Introduction

Heterodoxy and Heterology on the Threshold of Eurasia

You're Komsomol, I'm "nonaligned"
But my heart is yours
Inseparable from your light.
Though I'm an idler of the revolution
My road is the wide one that you traveled
And our word is "ready!"

Sən komsomol, mən—"bitərəf" . . .
Fəqət mənim qəlbim sənin
Nur çəşməndən ayrılamaz,
Mən inqilab tufeylisi olsam belə bir az
Yenə yolum sən getdiğim geniş yol
"Hazır ol!" bizim parol . . .
(Refili 1929, 45)

In the poem dedicated to the death of Lenin, the poet and translator Mikayıl Refili outlined the position of Azerbaijan in the tumultuous period

of the Bolshevik revolution and the consolidation of the Soviet multinational empire. Refili defines himself in relation to the state bureaucracy as "nonaligned," drawing on the hybrid Persian-Arabic loan word "biteref," literally without sides. Pledging his heart to Lenin and the Soviet cause, Refili's verse marks the inseparability between early Soviet politics and romantic poetics. The imagery of the heart, spiritual light (*nur*), and the open road, tropes of classical Arabo-Persian poetry, contrast Refili's use of the Latin script and free verse. For Refili, the *parol*, password or promise, weaves his lyric subject and Lenin into an intimate dialogue across political and cultural lines through the Soviet Komsomol, the Franco-Russian *parol* (word), and its Turkic rhymed command *hazır ol* (be ready).[1] In so doing, Refili locates political awareness not in party membership but in a space of romantic love, *without* or *between* (*biteref*), and in the process of an aesthetic, semantic, and political negotiation across the Russian, Persian, and Turkic cultural divides that surround the Caucasus. Refili's poem from his 1929 collection *The Window* (*Pencere*) offers an alternative view of the Bolshevik revolution and consolidation of the Soviet empire in the south Caucasus.

The Bolshevik revolution of 1917 remains a mythic turning point marking the moment when St. Petersburg—which Peter the Great declared the center of imperial Russia's modernization and westernization, its "window onto the West"—was swept away by the formation of a new empire centered in communist Leningrad. The legacy of these twin empires as a *translatio imperii,* or imperial succession, still looms in the shadow of the Cold War and Putin's 2014 interventions in Ukraine. However, the imperial imagination always seems to return to the topos of Eurasia.

Following Emily Apter's invocation of translation zones as both the process of imperial transition, *translatio imperii*, and translation studies, this book unfolds a series of Russian and Turkic intertextual encounters, which expose the construction of literary modernism as central to Soviet empire building, through the transnational circulation of texts and ideas between Russia and the Caucasus.[2] Rather than replicating the orientalist imaginary of Eurasia, as Russia's infamous Janus-faced vision of an empire trapped between the geopolitical and ideological constructs of Europe and Asia, I offer an analysis of understudied Turkic archives, placing them into dialogue with the Russian works that were monumentalized into a Soviet world literature and cultural canon.[3] While structural differences

underlie comparisons of the state formations of imperial Russia and the Soviet multinational empire, the formation of political subjectivity in Turkic Muslim literature produced during the revolutionary transition offers insight into discursive continuities in the *translatio imperii*, as well as the role of literature more broadly in the creation of alternative forms of political subjectivity on the imperial periphery. I argue that the topos of Eurasia exposes nodes of intersection between discourses of Soviet national identity and Russian and Soviet orientalism, as well as the interlinked imperial disciplines of structuralist linguistics and anthropology, which sustained the privileged position of literature in their formation.

The urgency of an exploration of the discourse of Eurasianism is motivated by the terrifying revival of neo-Eurasianist geopolitics spurred by the work of Alexander Dugin. Once a fringe political theorist, Dugin has not only gained Putin's ear but over the last five years has expanded his influence across global New Right movements, including the US Traditional Workers Party and the French GRECE. As Dugin frames in a recent interview, "Eurasianism is the creation of an alternative to liberalism," in which liberalism embodies the persistent force of the West, whose "dictatorship" can be fought against only by reclaiming the geopolitics of Eurasianism.[4] More than a political theory, Eurasianism for Dugin traces a historical continuity to the tradition of Russian and Soviet scholarship in linguistics, ethnography, and geography and its influence on the development of structuralism and anthropology.[5] As an orientalist enterprise driven by a vision of the sociopolitical value of language and literature, for Dugin (2010) Eurasianism formulates an existential understanding of a people, a history of being (*Seynsgeschichte*) based on a geopolitical model of the coordinated efforts of traditional religious societies to build a new world order within the contiguous landmass of Eurasia. Drawing on the work of the twentieth-century Eurasianists and nineteenth-century Slavophiles, Dugin (2012, 2014) argues that the historical evolution of a Eurasian people is inseparable from the space of the Eurasian landmass.[6] The application of geopolitics to discourses of (post-)Soviet victimhood more broadly has nurtured the emergence of nationalist discourses in the post-Soviet space, which armed with postcolonial post-Soviet scholarship, has championed a vision of return to an authentic national culture.[7]

As I elaborate below, the term "Eurasia" not only describes a geographical region situated between the European and Asian continents but

also opens up an entire system of economic and political relations across the former Russian, Ottoman, and Persian empires, centered along the Caucasus Mountains at its southeastern border. The orientalist vision of Eurasia—born in the work of Russian poets, politicians, geographers, and linguists—promoted Russia's liminal position between the ideological poles of a rational and modern "Europe" and a spiritual and revolutionary "Asia." Framing the revolution and its aftermath as a dialogue between the constructions of Russia and Europe from the vantage point of the Caucasus accounts for the ideological formation of Eurasia and its impact on these historical, cultural, economic, and political differences on twentieth-century literature and aesthetics.

