych Kirgizów, ale nic o tym nie wiedzą […]." A. Januszkiewicz, *Listy ze stepów kirgiskich i dziennik podróży*, ed. H. Geber, Polskie Towarzystwo Ludoznawcze, Wrocław 2013, pp. 180–181.

originated from earlier research by Russian explorers, whom Zaleski studied to be able to systematize specimens of mineral deposits found during expeditions. Following a planned top-down approach, these calendars organized the collected data while excluding any information that did not fit the adopted pattern. As a result, the format influenced the content. Analytical tools enabled the integration of extensive information into a lucid framework, leading to excessive generalizations that were characteristic of modern science and logical-empirical endeavors.[26]

One of the pivotal markers of Western civilization, according to some anthropologists with evolutionist views, was writing, especially alphabetic writing, which allegedly represented the peak of linguistic development.[27] According to David Olson, literate people tended to consider literacy to be the key to understanding themselves as cultured or civilized people.[28] The concepts of orality and literacy were the pillars supporting essentialist oppositions such as "civilization" versus "barbarism," establishing a distinct boundary between us (Western people) and them[29] (illiterate nomads from the East). Januszkiewicz, for instance, referred to literacy to emphasize cultural contrasts. In a letter to Gustaw Zieliński, he described the rivalry in improvisation between two *akyns*: "Today, I am faced with poets who cannot read or write."[30] He admired their talent, believing, however, that a time would come when "civilization," referring to Western civilization, "will kindle a spark of light here [in the steppe]."[31]

The Russian Empire's Orientalist perception, as Susan Layton has demonstrated, was consistent with Western Orientalist practices, particularly those of France and England. The views of its residents regarding Asian territories were largely influenced by simplified synecdoche narrative patterns based on ideological constructs found in European literature, which inevitably shaped the interpretations of Polish exiles as well. Thus, the term "similar to most nomads"[32] used by Gross in reference to the Kazakhs was not merely a description of their mobile lifestyle. It implied a sense of "typicality," positioning the Kazakhs alongside other nomadic groups and suggesting their lesser level of

[26] J. Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1977, p. 146.

[27] One may cite, for instance, the work of Lewis Henry Morgan. (R. Deliège, *Historia antropologii. Szkoły, autorzy, teorie*, trans. K. Marczewska, Oficyna Naukowa, Warszawa 2011, pp. 25–26) and, to some extent, Joseph Vendryes (J. Vendryes, *Le langage: introduction linguistique à l'histoire*, Renaissance du livre, Paris 1921.) and Vere Gordon Childe (G. V. Childe, *What Happened in History*, Harmondsworth, Middlesex 1923).

[28] D.R. Olson, *The World on the Paper*…, p. 6.

[29] J. Goody, *The Domestication* …, pp. 1–6.

[30] *Akyn* – Kazakh oral poets and singers.

[31] "Dziś występują przede mną poeci, co czytać i pisać nie umieją. […] Lud, który Stwórca obdarzył takimi zdolnościami, nie może pozostać obcym cywilizacji: duch jej przeniknie kiedyś kirgiskie pustynie, roznieci tu iskrę światła." A. Januszkiewicz, *Listy ze stepów*…, p. 81.

[32] *Материалы для изучения юридических обычаев киргизов*, вып. 1: Материальное право, ред. П.Е. Маковецкий, Омск 1886, p. 34.

civilization development than the settled populations, particularly European nations. Januszkiewicz, in turn, referred to images from a common exo-tic imaginary by comparing the Central Asian steppe to Palestine,[33] Arabia,[34] the riverside steppe oases to Brazilian forests,[35] and nomads working at the harvest to "Negroes on plantations."[36] These juxtapositions are the simplest examples of homogenizing strategies for conceptualizing both the inhabitants of the Middle East (not to mention Brazil) and Central Asia, according to established patterns of Otherness. Such Orientalist dialectics has created a distorted Orientalized universe and people on paper, allowing for the maintenance of the monopoly of European sciences over the production of meaning.[37]

Exo-tism or the return of the "repressed"?

All three authors began their accounts of expeditions into Central Asia with an allegedly objective[38] rhetoric, which Mary Louise Pratt called the "anti-conquest" narrative.[39] For example, the analytical nature of Gross's report served as an anti-conquest alibi, despite his involvement with the Russian administrative system and the imperial context of his research. In contrast, Januszkiewicz's adventurous spirit required additional motivation, such as an exploratory imperative. The allegory of the "sailor," commonly found in the Philomaths and the Filaretes texts,[40] aligned with the spirit of exploration and justified his writing endeavor. Januszkiewicz expressed his desire to be an "explorer" in a letter to his friends Paweł Ciepliński and Michał Moraczewski, dated May 14, 1846:

> Don't think, however, that the purpose of participating in the expedition was simply to wander around the steppe. […] That's not enough for me: I want to discover a second Nineveh in the Kyrgyz sand.[41]

Zaleski, in turn, assured his patroness Róża Sobańska that:

[33] A. Januszkiewicz, *Listy ze stepów kirgiskich…*, p. 179.
[34] Ibidem, p. 193.
[35] Ibidem, p. 57.
[36] Ibidem, p. 130.
[37] According to Pratt, such narratives emphasized the "disinterestedness" and "anti-military" character of scientific or explorative texts. M. L. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes. Travel Writing and Transculturation*, Routledge, London 1992, pp. 31–33.
[38] On the problems with the discourse of objectivity and its cognitive and explanatory limitations, see G. Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things*…, pp. 185–218.
[39] M. L. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*…, p. 7.
[40] A distinctive example of this writing style was the case of Józef Kułakowski. J. Borowczyk, *Zesłane pokolenie. Filomaci w Rosji (1824–1870)*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza, Poznań 2014, pp. 68–77.
[41] "Nie sądźcie wszakże, ażeby celem mojej wyprawy była tylko chęć pobujania się po stepie! […] dla mnie tego mało: ja chcę jeszcze przy tej zręczności odgrzebać w piasku kirgiskim drugą Niniwę." A. Januszkiewicz, *Listy ze stepów kirgiskich* …, p. 23.