During the revolutionary years from 1905 through 1929, from the first labor mobilizations through the end of the New Economic Policy, an alternative literary aesthetics emerged in the Turkic Muslim South Caucasus. The influence of romantic poetics as the basis of this new avant-garde, in turn, informed pan-Turkic, pan-Islamic, and later Soviet Eurasianist imaginaries. Viewed from a historical perspective, this romantic poetics, while defined by romantic genre conventions, was also motivated by a concern for the affective power of poetry to influence politics. One of the foundational figures of historical poetics, Alexander Veselovsky describes the affective dimension of sentimental poetry: that is, the ways in which literary texts give form to emotional experience, highlighting the simultaneous historical persistence (*perezhivanie*) of poetic form and personal experience ([1904] 2016, 255–73). Moving away from the imperial locus of this vision of affective poetics, writers in the Caucasus drew on the experience of cultural, linguistic, confessional, and political heterodoxy. In this way, the literature of the revolutionary period in the Caucasus poses a crucial paradox between the convergence of a deterministic discourse of imperial identity and the flourishing of variation and hybridity in forms of heterology and heterodoxy. These two terms describe the formation of literary modernity, as at once an *archive* of texts characterized by its linguistic and religious multiplicity, and as a *praxis* that challenges a monolingual, monologic canon, reliant on a static vision of European modernity and its attendant universalizing doxa. Cognizant of a diverse multilingual and heterogeneous archive of Russian orientalist scholarship, romantic and avant-garde aesthetics, Arabo-Persian-Turkic poetic conventions, and Muslim modernist cultural reform movements, Muslim

writers and thinkers thus positioned the Caucasus on the threshold of dominant political structures and poetic forms.[8] The decentralized locus of these literary aesthetics on the Soviet periphery and the formation of what Refili described, anticipating the postcolonial movement of the 1950s, as a "nonaligned" vision of Soviet literary modernity, in turn, exposes the geopolitics of uneven development in the context of Soviet modernization during the cementing of its empire.[9]

Explorations of Marxist aesthetics from the vantage point of the (post) colony are hardly new. However, postcolonial theory as distinguished from anticolonial writings, as Dipesh Chakrabarty observed, was born in the West (2010, 45–68). The epistemological distinction between the historical Marxist-Leninism of the Soviet empire and the Western Marxism of postcolonial theory hinges on a fundamental disjuncture between theory and praxis in Anglo-American academia.[10] Indeed, this disjuncture has resulted in a contentious relationship between postcolonial theory and Slavic studies, which is only recently being remedied.[11] Marxist aesthetics imagined through postcolonial theory produced in Euro-American academia was shaped by Sartrean existentialism and Althusserian structuralism. In this way, postcolonial theory framed anti-imperial discourses through a post-Marxist inquiry into Anglo-French orientalism, postmodernity, biopolitics, and feminism as debates that arose within the geopolitical landscape of the hegemonic forces of Euro-American capitalism.

As Timothy Mitchell (2000) contends, the conditions of modernity on the colonial periphery are the consequence of a response, or *structural adjustment,* to colonial subjugation. Mitchell's argument leads to aesthetic claims, namely that "the colonial-modern involves creating an effect we recognize as reality, by organizing the world endlessly to represent it."[12] I argue that historical poetics, formalism, and semiotics present literature as central to representing an alternative vision of colonial modernity. From an intellectual history standpoint, this connection is articulated through the reliance of semiotics on the Marxist-Leninist speech acts of Soviet linguistics and, more broadly, historical poetics's concern for the imbrication of literature with sociopolitical life.[13] In either model, a decentering of capitalist modernity is not achieved in a colonial mimesis of a phantom West, but rather in the act or event of speaking back, in enunciating and engaging in a dialogue with the West as a space of representation. This shift in focus on the perception of peripheral modernities does not aim to

validate the hegemony of a Eurocentric aesthetics but rather to ask what other types of aesthetic forms such encounters create.[14] In turn, this book addresses forms of heterology and heterodox praxis that emerge through intertextual dialogues in the "peripheral modernities" produced during the revolutionary period in the Caucasus.

Taking up this challenge, the disciplinary aims of such a comparative praxis reconciles the intellectual history of Eurasianist discourses of empire with Marxist-Leninist aesthetics and poetics across the divide between Slavic and Turkic area studies and postcolonial theory. In so doing, I trace the history and literature of discourses of anti-imperialism in the former Soviet Union to resonant if often dissonant echoes in postcolonial studies, exposing correspondences between avant-garde literary modernity and (post-)Marxist aesthetic theory. This alternative reading of postcoloniality is centered on a variant of Marxist-Leninist aesthetic and political thought that developed in the former Russian empire in an archive of romantic and modernist political and poetic texts penned by Russian and Turkic Muslim writers during the *longue durée* of the revolutionary period from 1905 to 1929.

Linking the Russian/Soviet avant-garde to contemporary postcolonial theory exposes a curious intellectual genealogy that has been obscured by the underrepresentation of work on Central Asia and the Caucasus in the literary field. These realities are fraught by lack of access to language training and archival sources, as well as the marginalization of cultural studies of the region from the disciplines of both Slavic and Middle Eastern studies.[15] Connecting these fields exposes the emergence of Soviet literary modernity at the nexus of the formation of new forms of political and cultural life in the multinational empire, as well as inviting a disciplinary critique of both postcolonial and Slavic studies.

The two topics central to discussions of Russian/Soviet (post)coloniality that frame this book are the geopolitics of *Eurasia* and Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of hybrid literary modernity developed in the concept of the *threshold*. The threshold, as I discuss at length below, at once outlines a literary topos and relational ontology, exposing the interplay between a text and its social worlds by exhuming the historical traces of diverse registers of speech and their cultural content. This framework highlights the imbricated intellectual histories of structuralist linguistics and the Eurasianist movement, which both emerged among Russian intellectual

émigré communities in Prague and Paris in the 1920s and 1930s and are echoed in Dugin's neo-Eurasianist designs.[16] Furthermore, the extension of the Russian imaginary of a hybrid Eurasian empire into the realm of cultural identity interpolated the Russian intelligentsia's critique of empire in the nineteenth century onto the notion of a multilingual, multiethnic Soviet federation in the twentieth.[17] The paradoxical coexistence of anti-imperial critique and colonization, I contend, was central to the revolutionary political as well as poetic exchanges between Russians and Turkic Muslims.