> As part of Central Asia, the Kyrgyz steppes might be fascinating in many ways, particularly for us, to whom they are entirely alien. Everything there is novel and unfamiliar to Western man […like] people in Abrahamic tents, […]; the entire universe that differs from the West […]. It would be worth exploring it thoroughly so that Psychology would gain from it, and History.[42]

At the outset of the latter description, the steppe was assigned a specific position on the map, defined by the geographical divisions that placed it within Central Asia, as part of the broader Asian continent, reinforcing a dualistic distinction: the "unknown" steppe and its inhabitants versus "civilized West." By invoking Orientalist dichotomies, Zaleski affirmed his own and his readers' "Europeanness." Contrary to his intentions, the archipelago of Western civilization he described also drew Poland and Russia closer to each other. This rapprochement occurred not only because Poland was part of the Russian political structure at the time but also because both countries shared, albeit contested, peripheral status within the European continent.[43] Zaleski's ingrained convictions regarding his cultural and civilizational superiority over the "Muscovite invaders" were intensified by encounters with the exo-tic inhabitants of the steppe.[44]

The discursive Otherness has incorporated and reinterpreted both real and imagined cultural differences, indicating the essential Orientalist practices in Western printed texts. Inspired by materials available in imperial libraries and archives written by Russian and Western European authors, Polish exiles adopted similar analytical approaches in their writing. Layton emphasized that the introspective and idealized image of the West in Russian romantic literature[45] emerged through a dialectical relationship between Western imperial elites and the abstract East. In this dynamic, the former projected its repressed fears and negative drives onto the latter. To describe this phenomenon, Irvin C. Schick introduced the term "technology of identity,"[46] highlighting the performative aspect of creating the "Western self" and revealing its hidden, abject

[42] "Stepy kirgiskie, jako część Średniej Azji, ciekawe są pod wielu względami, szczególniej dla nas, którym zupełnie są obce. Wszystko tam dla człowieka Zachodu nowe i nieznajome […], ludzie w abrahamowych namiotach, […]; cały świat różny od Zachodniego […]. Warto byłoby poznać ich z gruntu, i Psychologia zyskałaby na tym, i Historia może." B. Zaleski, *Wspomnienia z Uralu i stepów kazachskich*, ed. A. Zieliński, Polskie Towarzystwo Ludoznawcze, Wrocław 2008, p. 65.

[43] M. Janion, *Niesamowita Słowiańszczyzna. Fantazmaty literatury*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 2006, p.11.

[44] Further details on the ambiguous situation of Polish exiles serving in the Russian Empire's administration or army on the border of Siberia and Central Asia can be found in the article: K. Gaibulina, *The Role of the "Frontier" in Conceptualising the Russian Imperial Identity: A Study Based on Polish Political Prisoners*, "HYBRIDA" 2023, no. 6, pp. 179–198.

[45] S. Layton, *Russian Literature and Empire*…, p. 193.

[46] I.C. Schick, *Seksualność Orientu: przestrzeń i Eros*, trans. A. Gąsior-Niemiec, Oficyna Naukowa Warszawa 2012, pp. 31–35.

nature,[47] which allowed for a better rendering of the meaning of the concept of exo-ticism, as something foreign or "external" to European civilization. Consequently, the term exo-tic allowed for the reintroduction of elements of identity that had been repressed and rejected from European society, presenting them in a safe manner as belonging to an "Other" world.

The clash of cultural patterns exacerbated the symbolic divide between exiles and nomads. For example, the Poles saw the nomads' display of good manners, intended to convey hospitality, as "intrusiveness," leading to impatience on the part of the former. Januszkiewicz noted, "The intrusiveness of the Kyrgyz makes us terribly impatient,"[48] while Zaleski remarked, "They wanted us to share everything with them, sometimes to the point of being intrusive."[49] The source of the conflict stemmed from a misunderstanding of cultural codes in establishing relationships. Generosity and reciprocity in the practice of gift-giving were fundamental aspects of interpersonal relations in the steppe, based on the principle of *do ut des*.[50] However, Gross's study of customary law illustrates that representatives of the imperial state were not always treated equally to nomads.[51] A crucial function of gifts,[52] often overlooked by outsiders, was their symbolic significance. Gifts helped to enhance the recipient's authority not only in the eyes of their relatives but also among Central Asian neighbors.[53] Showing respect and accompanying guests, especially foreigners of high social status, highlighted the importance of selected Kazakhs. It allowed them to distinguish themselves from their peers as individuals honored by their association with "Russian" dignitaries. Nevertheless, the nomads' expressions of respect toward representatives of the imperial power contributed to the view that their behavior was "uncivilized," as they did not exhibit the "proper," expected, reserved manners associated with "civilized" individuals.[54]

The Orientalization process was not limited to the narrative representation of the Other, but also constructed a "space of Otherness." This concept added an extra layer to the binary opposition of "us" and "them" by introducing

[47] J. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror. An Essay on Abjection*, trans. L. S. Roudies, Columbia University Press, New York 1982, pp. 1–5.

[48] "natręctwo Kirgizów niecierpliwi nas strasznie." Transcription of A. Januszkiewicz's diary prepared by S. Kurzątkowski, BPP, sygn. 476, p. 289.

[49] "chcieli, żeby się wszystkim z nimi dzielić, aż do natręctwa nieraz." B.Zaleski, 1 letter-album, BCz, sygn.6928, p.21.

[50] It means: "I give so that you may give." B. Malinowski, *Prawo, zwyczaj, zbrodnia w społeczności dzikich*, trans. C. Znamierowski, "De Agostini," Warszawa 2001, pp. 15–22.

[51] *Материалы для изучения* …, pp. 53–54.

[52] M. Mauss, *The Gift. Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. I. Gunnison, Cohen & West LTD, London 1966.

[53] А. Ремнев, О. Сухих, *Казахские депутации в сценариях власти: от дипломатических миссий к имперским презентациям*, "Ab Imperio" 2006, no 1, p. 125.

[54] M. Pernau, *Emotions and Modernity in Colonial India. From Balance to Fervor*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2019, pp. 3–4.

the dimensions of "here" and "there."[55] Schick introduced the term *xenotopia* to emphasize the importance of place in the development of the concept of Otherness. This idea is based on a vicious cycle of reasoning, where the exo-tic characteristics attributed to people from distant nations were used as proof of their foreignness. In this context, Zaleski's drawings that accompanied the text in the letter-albums to Sobańska,[56] and those featured in the printed album *La vie des steppes Kirghizes* depicted both the inhabitants and the landscape of the Central Asian steppe. These illustrations aimed to capture the region's exo-tic nature. Even the animals drawn by Zaleski – such as *saygaks* (steppe antelopes), *kulans* (wild horses), rams with their thick, fat-filled tails known as *kurdiuks*, and camels, whose voices Zaleski compared to organ sounds[57] – were intended to emphasize the exo-ticism of the world they came from. Together, they contributed to an exo-tic portrayal of the steppe environment inhabited by exo-tic people and creatures.

Following xenotopic descriptions, the Otherness of nomads resulted from their origin. Such reasoning aligned with the prevalent belief in environmental determinism, which suggested that the environment shapes the characteristics of each society. For instance, Zaleski[58] (drawing on Lyovshin's work[59]) explained the Kazakhs' alleged laziness as a result of climate conditions, particularly the extreme summer heat.[60] The emphasis on the "laziness" of nomads deserves special attention, as it stemmed from the idea of an "Oriental character." According to the common belief of the time, Oriental people were described as having an innate lack of sense of time and urgency, contrasting sharply with the image of hard-working, time-conscious Westerners.[61] As a result, laziness was labeled as a sin, warranting condemnation in Zaleski's eyes, and serving as further confirmation of their backwardness.

Paradoxically, the rhetoric of exo-ticization presented an eclectic image of the repressed and recognized as "non-I" features of Western society, that strove for order, discipline, rationality, and maturity. The abject Western "doppelganger," which frequently emerged in the forms of exo-ticism and Orientalism,

[55] I.C. Schick, *Seksualność Orientu*…, pp. 37, 57–61.

[56] B. Zaleski, 2 letter-album, BCz, sygn. 6928, p. 30.

[57] Zaleski wrote: "I cannot convey the impression of a camel's mournful call at night in these vast spaces." "[N]ie umiem wypowiedzieć, jakie robi wrażenie płaczliwy krzyk wielbłąda, słyszany w nocy w tych przestrzeniach." B. Zaleski, 1 letter-album, BCz, sygn. 6928, p.22.

[58] B. Zaleski, 1 letter-album, BCz, sygn. 6928, p. 3.

[59] Lyovshin was convinced that the Kazakhs could not be distinctly categorized as the "southern type," a term he borrowed, as he himself noted, from Montesquieu. However, he agreed that the summer heat, which kept the nomads in their yurts for much of the time, had a direct impact on their "lazy" character. А.И. Левшин, *Описание киргиз-казачьих или киргиз-кайсацких орд и степей*, т. 3, Санкт-Петербург 1832, pp. 70–71.

[60] Thomas Buckle expressed a similar belief in environmental determinism stating "that the people living in temperate regions were dependent on hard work to survive and were first to develop the qualities needed for civilization, whereas a greater fertility of the soil encouraged habits of luxury and laziness," where geography and national character influenced each other mutually. M. Pernau, *Emotions and Modernity*…, p. 82.

[61] M. Hafez, *Inventing Laziness*…, pp. 16–24.

was acknowledged and integrated into Western discourse as the rejected "non -I." This schizophrenic ambivalence, accounting for the inability to fully complete both Western and Oriental identities, complicated the definition of the Other, who was never entirely foreign yet never completely subdued.

Äyel[62]

Another indicator of a lower level of development on the "modernity" scale of various cultures, apart from the inability to control strong emotions, inappropriate behavior, or laziness, was "polygamy, violence, or more generally the denial of respect to women," signifying that certain societies remained trapped in so-called the "darkness of the Middle Ages,"[63] which was a conceptual fabrication in itself prevailing in the nineteenth century. Oriental and Russian literature often contributed to the attribution of these characteristics to the Muslim religion, encompassing scientific and fictional works.[64] Within this setup of signs and symbols, women – both as living individuals and as a gender concept of femininity – have been the most popular objects subjected to analysis. The symbolic power of Western knowledge, thus, manifested through the privilege of imposing standards for assessing Other cultures.[65] The differences in social constructions of gender roles defined the boundaries of Otherness in Orientalism. Ann Stoler summed up that the sexual subordination and possession of Oriental women by European men defined the pattern of power dynamics between East and West. In this "male power-fantasy," according to her, the Orient was penetrated, silenced, and possessed.[66] Sexuality, thus, illustrated the iconography of power, not its pragmatics, while sexual asymmetries were tropes describing centers of power. Such an understanding of sexuality and femininity led to considerations that captured the imagination of all three analyzed Polish exiles.

For example, Gross explained the "custom of abortion," which he claimed was "prevalent among young Kyrgyz women" through the lens of the evolutionary theory of civilizational progress. He attributed this practice to the low cultural level of the inhabitants of the steppe at that time, noting that "neither customary criminal law nor Kyrgyz ethics condemn this custom."[67] In turn, Januszkiewicz, in letters to his brother January, recalled the alleged unjust tre-

[62] *Äyel* means "woman" in Kazakh.

[63] M. Pernau, *Emotions and Modernity*…, p. 251.

[64] S. Layton, *Russian Literature and Empire*…, p. 10.

[65] Ch.T. Mohanty, *Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses*, [in:] *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, ed. Ch.T. Mohanty, A. Russo, L. Torres, Indiana University Press, Indiana 1991, p. 336.

[66] A.L. Stoler, *Making Empire Respectable: The politics of race and sexual morality in 20th century colonial cultures,* "American Ethnologist" 2009, vol. 16, no.4, p. 635.

[67] "W tem tkwi też powód do spędzania płodu tak szeroko rozpowszechnionego śród dziewcząt kirgiskich […]. Ani prawo karne zwyczajowe, ani etyka kirgiska nie potępiają tego zwyczaju." J. Witort, *Ze stepów Azji Środkowej (szkic etnograficzny)*, "Lud" 1899, vol. 5, p. 20.

atment of Kazakh women, stating: "The Kyrgyz rank God's creatures as follows: first man, then the horse, followed by woman, and then a camel, cow, sheep, goat, and finally, the most unfortunate of all, a dog," adding that his brother should "congratulate his wife" for "not having been born in the Kyrgyz steppe."[68] The amplification of antagonisms in the steppe family confirmed the illusory superiority of Western women, who were deemed "equal" to men, as Zaleski claimed, because: "Only Christianity, by uniting everyone in the Savior, compares man and woman. In places where His teachings did not reach, the wife remained entirely dependent on her husband."[69] However, the second part of the same entry challenged such stark binary distinctions, presenting a more nuanced view of the supposedly tyrannical nature of nomads. He acknowledged that "in general, nomadism contributes to a situation where women in the steppe enjoy much more freedom than their sisters in the East."[70] In this way, he again implied an environmental determinism that shaped the nomads' character, distinguishing Kazakhs from other Muslims.