The geopolitical and linguistic formulation of Eurasia, in turn, influenced the theoretization of empire in Euro-American academia.[18] This liminal Eurasian geopolitics and linguistic and cultural hybridity has, in particular, endured in post-Soviet academic scholarship on Russian orientalism, as the central ideological framework through which the diversity of the Soviet archive is articulated. In this way, the growth of Slavic studies amid Cold War cultural armament was beholden to forms of liberal multiculturalism that not only grew out of American neoliberalism but were indebted to discourses of Russian/Soviet imperial modernity.[19] In reference to this point, in *Death of a Discipline,* Gayatri Spivak (2003) raises "planetary" forms of critical practice as a necessary corrective to the institutional shift brought on by the defunding of area studies in the wake of the Cold War and the formulation of discourses of multiculturalism as a belated form of postcoloniality in the age of globalization. Aamir Mufti similarly argues that the orientalist project lies at the foundations of the making of world literature. He urges, "what would be needed is a concept of world literature (and practices of teaching it) that works to reveal the ways in which 'diversity' itself—national, religious, civilizational, continental—is a colonial and orientalist problematic, though one that emerges precisely on the plane of equivalence that is literature" (2010, 493). Reading a Soviet-world literary framework similarly requires a critical approach to the role of Russian and Soviet orientalism in the foundations of the geopolitical discourse of Eurasianism and its production of forms of diversity. Attentive to the geopolitics of the Eurasian imaginary, I render visible the imbrication of Soviet imperialism, linguistics, and modernist aesthetic theory. Following Edward Said's critique of Orientalism, as well as Spivak's, Mufti's, and others' interventions, this book contests a vision of Eurasia that functioned not only as an orientalist imaginary but

also as an institutionalized canon constituted through the growth of Slavic studies in American academia. Emerging out of Eurasianist discourses, formalist and structuralist linguistics were thus predicated on a binary worldview of Russia and the West.

For Iurii Lotman and Boris Uspenskii, the centrality of binaries to Russian culture lies in the duality of the Russian medieval system. They argue that in contrast to the medieval West, in which "a wide area of neutral behavior" neither "unconditionally sinful" nor "unconditionally holy" was possible, the Russian medieval system was rather based on an accentuated duality of the sinful and holy (1985, 32). While their model relies on a reading of what they call "non-hereditary memory"—that is, cultural constructs that are discursively perpetuated—the claim does not account for any historical cultural accounts that were not included in nineteenth-century political and literary writing devoted to discourses of Russian national identity. To challenge this binary, I engage with discussions of literary modernity and (post)colonial subjectivity from the vantage point of the writings of the Turkic Muslims of the Russian empire.

The theoretical formation of this paradoxical discourse of imperial totality predicated on difference and hybridity can be clarified by turning to the work of the literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin. While Bakhtin's work belatedly received wide reception in the 1980s, apace with the growing popularity of postcolonial theory, his early writings were penned in the 1920s during the revolutionary period of cultural production on the imperial periphery.[20] While Bakhtin's work considers a range of subjects outside the Soviet sphere, from Rabelais to Dostoevsky, one of the fundamental animating concerns in his work is the construction of literary modernity in relation to discourses of imperial identity. These discourses include Russian Orthodox mysticism as a revolutionary topos, the romantic anticapitalism of the avant-garde, and the centralized control of the arts under Stalinism. Bakhtin's elusive flirtations with Marxist aesthetics, demonstrated in his publications, whose authorship was contested and attributed to his contemporary Valentin Voloshinov, were indeed hotly debated in the 1990s in North American academic circles. Putting aside his personal politics, Bakhtin's inflection of Marxist-Leninist aesthetics perhaps more crucially situates his work within a historical context in which, as Stephen Kotkin (1995) has argued, intellectuals regardless of real political commitment were required to "speak Bolshevik."[21] In this

way, his work envisions a Soviet literary modernity through its interpolation of romantic anticapitalism into a vision of *novelistic discourse* (Bakhtin 1997–2012, 3:9–179).

The concept of the *threshold* in Bakhtin's work envisions an avant-garde or modernist position, one that critically reflects on art's relationship to society. In dialogue with Jürgen Habermas's aesthetic formation, avant-garde poetics generates a form of literary modernity premised on a post-Enlightenment struggle with the schism among religion, science, and art (3:19–22).[22] This disjuncture between autonomous art and life, as well as the sublation of art in the praxis of life, articulates its transformation on the Soviet periphery through the recovery of a hermeneutics of the dialogic form.[23] The Russian and Soviet periphery, I argue, functioned as an experimental space for this transformation of life. Drawing on the work of Bakhtin, I situate this exploration of literary modernity on the discursive *threshold*, which envisions literary or novelistic discourse through a series of intersubjective encounters between speaking consciousnesses and their underlying epistemological and historical formations. In so doing, I expose the ways in which literary modernity in the Russian and Soviet East during the revolutionary transition and *translatio imperii* was imagined through a series of intertextual encounters between Azeri and Russian poetics. This intertextual dialogue, in turn, drew on resonances from diverse doxa, including metaphysical and religious concepts in Islamic, Orthodox, and Enlightenment thought, evolutionary biology, German romanticism, and Marxist-Leninist materialist theories of language.

Russia's military intervention in Ukraine in 2014 spurred a series of quasi-historical comparisons to both Russian and Soviet imperial expansion. But, the question remains, what kind of empire was Russia? The nineteenth-century Russian historian Vasily Kliuchevsky infamously declared, "In Russia the center is at the periphery."[24] Much of the scholarship on the history of the Russian empire and the formation of the Soviet Union indeed continues to echo his words.[25] The fall of the Soviet Union witnessed a burgeoning body of scholarship on the topic of Russia's empire across the disciplines of literature, history, and anthropology. The case of Russian orientalism, for example, presents a unique challenge to historians, anthropologists, and literary scholars. How can a notion of empire, which has largely been theorized through the hegemony of the first-world Anglo-French empires be reconciled with the Marxist-Leninist

second world sprawling across the continuous landmass of Eurasia? Two major differences emerge in cross-imperial comparisons: the ideological centrality of the West European Enlightenment to constructions of imperial modernity and the geography of the overseas empire.[26] This book positions the long revolutionary period of transition from the Russian empire to the consolidation of Stalin's power (1905–1929) at the heart of Russia's expansion of its Eurasian land empire in the Caucasus. The focal points of this vision of Russian and Soviet imperialism hinge on representations of revolution and the Caucasus as a geopolitical and ideological border or threshold space that was central to imperial ideology, thereby securing the transition from the Russian to the Soviet empires.

This book focuses on a series of literary encounters in poetry, prose, and political essays written by Russian and Turkic Muslim writers, which contributed to the formation of discourses of literary modernity in the transitional revolutionary period. The key concept of the threshold informs the geopolitical setting of my study and sustains the critical framework of this book. The threshold not only describes the imperial periphery and—to paraphrase Kliuchevsky, its central role in the formation of the Soviet Union—but it also identifies the ideology of Eurasian hybridity and liminality, which emerged in textual archives produced by both Russian and Turkic Muslim writers in the Caucasus. The threshold, as a Bakhtinian concept, situates my reading of texts between the constellations of power that underlie orientalist, imperialist, and anti-imperialist discourses.[27] Intervening in historical and aesthetic discussions about Russian national identity to illustrate its relationship to imperial expansion and orientalist production makes it possible to account for the contributions of Turkic Muslims of the Caucasus to imperial and revolutionary politics, identifying critical yet lesser-known discourses of Turkic and Muslim cultural and civic identities—that is, forms of self-ascribed confessional and ethnolinguistic identity that transcended national borders.

The terms "Russian" and "Muslim" signify ethno-religious markers of identity, as Islam and Orthodox Christianity played a major role in defining cultural, ethnic, and civic identity through the early twentieth century.[28] Russian orientalists referred to Muslims of the Caucasus as Caucasian (*kavkazets*) or mountaineers (*gortsy*) to emphasize a connection between the physical topography of the Caucasus and the character of its people. However, most often the terms "Tatar" or "Azerbaijani Tatar"

were used erroneously to refer to all Muslims across the empire, not only those Tatar-speaking Muslims of the Volga-Ural and Crimean regions.[29] The term "Muslim" was also employed by Russians to distinguish religious otherness and by the people of the Caucasus as a means of self-identification.[30] Within the Caucasus, Azeri speakers were called "Türk" by Armenians, "Tatrebi" or "Tatars" by Georgians, and "Mughals" or "Mongols" by other minorities.[31] Like the supranational signifier *Türk*, Azeri also drew on wider cultural ties across the former Persian empire, referring more broadly to the Turkic-speaking people, a majority of whom are Shiʿi, who inhabit the territory between modern-day Iran and Daghestan, flanked by the Caspian Sea.[32] My use of the term "Azeri" thus emphasizes the porous national boundaries between various cultural identities in the region, the cultural centers of Tbilisi and Baku (the capitals of contemporary Georgia and Azerbaijan), as well as the shared cultural heritage with the Persian, Russian, and Ottoman empires.[33]

These intersecting cultural identity discourses challenge a singular narrative of an Orthodox Russophone imperial space. While confessional and linguistic difference remains one of the observed markers of the Russian empire's distinction vis-à-vis a vision of secular Anglo-French imperial modernity, these forms of imperial hegemony obscure the multilingual and multiethnic constitution of the empire. Religion—Orthodoxy, in particular—played a major role in defining imperial ideology. For instance, in the 1830s Sergei Uvarov—education minister and adviser to Tsar Nicholas I—coined the state slogan "Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationality [*Narodnost'*]" to describe the tsar's embodiment of the Russian people or *narod*.[34] However, across the empire religion functioned as a heterodox field marked by intriguing correspondences between various discourses of collective action and unity, such as the Orthodox notion of *sobornost'*, the Islamic conception of *tawḥīd*, and the Marxist international union of the working classes, which I discuss in subsequent chapters.[35] Taking up these intersectional doxa through their poetic manifestations, this book contests national boundaries, and by extension, the idea of national literatures. By rejecting the singular model of national literature, I trace the formation of what I call *supranational* literary traditions that invoked pan-Slavic, pan-Turkic, pan-Islamic, and Marxist-Leninist ideologies, engaging writers and thinkers across the Persian, Ottoman, and Russian empires.[36]

The Eurasian Empire

"The transition from Europe to Asia is more perceptible with every hour," wrote Alexander Pushkin as he recorded his passage through the Caucasus in his travelogue, *Journey to Arzrum* (1974, 17). The story of the Russian and Soviet colonization of the Caucasus and local resistance to it took the form of a dialogue, albeit often one-sided, about the imagined geography of a Eurasian land empire as it was projected across the sublime slopes of the Caucasus. Drawing on accounts dating back to ancient Greece, nineteenth-century Russian orientalist ethnographic, linguistic, and literary representations identified the Caucasus as a threshold space caught between Europe and Asia.[37] Marked by the expansion of Russia's massive land empire and its related distinction as a destination for political exiles, the Caucasus emerged in accounts such as Pushkin's marked by its liminal geography and cultural hybridity.

My use of the term "Eurasia," however, draws on the aforementioned historical movement popularized in intellectual circles between the 1920s and 1930s, which sought to found a new social and cultural form in the arts and sciences, linking biology, history, geography, and linguistics. By building on studies of Eurasianism that trace its intellectual antecedents to nineteenth-century Slavophile nationalist ideology and Russian orientalist scholarship, with its connections to the formation of early twentieth-century linguistics, we can explore Eurasia as a discursive threshold space through which a vision of literary modernity and revolutionary transformation was interpolated in the works of Russian writers and thinkers and their Muslim Turkic counterparts in the South Caucasus.

As Russian writers and thinkers imagined Eurasia, they mapped geopolitical, scientific, and theological epistemologies onto literary representations of Russia's southern colonies, particularly the Caucasus. In so doing, they defined the cultural and economic importance of the territories as central to a modern revolutionary ideology. These revolutionary-romantic discourses generated a crucial historiographic and theoretical foundation that linked anti-imperial revolutionary poetics with the process of colonization, all the while operating through intertwining discourses of geographical liminality and cultural hybridity. Orientalists of the Caucasus, like the historian and Turkologist Vasily Bartold and the linguist and geographer Nikolai Marr, were informed by the notion of a heterogeneous

Eurasian identity that was not united by race but rather by a common historical fate and culture.[38] In this way, revolutionary poetics, more broadly encompassing the Russian and Turkic avant-gardes, served a central role in the transition from the fall of the Russian empire through the consolidation of the Soviet multinational empire from 1905 to 1929. Highlighting these avant-garde poetics thus exposes intersections between revolutionary ideologies that were striated by the geopolitics of the Eurasian land empire.