Discussing any form of "subordination" implied a specific notion of freedom that reinforced a hierarchical binary system founded on the very differences that defined it. The examined accounts of the subordinate position of Kazakh women implicitly contrasted them with the supposed liberty of Western women, particularly those from higher social classes, creating a misleadingly homogeneous portrayal of European women. Viewed through the lens of Western values, steppe women were depicted as "enslaved," as the nomads' family dynamics did not align with the concept of freedom held by the Poles. In all three texts, the Kazakh women were seen as "victims" of the despotic steppe patriarchy. Januszkiewicz noted in his diary on July 18, 1846:

> A woman [in the steppes] is a slave in the fullest sense; […] When [the husband] becomes tired of one wife, he simply takes another; after being satisfied with that one, if he is rich, he buys the third one, and so on. […] The "easy" demeanor of the Kyrgyz women is well known, and it cannot be otherwise when put in such relations with their husbands.[71]

[68] "Kirgizy w następnym porządku kładą stworzenia Boże: naprzód człowiek, po człowieku koń, po koniu kobieta, a dalej wielbłąd, krowa, owca, koza i na koniec najnieszczęśliwszy pies. [...] Tymczasem powinszuj swojej żonie, że się nie urodziła w kirgiskim stepie." A. Januszkiewicz, unpublished letter of August 3/15, 1846 to his brother J. Januszkiewicz, Ak-basz-tau forest range, BPP, sygn. 474, p. 112.

[69] Ibidem.

[70] "jeden tylko chrystianizm, połączywszy wszystkich w Zbawicielu, porównał mężczyznę i kobietę. Gdzie Jego słowo nie przenikło, tam wszędzie żona została w zupełnej zawisłości od męża. [...] w ogólności, już sposób życia wędrowny przyczynia się do tego, że kobieta w stepie daleko jest swobodniejsza niż jej siostry na Wschodzie." B. Zaleski, *Wspomnienia z Uralu i stepów kazachskich*…, p. 193; Idem, *Podróż w Góry Mugodżarskie przez Michała Bielickiego*, "Księga Świata" 1858, vol. 2, p. 151.

[71] "Kobieta w całym znaczeniu niewolnica; […] Sprzykrzy mu [mężowi] się jedna, bierze drugą; tą się nasyci, jeśli bogaty kupuje trzecią i tak dalej. […] Wiadoma bowiem łatwość obyczajów Kirgizek, i nie może być inaczej przy takim urządzeniu ich stosunków z mężem." Transcription of A. Januszkiewicz's diary prepared by S. Kurzątkowski, p. 223.

The belief in the Kazakh women's submissive position gave credence to another prevalent Western myth about the presumed debauchery of Eastern women only awaiting liberation from oppression by civilized European men. Contemporary researchers, including Lyovshin,[72] argued that the practice of polygamy in the steppe was the result of the "absolute" male power in Oriental societies. Polygamy was often criticized for treating women as mere objects of exchange. The focus on the women's issues exclusively through the single lens of gender neglected other vital factors, such as social status[73] and age. Oriental women were often portrayed as submissive to an equally homogenized Oriental male figure, which represented patriarchal, religious, and economic dominance. The use of oversimplified rhetorical schemes, modeled on the analytical tabular structure, perpetuated a conceptual form of enslavement for women.[74] Such convictions were deeply entrenched and echoed by Russian ethnographers and historians over many generations.

Directly or implicitly referring to the previously read texts, analyzed authors created a steppe world that was partially independent of reality and partially replaced it. A fundamental problem with the essentialist categories and epistemological frameworks used by the Poles was their tendency to self-reproduce, ensuring the continued vitality of ideas about the "enslaved Eastern woman." Such concepts clouded the exiles' perceptions during their direct contacts with nomads. As a result, the selected texts resembled a patchwork, combining often superficial observations with various sources of knowledge, such as book fragments and snippets of information recalled from conversations with expedition members.

On his way back from a diplomatic expedition, Januszkiewicz faced dwindling access to new "curiosities" about the lives of nomads. To enhance his narrative, he enriched it with impressions drawn from books, presenting them as authentic experiences. An example of this appears in his diary, where he depicts the "Kyrgyz matchmakers"[75] and evening festivities that he referred to as "bacchanalia." During these events, young men were allegedly placed on a cow and sent into the steppe, "sometimes alongside a naked girl." This passage is likely a loose reinterpretation of a punishment for blasphemy found in Lyovshin's book. Januszkiewicz also introduced the motif of marrying young girls, which was likely influenced by popular representations of Middle Eastern traditions. Using various sources of information in his descriptions helped Januszkiewicz

[72] А.И. Левшин, *Описание киргиз-казачьих или киргиз-кайсацких орд*…, p. 99.

[73] An example of how origin and social status influenced an individual's position in the steppe is illustrated by Khansha Bopai, the sister of Khan Kenesary Kasymuly. During the uprising from 1837 to 1847, she led the troops that were responsible for forcibly collecting taxes from clans that refused to support the uprising. Е. Бекмаханов, *Казахстан в 20–40 XIX веке*, Қазақ Унивеситеті, Алматы 1992, p. 283.

[74] Ch.T. Mohanty, *Under Western Eyes*…, p. 338.

[75] "sadzają na krowę lub byka, czasem nawet z nagą dziewką, i związawszy razem puszczają w step [...]. Bachanalia te odbywają się w nocy." Transcription of A. Januszkiewicz's diary prepared by S. Kurzątkowski, BPP, sygn. 476, p. 31.

create a complex, multi-layered narrative on Kazakh wedding ceremonies and fill cognitive gaps. The result inevitably led to internal dissonances in his text.

Zaleski's second letter-album also reveals the clash between established scientific opinions on the East and personal observations. In one entry, he stated that "the husband's power among the Kyrgyz is still unlimited, and the wife dares not oppose him in any way," adding that "women, however, are not always passive creatures in the steppe."[76] Gross, in turn, sought to reconcile the surprisingly influential role of certain widows in the steppe, who sometimes even ruled the entire *aul* on their own, with the notion of their alleged passivity. He argued that "[s]uch a phenomenon does not contradict the previous description [on women's subordinated position]. The Kyrgyz woman managing the aul is not its actual head; she holds this position only temporarily until her sons come of age."[77]

The invisibility and naturalization of applied conceptual language reduced real women from various parts of the East to simplistic, homogeneous cognitive frameworks that drew on both stereotypes and scientific theories. Chandra Mohanty defined this phenomenon as the discursive colonization of women.[78] The portrayal of Kazakh women by exiles emphasized their submissive relationships with men – whether fathers, brothers, husbands, or colonizers – as the sole factor determining their status, causing a double "muting" of their voices: first, through the lenses of gender and origin, and second, by stripping them of any agency within traditional community structures, creating a foundation for defining the ideal "subordinate Other."[79] Western Orientalist language formed an ideological grid that enabled the presentation of individual, random experiences as objective, analytical, self-explanatory categories. Setting aside the psychological aspects of Western misogyny and following the exo-tic patterns, one can say that the ideas about the Eastern woman were an abjected self-portrait of Europe seen in a distorting mirror.

Nudité

Erotically charged representations of the Orient were popular themes in both Western and Russian literature. These depictions played a significant role in shaping the identities of European empires, which Russia sought to emula-

[76] "władza męża dotychczas jest u Kirgizów nieograniczona i żona w niczym sprzeciwiać się jemu nie śmie [...]. a wszakże kobiety nie zawsze są biernymi istotami w stepie." B. Zaleski, *Wspomnienia z Uralu i stepów kazachskich*…, p. 193.

[77] "Иногда встречается видеть в степи, что аулом управляет женщина – вдова. Подобные явления не противоречат высказанному. Кизргизка, распоряжающаяся в ауле, не является его хозяином; она только воевременно управляет, до тех пор, пока сыновья ея не достиганут совершинолетия." *Материалы для изучения* …, p. 31.

[78] Ch.T. Mohanty, *Under Western Eyes*…, pp. 334–335.

[79] Spivak discusses the portrayal of the "brown woman" from the third (Oriental) world, enslaved by the brown man and liberated by the white colonizer, entirely ignoring the perspectives and intentions of women in this narrative. G.Ch. Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*, Harvard University Press, London 1999, p. 283.

te. By portraying the Western male as a defender of European cultural values against barbarism, these narratives justified sexual and imperial domination as part of a "civilising mission."[80] Individuals violating the colonial system of relations, including sexual taboos, undermined the essence of the colonial project. Disparities in the mutual influence and flow of imposed or voluntarily accepted normative values within the political and social context were directly reflected in the imperial ideology of moral standards.[81]

A category that illustrates the overlap between the discourse of domination and national purity was "nudity." This concept is closely tied to the voyeuristic privilege inherent in scientific analysis, which aimed to "reveal" all hidden aspects of the studied subjects. Bearing in mind the erotic nature of some allegories of conquest – such as the "penetration" of "virgin" lands[82] – the motif of female nudity, notoriously appearing in exo-tic literature and art, reflected an interest in the sexual practices of the Other, and played a key role in shaping the vision of the Orient.[83] The act of discursive and actual exposure, including female bodies, confirmed the belief in the underlying symbolic hierarchy of power that stood behind it.[84]

The notion of nudity in European culture has deep roots in Christianity, symbolizing both the sin and fall of the first humans and the blissful state that existed before they ate from the "tree of knowledge."[85] The so-called primitive nudity was interpreted through the lens of religious thought, even if these ideas were not explicitly stated. The "Other corporeality" observed by Western travelers and researchers evoked the idea of a return to a lost paradise, where there was no need to cover certain body parts, and the absence of clothing went unnoticed.[86] Januszkiewicz perceived the exposed bodies of Kazakh women as a form of paradisiacal primitivism:

> A rather pretty young woman sat behind the loom, half-naked, and seemed completely unconcerned about covering her charms. At the sight of her, my thoughts flew to Otahiki and all those islands of the Pacific Ocean, where the fair sex also lives *au naturel*.[87]

Within Orientalist discourse, nudity could also imply destructive knowledge gained through rapprochement with the Other. Cultural assimilation was associated with regression, deviation, and the betrayal of Western identity. Equ-

[80] S. Layton, *Russian Literature and Empire*…, p. 193.
[81] A.L. Stoler, *Making Empire Respectable*…, pp. 648–651.
[82] I.C. Schick, *Seksualność Orientu*…, p. 132.
[83] Ibidem, p. 110.
[84] A. Wieczorkiewicz, *Czarna kobieta na białym tle*…, pp. 67–75.
[85] J. Le Goff, N. Truong, *Une histoire du corps au Moyen-Age,* Liliana Levi, Paris 2006, p. 153.
[86] G. Agamben, *Nudities*, trans. D. Kishik, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2011, pp. 72–83.
[87] "dość ładna i młoda dziewczyna siedziała za krosnami w półnaga i nie pomyślała nawet o zakryciu swych wdzięków. Na jej widok myśl moja przeniosła się na Otahiki i te wszystkie wyspy spokojnego oceanu, gdzie płeć piękna żyje sobie także *au naturel*." Transcription of A. Januszkiewicz's diary prepared by S. Kurzątkowski, BPP, sygn. 476, p. 371.

ivocal connections between eroticism and studying, shame and power, fear and fascination with a foreign culture, and femininity significantly permeated the minds of the Poles considered in this article and their texts. An interesting example from Januszkiewicz's diary features a passage in which one of the translators accompanying the expedition recalled his past adventures in the steppe while serving a regional sultan. He detailed the lively interest that the sultan's wives had in his genitals, which he displayed during the absence of their husband.[88] The editors of Januszkiewicz's diary removed this fragment, replacing it with a conventional Orientalist construction that reinforced the popular beliefs about the "licentiousness" of steppe women: "translators tell incredible stories about the promiscuity of [Kazakh] women."[89] The change was not solely motivated by the prudish sentiments of nineteenth -century decency – Oriental literature was rife with suggestive themes – but reflected a more profound tension. Namely, the active roles that these exo-tic women assumed in male-female relationships challenged the foundational principles of the hierarchical order that supported both power and imperial authority. In Oriental tradition, the Other woman had to remain submissive to the rational male researcher, colonizer, and authority figure, supporting the rhetoric of colonial conquest and Western civilizational superiority.[90] The decision to remove the passage about the semi undressed translator was most likely influenced by concerns about crossing moral boundaries in sexual relations with representatives of imperial power and foreign cultures. It was considered unthinkable for an Oriental woman to take on the role of an observer, directing her gaze toward the physicality of an imperial representative stripped of any disguise of his social role.