The topos of the imaginary Caucasus as a projected fantasy of Russia's revolutionary Eurasian identity constituted forms of literary modernity based on a differential ontology. This discourse of modernity was premised on the centrality of difference to forms of being, which were articulated through a romantic vision of totality. This conception of totality through heterogeneity and difference was indebted to Russian responses to Darwinian evolutionism, in which a theory of evolution based on coincidence was replaced with an overarching vision of structural laws premised on wholeness.[39] On the one hand, this model of the evolution and diversity of imperial culture, contributed to the structure of the multinational Soviet empire, while on the other, it relied on an orientalist vision of Eurasian totality. This totality was inscribed in the imagination of a place that was neither Europe nor Asia but greater than their sum. Despite divergent politics, the shared conception of an evolutionist scientific discourse in linguistics and literature also accounts for the aesthetic resonances between Marxist-Leninist and Eurasianist modernity discourses.[40]

In Patrick Sériot's *Structure and the Whole*, he exposes the explicit connections between non-Darwinian evolution and Russian linguistics, tracing the latter to nineteenth-century biological and cultural theories, as well as Slavophile and Eurasianist politics (2014, 24–60). The Slavophile philosopher Nikolai Danilevsky's famous treatise *Russia and Europe* (*Rossiia i Evropa* [1869]) designed a theory of nations that combined religion and the natural sciences into a natural theology based on German romantic connections to homology and responses to Darwinian evolution.[41] Danilevsky's natural theology developed a concept of pan-Slavic unity and superiority through the cross-fertilization of nations and cultural traditions. He compared Slavic nations to the confluence of streams of world history running through Egypt, Palestine, and Byzantium, merging with ancient Greece and the Roman empire (Danilevsky, as described

in MacMaster 1954, 154–61). Danilevsky's vision of cultural hybridity was based on Goethe's poetics and Karl Ernst von Baer's biological theories of homology. Indeed, as the Tashkent-based French ethnographer Joseph Castagné argued in 1923, German romantic orientalist ethnography had a major impact on the formation of Bolshevik Muslim politics.[42] The biological model compared organisms with the same type of structure and in so doing constructed an ideal that was particularized according to individual organisms but remained unified under the conceptual structure (MacMaster 1954, 154–61). In this way, Danilevsky projected the future of a pan-Slavic empire through its heterogeneous yet structurally coherent composition. For thinkers such as Danilevsky, Darwin's theory constituted a form of Western materialism that must be rejected for an alternative form of Slavic modernity.

Eurasianist linguistics extended this geopolitical model into the twentieth century, drawing on the disciplines of geography, biology, economics, and a political-military idiom. Following the work of the Russian biologists and geographers Lev Berg and Igor Savitsky, Roman Jakobson argues in "Toward a Characterization of the Eurasian Language Affiliation" (K kharakteristike evraziiskogo iazykovogo soiuza [1931]) that languages are not only bound by shared families, inherited vocabularies, grammars, and phonetic traits but also language affiliation (*iazykovyi soiuz*), a term he appropriates from Nikolai Trubetskoy (Jakobson 1962, 144–201).[43] Language affiliation describes structural similarities that do not stem from shared inherited traits but rather from a continuous geography, as well as a shared culture and history. In this way, it is a comparative linguistic theory grounded in a notion of the linguistic and cultural affiliation of neighboring territories. Jakobson understands Eurasia through its territorial continuity and linguistic structure (defined by a shared consonant palatalization and the absence of polytony).[44]

While such a model promises the lateral affiliation of neighboring languages and cultures not linked by a single nation-state, the very notion of affiliation for Jakobson is tied to political and military organization. For example, Jakobson introduces language affiliation through the analogue of a government's military, political, and economic alliances. Like political and military alliances, for Jakobson language is correlated through several systems (morphological, syntactical, phraseological), and in this way, he concludes, "language is a system of systems" (1962, 145). Crucially, the

linguistic structure for Jakobson and the other Eurasianists, unlike the Saussurean model of arbitrary signification, is governed by a romantic conception of wholeness derived from specifically non-Darwianian evolutionary biological models. For example, Jakobson draws on the biologist Lev Berg to support his formulation of the Eurasian linguistic union as a model reliant not on coincidence but rather on convergence to internal laws, and in which hereditary variations are limited by their determined direction. Following German romantic thinkers like von Humboldt, phonological affinities mirror the ecological affinities of plants. In this way, convergence, as a non-Darwinian evolutionary principle, is the central mode of comparison.[45]

Similarly, the work of Nikolai Marr substituted natural selection for a principle of total contamination yielding to cross-breeding forms of language for culture building.[46] Marr's work highlights an intellectual lineage linking Russian orientalist accounts of the Caucasus in linguistics to historical poetics. In both the cases of non-Darwinian nomogenesis and Marrean cross-contamination, the idea of a cultural, geographic, scientific, and economic totality was based on the principle of the heterogeneous character of the Eurasian space and its attendant revolutionary time. These evolutionary biological theories, in turn, informed the conception of linguistic structure. As Sériot argues, Berg's nomogenesis illustrated how internal and external determinism, driven by mimesis or environmental/geographic factors, functioned as structural laws that generated a modern functional system of genetically varied organisms. As structural principles applied to linguistics, mimetic and geographic evolutionary determinism thus became central tropes in Russian orientalist literature. The scientific principles of mimesis, cross-contamination, and geographic determinism furthermore informed the literary imaginary of the Soviet frontier.

At the end of the nineteenth century, Russia's Eurasian geopolitics became central to calls for imperial messianism. Perhaps the most famous iteration of this Eurasian messianism is Fyodor Dostoevsky's description of the Russian conquest of Central Asia. In 1881 he wrote, "In Europe we were hangers-on, but to Asia we will go as masters. In Europe we were Tatars, but in Asia we too are Europeans" (1972–1992, 27:36–37).[47] Penned at an analogous historical moment during the Bolsheviks' southern expansion into the Caucasus in 1918, Alexander Blok's poem "The Scythians" (Skify) imagines Eurasia through the myth of the Third Rome:

that is, Russia's messianic succession to Byzantine power. Responding to the popular French orientalist depiction of the Slavic peoples as Tatars, Blok identifies the Russian empire instead as a band of Scythian warriors. His vision of the Iranian Scythian, in turn, draws on the race theory of the nineteenth-century orientalist Alexei Khomiakov. As an alternative to Ernest Renan's influential ethno-linguistic theory of Aryan and Semitic peoples, Khomiakov instead insisted on the terms Aryan and Kushite, which classified peoples according to monotheistic and polytheistic confessions. Thus Khomiakov identified Eurasia as Aryan, dominated by Islamic and Orthodox cultures, while both China and Germany instead encompassed forms of polytheistic Kushite civilizations.[48]

In Blok's poem, Russia stands as a sphinx gazing with love and hatred between two enemy cultures, Tatars and Europeans. Associating the figure of the Tatar with the Kushite, and the Scythian with the Iranian Aryan, the Scythian warrior represents both Russia's opposition to the forces of westernization and dominance over Asia through the unity of its monotheistic religions—Islam and Orthodoxy. Blok also urges that Russia should be inspired by the spirit of the ancient nomadic Scythians to expand its empire. "Across the wide thickets and forests / In front of pretty Europe / We will spread out! We will turn to you / with our Asiatic mugs" (Мы широко по дебрям и лесам / Перед Европою пригожей / расступимся! Мы обернемся к вам / своею азиатской рожей) (1997, 5:77). Blok appeals to Russia with a self-orientalizing gesture, calling on the Asian-Russian empire to rise up against *pretty Europe*. While emphasizing Russia's hybrid Eurasian character, he nonetheless issues a triumphal, militarized call for expansion to fulfill a Eurasian imperial telos. The doubled signifier of the Scythian warrior announces the Eurasian imperial crusade as an alternative to the cultural and political hegemony of Greco-European civilization. In this way, the Eurasian ideology relied on both the contingency of simultaneously being and nonbeing—that is, both and neither Asian nor European—and a commitment to an ethno-linguistic identity determined by Islamic and Orthodox culture.