The certain freedom and "pickiness" of Kazakh women also astonished Zaleski, as he mentioned in his diary on June 15–16, 1852: "After many visits, four women finally arrived on two camels, accompanied by their husbands or relatives. They were not timid in our yurts; in fact, they were talkative and even teasing."[91] In a second letter-album to Sobańska, he further remarked: "In general, when you encounter Kyrgyz women without men, they are not only outspoken but also quite bold, and the lack of female virtue is one of the terrible wounds that afflict this society."[92] Zaleski's disappointment stemmed from the significant gap between his notions of femininity and decency, particularly regarding the model of the Oriental women as a slave – shaped by the texts he

[88] "tłumacze opowiadają niesłychane rzeczy o rozwiązłości ich [kazachskich] kobiet." Ibidem, p. 303.

[89] A. Januszkiewicz, *Listy ze stepów kirgiskich*…, p. 154.

[90] S. Layton, *Russian Literature and Empire*…, pp. 209–210.

[91] "po wielu wizytach przyjechały na koniec na 2 wielbłądach 4 kobiety, z mężami czy krewnymi, były w naszych kibitkach nie bojaźliwe, owszem rozmowne i zaczepiające nawet." B. Zaleski, dziennik, BCz, sygn. 6927, s. 21.

[92] "na ogół, Kirgizki, kiedy je spotkasz bez mężczyzn, w mowie są nie tylko wolne, ale nawet wyuzdane, i brak kobiecej cnoty jest jedną z ran okropnych, które toczą tę społeczność." B. Zaleski, 2 letter-album, BCz, sygn. 6928, p. 47.

had read[93] and the stories he had heard – when confronted by the reality he encountered. The liberty with which some steppe women interacted with colonizers not only challenged the oppressive language of Orientalism and symbols of imperial power but also called into question the traditional gender roles in European society.

Contend for a Woman – Strive for a Culture

Sherry Ortner, in her article, explored the relationship between culture – associated with masculinity and the public sphere – and nature, which she argued, was typically linked to a "lower order of being,"[94] and therefore with femininity, often hidden from the public and foreign gaze in private space. Such generalizations claimed that all cultures symbolically devalue women, reducing them to a mere abstract category of gender. Ortner reinforced the unequivocal dualistic model she presented of opposing "femininity" and "masculinity" by adding further characteristics, such as "subjectivity," "pollution," "lower level of social organization," "giving birth," "domestic" versus "objectivity," "purity," "higher level of social organization," "killing," "public," etc.[95] Goody argued that a similar fixed, dichotomous model commonly used in anthropological theories – and, as we saw earlier in Orientalist discourse, was based on tabular principles. By oversimplifying reality, such reasoning made the analysis more challenging rather than facilitating it.[96] Similarly, the symbolic dynamics and fluidity of gender terminology hinder a straightforward classification of women and men as belonging to either nature or culture, as Ortner proposed.[97] Interactions with other cultures introduced additional semantic layers, further complicating the conceptualization of femininity and masculinity, as well as of nature and culture. For instance, Orientalist narratives created a complex image of Eastern women, who were sometimes depicted as slaves and at other times as dangerous, seductive temptresses who threatened the colonizer's identity.[98] This portrayal stems from the clash of different cultural norms and from both fascination with and fear of the potential negative influence of fore-

[93] Susan Layton demonstrated a similar conclusion by claiming: "But the plot of a Georgian woman's hostility to a Russian man was strictly taboo in literature." S. Layton, *Russian Literature and Empire*…, p. 210.

[94] S. B. Ortner, *Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture*, [in:] *Women, Culture and Society,* ed. Rosaldo M., Lamphere L., Stanford University Press, Stanford 1974, p. 73.

[95] Ibidem, pp. 72–78.

[96] J. Goody, *The domestication*…, p. 54. To support his thesis, Goody recalled an example of the polysemic nature of the color black, which can simultaneously evoke associations with the processes of bodily decay and death, and with the fertile earth that sustains life. Ibidem, pp. 88–89.

[97] Even Ortner recognized a certain incompatibility between theory and actual ethnographic material. To address this, she introduced the concept of a "transitional position" for women at the end of her article to relativize the proposed dichotomy's initial rigidity within the structure. S. B. Ortner, *Is Female to Male*…, pp. 83–86.

[98] I.C. Schick, *Seksualność Orientu*…, pp. 150–158, 175–181. In her work Susan Layton devoted to Russian texts describing the Caucasus she compiled a similar catalogue of the type

ign customs. To better understand the "soul of society," the focus of scientific inquiry was directed toward women, who were stripped of all social masks by the analytical gaze of male researchers.

Chosen Polish exiles defined steppe women by listing characteristics similar to those identified by Ortner, which they considered distinctive of a taxonomic category labeled "Central Asian woman." Such a category was part of a larger group referred to as "Oriental women," where "Oriental" and "Occidental" men served as a backdrop. These objectifying strategies were an inherent part of the analysis itself and complicated the process of grasping the elusive essence of Kazakh women's "femininity." In his letters to Sobańska, Zaleski often employed a set of dichotomous constructions to present the gender norms of nomads as antinomies to Western norms. He not only highlighted these differences but also suggested that they were "natural," concluding that "one cannot blame the Kyrgyz man for his domestic tyranny; it is rooted in their customs, and women raised this way accept these norms."[99] After returning from exile, he further emphasized in his album *La vie des steppes Kirghizes* the connection between culture and the notion of progress, arguing that "the position of women most clearly reflects the level of development of each society," and adding that Kazakh women were often treated more like "burden beasts" than as "life companions" of Kazakh men.[100] This reasoning was part of a broader Orientalist discourse that posited the social status of women as one of the key determinants of the level of "development" in terms of the "modernity" scale for various cultures.[101] Using the universalist framework of human development, Zaleski categorized the inhabitants of the steppe as being on the lower rungs of the ladder of humanity development.

Nomadic culture, however, not only imposed various restrictions on women, as Zaleski suggested, but also gave them prerogatives, outlining a certain scope of agency within their society. In his work, Gross outlined several elements of Kazakh customary law that defended women's interests. He noted that women had the right to seek divorce if their husbands were found to be infertile, and they could also seek support and protection from relatives in cases of abuse by their spouses.[102] Yet, Gross approached the nomads' customs through the lens of his background, education, and position in the colonial system. The return to Orientalist categories is especially evident in his later article, where he framed customary law through the framework of evolutionary theory and

of "Eastern women": "enticing virgin, a bride-to-be, a subjugated whore, a femme fatale and a teasing goddess." S. Layton, *Russian Literature and Empire*…, p.189.