The Eurasian ideology was not only one of the driving forces of Russia's cultural imperialism, but it also paradoxically informed the construction of pan-Turkic and pan-Islamic supranational identity discourses. One of the founding figures of Russian pan-Turkism, the Crimean Tatar writer and thinker Ismail Gasprinsky (Gasprali) invoked the idea of Eurasia in

his vision of a Muslim utopia—albeit one set on a different mountain range—in southern Spain.[49] In his fictional account of an advanced civilization secluded in the Andalusian mountains, Gasprinksy described his vision of a Muslim Eurasian utopian civilization in his influential dual-language Russian and Crimean Tatar journal *The Interpreter* (*Terjuman*). He writes, "This city reminded me of neither Europe, nor Asia. There, one did not see the huge, compact, mountain-like tall houses of Europe and nothing resembled either the decaying shacks of our Asia, or its filth. Everything was original, beautiful, excellent, clean and [the result of] voluntary [participation]" (Gasprali 2008, 120). Rejecting the singularity of the geopolitical categories of Europe and Asia, Gasprinsky defends the possibility of a hospitable cultural union in the Russian imperial space through the formation of a nonplace, "neither Europe, nor Asia."[50] His utopian imaginary—both a good place and nonplace, or *eu-topos* and *ou-topos* according to the Greek etymology—offers an intervention into Eurasianist civilizing discourse, unified by a supranational vision of Turkic Muslim modernity.

While it is noteworthy that Gasprinsky had often been an apologist for empire, he here complicates the discursive terrain of Eurasianism by envisioning a sort of Eu(r)-Asian topos that replaces Pushkin's geographic, Dostoevsky's political, and Blok's cultural hybridity with an emptying of space and time.[51] For Gasprinsky, the determinism of the Eurasian telos is troubled by the nomadic topology and mythic futurity of his Andalusian society. Eurasianism and its evolutionist biological underpinnings thus not only authorized Russia's imperial hegemony but, more important, informed a differential ontology central to the experience of being in the Russian empire, and through which both Russian orientalists and Turkic Muslim intellectuals mediated literary modernity during the revolutionary period.

Revolution in the Caucasus

The most proximate and enduring imaginary Eurasian topos was projected onto the Caucasus. Indeed, the Caucasus served as a crucial ideological, geopolitical, and economic site in the Russian empire and during the formation of the Soviet Union. After the signing of the Treaty of

Turkmenchay in 1828, which ended the Russo-Persian wars (1804–1828), the Russian empire annexed the Caucasus territories north of the Araz (Araxes) River.[52] Russians traveled to the Caucasus as political exiles, imperial bureaucrats, researchers, soldiers, and adventure seekers. The region most memorably entered the Russian imagination through the poetry and prose of Alexander Pushkin, Mikhail Lermontov, Alexander Bestuzhev-Marlinsky, and Lev Tolstoy, as well as the photography and film of Sergei Prokudin-Gorsky and Alexander Mishon. Short stories and verse—as well as ethnography, geography and linguistics—exalted a romantic vision of the wild and sublime terrain on this border between Asia and Europe and its "brave" but "savage" and "primal" inhabitants.[53] Representations of the Caucasus emphasized the position of Russia on the border of Europe and Asia, a protectorate of European modernity and the heir to Asian "bravery" and "might," as well as a location for political exile and revolutionary dissent.

Pushkin, Bestuzhev-Marlinsky, and Lermontov's writings, which largely described the North Caucasus or Georgia, became the foundation of a general Caucasus imaginary. Both Pushkin and Lermontov were exiled to the Caucasus, in part, for their respective poems "Liberty" (Vol′nost′ [1820]), which rallied the people against the tsarist autocracy, and "The Death of the Poet" (Smert′ poeta [1837]), which condemned the ruling elite for Pushkin's death. In particular, Tsar Nicholas I feared the poets' sympathy for the revolutionary Decembrists—a group of writers and thinkers who organized an uprising in December 1825 to overthrow the tsar and establish a constitutional monarchy.[54] The most famous examples of what would become the Russian orientalist canon include Pushkin's "Prisoner of the Caucasus" (Kavkazskii plennik) and Lermontov's "Demon" (1829–1839), which recount failed quests for freedom and love set in the Caucasus. Through their descriptions of the landscapes and peoples of the Caucasus, the works emphasize the ideals of *freedom* (*vol'nost'*, *svoboda*), faith, bravery, and a close connection to nature.[55] *Svoboda* evokes freedom from restrictions, while *vol'nost'*, or liberty, refers to political will and a sense of the openness of space. Deriving from *volia,* a form of the Latinate *voluntas,* it emphasizes the role of human cognition in its determination. The poetic imagination of the Caucasus emphasized the role of literature in designing the conceptual topography of an early revolutionary discourse rooted in both a spatial and a political vision of freedom. Indeed,

this poetic trend was sustained by state ethnographic campaigns, which defined the peoples of the Caucasus through their natural surroundings, envisioning both the diversity and unity of the Russian empire through the biological determinism of its landscape.[56]

The influence of the Russian imperial imagination generated by Russian émigrés, exiles, and orientalists left a mark on the local Muslim elite communities of the South Caucasus. The 1905 revolution and the consolidation of Stalin's power in the 1930s frame a period during which artistic and political experiments shaped the terrain of identity. The 1905 revolution resulted in Tsar Nicholas II's declaration of new civic laws, including the freedoms of speech, assembly, and conscience. These laws lifted the ban on the Muslim press and liberalized the status of non-Orthodox religious practices, including conversion and the proliferation of new religious sects.[57] The city of Tiflis (Tbilisi), the capital of Georgia, served as the administrative center of the Russian Caucasus and became a cultural center for literary salons and publications, as well as artistic, musical, and theatrical productions.[58]