[99] "może więc i obwiniać bardzo Kirgiza nie można za jego domową tyranię, jest ona w obyczajach i kobiety same z tymi pojęciami rosną." B. Zaleski, *Wspomnienia z Uralu i stepów kazachskich*…, p. 193.

[100] "повсюду ее положение лучше всего отражает степень развития каждого общества [...]. Несмотря на это, судьба ее зависит зависит исключтельно от мужа: она для него скорее вьючное животное, чем подруга." З Б. Залесский, *Жизнь казахских степей*, пер. Ф.И. Стеклова, Б.И. Садыкова, Алматы 1991, pp. 64–65.

[101] M. Hafez, *Inventing Laziness*…, pp. 2–6.

[102] *Материалы для изучения* …, pp. 23–25. To read the full quote, see the next section.

exaggerated the suffering of steppe women, whom he compared to "property" and described as the "humble servants"[103] of their husbands.

The analytical perspective of external observers, travelers, and so-called experts presented a seemingly homogeneous picture, hindering an understanding of the actions of steppe women as outcomes of their free choices. This framing trapped them in a dichotomy between the "freedom" associated with "progressive Western civilization" and "enslavement" linked to their traditional "backward" culture. Thus, any potential action taken by these women was interpreted through preestablished perceptions without considering the actual motivations driving their decisions. For example, Gross suggested that Kazakh women started to gain respect in the steppe,[104] thanks to the positive influence of Russian culture. He provided evidence by referring to the "alleviation of customs" and the "transformation of Kyrgyz people's views on women's rights," which further proved the shift away from the traditional ties of the patriarchal system.[105]

The emancipation discourse celebrated by Polish exiles, which advocated for the "saving" of Eastern women, concealed an imperial need for knowledge about foreign cultures, implying the descriptive and structural subjugation of women. Russian authorities sought to impose bureaucratic laws, unsuitable for nomadic traditions, under the guise of protecting the rights of "oppressed women,"[106] challenging the authority of customary courts. As long as women accepted traditional roles and adhered to prevailing moral principles, they were regarded as the true "bastion" of their culture. The "manumission" of steppe women fundamentally threatened the basis of nomadic society. By reiterating Orientalist ideas, all three exiles justified the civilization mission and supported the liberalization of steppe customs and the liberation of Central Asian women under conditions dictated by imperial power. The Western approach to emancipating Oriental women, characterized by pedagogical, universal, and expansionist ideals that emerged from Enlightenment beliefs in human progress and development,[107] proved to be as oppressive as the patriarchal system it sought to free these women from.

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The final stage of Orientalization of the steppe and its inhabitants involved editing materials found in personal diaries kept during expeditions and cor-

[103] J. Witort, *Na weselu u Kazachów*…, pp. 268–269.

[104] *Материалы для изучения* …, p. 1.

[105] Ibidem, p. 46.

[106] The Russian authorities introduced a new method for dissolving marriage by providing Kazakh women with a co-called "divorce letter," as mentioned by Gross. This intervention aimed to entrench further the imperial administration's superiority over the local judicial institutions, which were crucial for maintaining the nomads' culture and identity. Ibidem, pp. 48–50.

[107] J. Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World. A Global History of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. P. Camiller, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2014, p. 828.

respondence. This process transformed private documents into a coherent, complete account that resembled a conventionalized "shadow" of reality. The act of publishing a text, even if it closely resembled the manuscript, signified a shift in medium with a corresponding impact, fundamentally transforming its potential recipients. To explain these differences, Mikhail Bakhtin introduced a distinction between "primary" and "secondary speech genres." Primary genres, which also included diaries and letters, assumed a reader known to the author; in contrast, when a work is submitted for publication, the author could only anticipate the audience.[108] Given that readers often engaged only with printed materials and did not have the chance to see the reality described in those materials, it is essential to critically examine the concepts of "correctness, truth and appropriateness of representation,"[109] both in private documents and their published versions.

The continuous interplay between the two forms of Orientalism – "latent" and "manifest"[110] – established a framework that defined the boundaries of truth within Orientalist discourse. This framework served as a reference point or filter for evaluating dubious cases within the collected material.[111] During the preparation of texts for publication, all editors – including authors themselves, such as Zaleski and Gross, as well as Feliks Wrotnowski in the case of Januszkiewicz's notes[112] – consulted previous notable works on the subject. Referring to the established discourse helped clarify uncertainties, distil a large amount of information, and create the impression of a coherent Oriental world on paper.

The transition from one medium (journal/letter) to another (printed text) required refining the message, unifying the narrative form, combining certain fragments, omitting others, and filling cognitive gaps. A passage from Zaleski's diary illustrates this method well. It describes an incident involving Kuzumbay, a local guide employed by the Russian expedition, who refused to pursue two nomads accused of stealing fish from a Russian settler. Kuzumbay "begged for forgiveness [for the two nomads], on his knees, with a peculiar

[108] Bakhtin categorized speech genres as "primary" and "secondary." Primary genres, which arise from "direct linguistic communication" between individuals, have a strong connection to immediate reality and refer to actual statements made by others. Examples of primary genres include letters and diaries. Secondary speech genres, on the other hand, consist of forms such as novels, plays, scientific studies, and journalism. These secondary genres are shaped by primary genres, absorbing and transforming them according to their own conventions. M. Bachtin, *Estetyka twórczości słownej*…, pp. 350–351.

[109] D.R. Olson, *The World on the Paper*…, p. 167.

[110] E.W. Said, *Orientalism*…, p. 201.

[111] As Bronisław Malinowski pointed out, there are no pure data, non-tainted by the conceptual framework. M. Rakoczy, *Słowo – działanie – kontekst. O etnograficznej koncepcji języka Bronisława Malinowskiego*, Warszawa 2012, p. 47.