The oil boom at the beginning of the twentieth century also channeled resources to Baku, making it the second largest producer of crude oil in the world and an important site during the revolutionary transition. From 1905 to 1929, Baku experienced a series of political upheavals, including the fall of the Russian empire, a brief period of noncentralized leadership under the Baku Commune and the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, and finally the Soviet reconquest of the Caucasus and institutionalization of the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic in 1920. The economic development of Baku in turn led to the emergence of a Muslim entrepreneurial class that lent its support to a movement of Muslim cultural reform.[59] Focused on education and critical thinking, the movement campaigned for school reforms, launched an international Turkic language press, as well as an internationally touring theater company—named after its benefactor, the entrepreneur and intellectual Zeynalabdin Tağıyev.[60]

The rise of the Muslim merchant class contributed to the cultivation of discourses of civic and cultural identity. After the October revolution in 1917, Azerbaijan experienced only a brief period of independence under the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic from 1918 until the Bolsheviks invaded in 1920. Prior to the revolution, Azeri writers and thinkers associated an imperial civic identity with the event of Russian colonization in

the mid-nineteenth century. Russian linguistic and civic identity, in predictable colonial fashion, represented the gateway to westernization and often modernization. However, an Azeri ethno-linguistic identity was also defined through Turkic and Persian cultural spheres of influence, which acquired political valences as they entered public fora, particularly in the local press and theater. Although identity in the Caucasus remained highly regionalized among the working class and peasant populations, at the turn of the century the emerging class of Russian- and French-educated writers and thinkers, in addition to the existing group of Persianate and Ottoman literati, began to promote discourses of identity that transcended Russian, Persian, and Ottoman national identity. Persian cultural influences on Azeri identity, which in the twentieth century were often connected to a critique of Islamic clericism, extended back to the foundational role of sixteenth-century Persian poetry and the Shi'i tradition of the passion plays or *ta'ziyeh* ritual performances on local literature and theater under the Safavids.[61] Despite a great diversity of forms of Islam practiced in the Caucasus, a supranational notion of pan-Islamic Muslim cultural identity was defined through a common association with the *umma*, or the international community of Islamic believers. Similarly, a supranational pan-Turkic identity was fostered through the rise of print culture. These Muslim, Turkic (and Persianate) identity discourses functioned as cultural signifiers that were interpolated in civic contexts through reformist campaigns in popular literary and cultural journals.

While the idea of the cultural fusion of Europe and Asia was promoted both in the writings of Turkic Muslims and Russian orientalists, these Eurasias were used to justify different forms of political and cultural sovereignty. For example, forms of pan-Turkism were tied to both national and orientalist narratives. On the one hand, European orientalists—including the Hungarian Arminius Vambery and the Frenchman Léon Cahun—developed a political ideology of world domination under the rubric of pan-Turkism in order to justify the imperial expansion of the Russian and British empires in Central Asia (Altstadt 1986, 280). On the other hand, Turkic writers and thinkers in the Russian empire generated pan-Turkic ethno-linguistic forms of self-identification as part of local reform campaigns (Altstadt 1986, 280). That is, while Vambery theorized the creation of a pan-Turkic state from the Adriatic to China, Azeri authors instead emphasized the creation of an imagined community of readers

through a body of literary, philosophical, and political works, spread by the print boom at the turn of the century.

To this end, the Azeri writer and thinker Ali bey Hüseynzade describes the objectives of his literary journal *Enlightenment* (*Füyuzat*), published between 1906 and 1907, as a project aimed at a progressive cultural unification according to the slogan: "Turkify, Islamicize, Europeanize."[62] Hüseynzade envisions the union of language and religion through a combined reform effort including an "Islamic renaissance" (*islam intibahı*), the creation of "national self awareness" (*milliözünü derk*), and "Europeanization as a synthesis of Eastern and Western culture" (*avropalaşmaq—Qerb ve Şerq medniyyetlerinin sintezi*) ([1906–1907] 2007, xxiv). While Hüseynzade's journal represented a particularly Turkophilic identity, the tripartite structure of his model for "national freedom" (*milli azadlıq*) is informed by a common interest shared by Azeri writers and thinkers of the time in fusing European and Islamic thought to modernize language education and religious institutions. These pan-Turkic and pan-Islamic signifiers participated in the creation of a literary corpus that generated its own history of impact and influence within and beyond the borders of the former imperial territories. The intersection of these forms of hybrid Eurasian identity—whether used in imagining pan-Slavic, pan-Turkic, or pan-Islamic cultural communities—generated a medium for public discourse, albeit one that often operated through interlingual and intertextual dialogues.[63] An examination of the interference between these competing visions of Eurasia highlights a dissonance between orientalist visions of world domination and alternative supranational counternarratives that interpolated the Turkic and Persianate Muslim world. In this way, these intersecting narratives of religious and linguistic identity shaped the revolutionary space and influenced the creation of a modern subjectivity through the circulation of a crucial body of texts that animated discourses of both imperial and anti-imperial identity.

Examining the development of an ideology, or system of ideas, about Eurasia as a dynamic intertextual modality renders legible its role in framing the important cultural function of religious ritual and language politics in the political and cultural life of the empire. In particular, Islam—the largest confessional minority in the former imperial and Soviet space—and Azeri Turkic—which held the strongest transnational ties to the Persian and Ottoman empires in the Caucasus—played a significant role in

shaping imperial geopolitics during the revolutionary transition. Placing these two, often-conflicting, Eurasias into dialogue, I outline a critical threshold space-time that reveals both the construction of imperial narratives and the role of heteroglossic and heterodoxic Russian and Turkic responses in shaping and contesting these dominant discourses. The threshold demarcates the geopolitical border space of Eurasia, the temporal shift from the fall of the Russian empire through the formation of the Soviet Union, and intertextual and discursive exchanges between these competing visions of identity. In this way, the threshold not only outlines the Eurasian geopolitical border zone and the *translatio imperii* from the Russian to the Soviet empires but marks the creation of a diverse intertextual topography in which these cultural exchanges shaped the political and historical transformations of the early twentieth century.