[112] For more information on how each stage of correction of private notes from the expeditions occurred, the changes in the message due to the shift in medium, and the extent of editorial interference in Januszkiewicz's case, see K. Gaibulina, *Etnografowie z przymusu. Polscy Zesłańcy w służbie kolonialnej Cesarstwa Rosyjskiego,* Communicare, Warszawa 2024, pp. 127–281.

facial expression,"[113] as Zaleski noted, for which he was subsequently punished. This entry highlighted the tensions between the imperial government and its steppe subjects. However, Zaleski, unable to find an appropriate explanatory model, overlooked this event, failing to mention it ever since. Later, in a retrospective article titled *Polish Exiles in Orenburg*,[114] he reflected on his time spent in exile along the Orenburg line. In this piece, he returned to rigid Orientalist dichotomies to depict the inhabitants of the Khanate of Kokand. He portrayed the capture of the Aq-Masjid fortress,[115] framing it as a triumph of progress over backwardness: "the besieged defended themselves well, for Central Asian people, but after the wall was blown up, the fortress was captured in August 1853."[116]

In Gross's case, we cannot trace the transformation of his working notes into a report. Yet, we can examine the article in which he aligned the official document with the expectations of the readers in Poland. In the text published under his friend Witort's name, there was a clear return to binary Orientalist categories that depicted steppe women as victims, exaggerating their "submissive" position compared to the original version. In the latter article, he claimed that:

> A husband has the right to expect his wife to live with him, share his fate, run the household, etc., in a word, she remains his humble servant; in the event of the minor transgression, he feels entitled to punish her as he sees fit, if he does not abuse or seriously injure her.[117]

The transition from a report to an article required significant effort to adjust the content to meet the formal constraints and requirements of the chosen genre, which was a short ethnographic overview. Furthermore, Western-centric, evolutionist, and progressive ideas shaped Gross's worldview so deeply that he was unable to dismiss them. Even after several trips to the steppes and discussions with the Kazakh poet Abai, Gross not only tailored his article to prevailing anthropological knowledge of the time but also perpetuated prejudices that discredited nomadic cultures, such as "Oriental despotism," and "a submissive Oriental woman."

[113] "prosił, żeby im przebaczono, na kolanach, z dziwnym uczuciem. […] jechać za uciekającymi nie chciał." B. Zaleski, 1 letter-album, BCz, sygn. 6928, p. 28.

[114] B. Zaleski, *Wygnańcy polscy w Orenburgu*, "Rocznik Towarzystwa Historyczno-Literackiego w Paryżu. Rok 1866" 1867, no 1.

[115] Which was called Ak-Mechet in Russian, and by Zaleski in his diary.

[116] "Oblężeni jak na dzisiejszych mieszkańców Środkowej Azji bronili się dobrze, ale po wysadzeniu muru w powietrze twierdzę zdobyto w sierpniu 1853 r." B. Zaleski, *Wspomnienia z Uralu i stepów kazachskich*…, p. 65.

[117] "Mąż ma prawo wymagać, by żona żyła z nim razem, dzieliła jego losy, prowadziła gospodarstwo itd., słowem była jego sługą pokorną; w razie najmniejszego wykroczenia może on karać żonę dowolnie, byle tylko nie znęcając się i nie kalecząc jej ciężko." J. Witort, *Na weselu u Kazachów*…, p. 268–269.

Unlike the texts by Zaleski and Gross, Januszkiewicz's documents were edited by third parties. Although Januszkiewicz had partially transformed his diary into what he called "Kyrgyz letters," the editor's involvement was decisive. Popular scientific models played an even more significant role in the editing work of Wrotnowski, allowing him to evaluate the material he possessed without any need for direct contact with the nomads. In addition to censoring controversial sections, such as the translator's story, he removed elements deemed "meaningless," including lists of traditional, typical Kazakh names. Furthermore, he combined several entries on related topics, such as two separate stories about *baranta*,[118] which Januszkiewicz noted during the expedition. According to the manuscript, the first attack was witnessed by his colleague and friend, Wiktor Iwaszkiewicz, in which the attackers stole camels. The description of the second attack presented an unlikely image of Kazakh women, who supposedly "threw their children at the feet of their [attackers'] horses" or exposed them "to blows in a desperate attempt to invoke mercy."[119] By combining two originally separate entries into one, Wrotnowski enhanced the credibility of the second account, making it seem as if Iwaszkiewicz had witnessed it. Such interference with the text caused a semantic fusion that framed it within recognizable structures of the Orient, enhancing the exo-ticism of the nomadic world while distorting the original description. Using a fixed iconographic repertoire helped familiarize the new topic by allowing readers to consume images they were already accustomed to[120].

Impersonal communication through writing and print facilitated knowledge transfer across time and space in a petrified form. Printed narratives about the Orient did not merely describe the exo-tic world of the East – its topography, landscape, nature, people, culture, and history. Instead, they aimed to create substitutes for this world. By detaching the texts from their authors and the specific contexts in which they were produced, printed versions offered a revised image of the Orient, which was later linked with other thematically related works within Western archival collections, intensifying the exchange between the "latent" and "manifest" Orientalism. The editorial work and publication itself completed the Orientalization process by filling in knowledge gaps and adapting the text to meet the needs and expectations of anonymous readers, who, apart from enjoying the reading experience, were eager to acquire geographical and ethnographic knowledge about distant lands and exo-tic cultures of the East.[121] The printed texts of letters, diaries, and reports became a model for future researchers, effectively colonizing knowledge about the re-

[118] *Baranta* (correctly *barymta*), which means "belonging to me" in Kazakh, was a practice in which cattle were taken from the aul of a (group of) person suspected of a crime to compel their appearance before a customary court and was crucial for maintaining social balance among the Kazakhs.

[119] "Często rzucają swe dzieci pod nogi ich [napastników] koniom lub nadstawiają je pod ciosy dla obudzenia miłosierdzia." A. Januszkiewicz, *Listy ze stepów kirgiskich*…, p. 162.

[120] A. Wieczorkiewicz, *Czarna kobieta na białym tle* …, p. 23.

[121] S. Layton, *Russian Literature and Empire*…, p. 20.

gion by employing symbolic designation.[122] Western epistemological structures, developed from writing practices that leverage the independence of material communication, have successfully organized all the data about the world according to universal analytical perspectives, such as Orientalism, primarily due to their expansive and self-reproductive nature. As a result of producing new information within the archival framework, a vicious circle emerged. On the one hand, cognitive strategies shaped by the culture of writing and print influenced the perspectives of researchers, including the selected Polish exiles. On the other, the scientific achievements were reinforced by the same media that initially sparked the need for research. Although the political, military, and cultural domination of one group of people over another needed neither writing nor any other material representations, the concept of Orientalism, along with its antinomic pair of Occidentalism, could arise only in the minds of literate people and was the result of highly specific analytical practices involving contact with physical carriers of human thought. Writing itself did not have to lead to the idea or category of the Orient; it was shaped by specific strategies aimed at capturing the world in all its complexity.

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