While it is tempting to read the revolution in the Caucasus as a political shift from a colony to anti-imperial republic, these heterodoxic and heterologic intertextual encounters between metropolitan Russia and the Caucasus's colonial outposts (*okraina*) of Tbilisi and Baku reveal a different story. The reciprocal, though unequal, cultural exchanges that took shape in poetry, periodicals, theater, and political essays contributed to the construction of an enduring discourse of an orientalist Eurasian imaginary, which even today remains central to Russian calls for imperial expansion. In this way, my portrait of the Caucasus differs from Steven Lee's vision of the Soviet international avant-garde in his *Ethnic Avant-Garde: Minority Cultures and World Revolution* as "inclusive and decolonizing" (2015, 4). I argue instead that the multinationalism of the avant-garde was central to the regulation by Soviet imperial control, from Stalin's purges in the 1930s to continued provocations of interethnic violence in the republics through the fall of the Soviet Union. These Eurasias not only appear in the cultural archives of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries but reemerge in the institutional fora of academic exchange, shaping Soviet and post-Soviet critical approaches to reading the literature of the Russian and Soviet empires. Indeed, the afterlife of Eurasia remains well chronicled in the Russian literary canon, including the many famous accounts of Tolstoy, Pushkin, and Lermontov in the Caucasus, which remain central to North American Slavic department curricula.[64] This canon is also readily deployed in public media, such as in the example of the flood of articles and references to Tolstoy's *Hadji Murat* following the identification of

the Tsarnaev brothers as the Boston Marathon bombers. The figure of the threshold, in turn, formulates a reading practice for disentangling the relations of power that underlie these intertextual encounters and their historicization in Soviet and contemporary scholarship.

My literary selection includes works written by members of the Russian intelligentsia who traveled to the Caucasus either as political exiles or in the service of the imperial administration or to participate in revolutionary politics and intellectual exchange. In this way, the book explores the writers who have since become integral to the Russian romantic, realist, and modernist literary canons, and whose works shaped the Russian orientalist imagination. These include Alexander Pushkin (Aleksandr Sergeevich Pushkin), Mikhail Lermontov (Mikhail Iur′evich Lermontov), Nikolai Gogol (Nikolai Vasil′evich Gogol′), Viacheslav Ivanov (Viacheslav Ivanovich Ivanov), Vladimir Mayakovsky (Vladimir Vladimirovich Maiakovskii), Sergei Gorodetsky (Sergei Mitrofanovich Gorodetskii), Alexei Kruchenykh (Aleksei Eliseevich Kruchenykh), Velimir Khlebnikov, and Tatiana Vechorka (Tat′iana Vechërka).[65] I examine the ways in which their Muslim interlocutors referenced, parodied, translated, and transformed their work and in so doing generated a vision of literary modernity in dialogue with Russian orientalism. To this end I discuss the work of Mirze Feteli Axundov, Abbas Sehhet, Mehemmed Hadi, Celil Memmedquluzade, Üzeyir Hacıbeyov, Hüseyn Cavid, Süleyman Rüstem, Mikayıl Refili, and the Turkish poet Nazim Hikmet, with the overall effect of displacing Russian imperial authority. These authors, like their Russian interlocutors, engaged with a broad range of styles from classical Arabo-Persian-Ottoman poetic forms and tropes to a free verse style. Writers such as Memmedquluzade also drew on a satirical tradition of Turkic folktales. In post-Soviet Azerbaijani literature textbooks these writers are often defined by two camps, highlighting their participation either in the popular working-class Turkic and Persian-oriented satirical journal *Molla Nesreddin* edited by Memmedquluzade or the more bourgeois European and Ottoman-oriented journal *Enlightenment* edited by Hüseynzade. Indeed, while the journals themselves played up this rivalry, such a binary vision of Azeri literary production does not account for the many authors who published in both journals, as well as the various intersections and collaborations among these visions of Azeri Turkic, Persian, Ottoman, European, and Russian imperial identity, which circulated during the

transitional revolutionary period. These intertextual encounters not only reveal the manner in which the Russian orientalist literary canon was read by Muslim writers and thinkers from the Caucasus, but it further exposes how their engagement with the Russian literary imaginary shaped their own discussions of the relationship among reform, modern forms of governance, and Islam.

Figures such as Refili, Rüstem, Cavid, Memmedquluzade, and Nariman Narimanov participated in the formation of the Soviet world literature project, many of them willingly serving in or collaborating with Soviet institutions and contributing to Latinization and Russian translation efforts. However, there is a risk in romanticizing their role, since they were on the winning side of history. There is another story that can be traced in the tracks of those who challenged the system and were forced to immigrate to Warsaw, Paris, Istanbul, and Berlin after the October revolution. These included the members of the anti-Soviet Prometheus movement that was founded between 1923 and 1926 in Istanbul. Azeri intellectuals involved in the movement included the writers and statesmen Memmed Amin Rasulzade, Akhmed Aghaoglu, Ali bey Hüseynzade, Mirza Bala Mehmetzade, and Hilal Münchi.[66] They also launched a literary journal of the same name, *Promethée*, published in French and funded by a Polish and French anti-Bolshevik resistance with the main aims of combating Soviet-Russian imperialism.[67] The stories of other writers and thinkers who fled to Istanbul, Tebriz, Tehran, and beyond still remains to be written.

More broadly, while the narrative of Russian writers in the Caucasus has become well known, literary works by Muslim writers and thinkers remain underrepresented in contemporary Anglophone scholarship.[68] This is not only because these works were written in Persian and Turkic languages through the mid-twentieth century, but because they appealed to an interest in supranational intellectual traditions across the Persian, Ottoman, and Russian empires, as well as Europe and the greater Islamic world. Indeed, these philosophic, literary, and political works influenced Muslim intellectuals in Turkey, Central Asia, Iran, Egypt, and Algeria. Beyond exceptional cases, meetings between Russians and Muslims in the Caucasus have been more difficult to trace. Mayakovsky, Khlebnikov, and Ivanov gave lectures in Baku in the 1920s, yet their names remain largely absent from the Turkic press. Similarly, they do not discuss the

work of their Azeri contemporaries Memmedquluzade, Sehhet, and Refili. The Soviet conquest of the Caucasus generated a series of institutional collaborative productions in the domains of theater, propaganda posters, and film. Archival records of these collaborative projects have largely been displaced, lost, or remain classified. This book thus recounts the story of Russian and Muslim cultural interactions between these institutional and intertextual encounters, as well as rendering connections visible from within the aesthetic tissue of the works themselves. An examination of the cultural topography of the Caucasus in this way offers the opportunity to challenge the orientalist discourse of Eurasian hybridity, not only by rendering legible forms of difference, but by presenting contesting and intertwining ideologies of empire from both positions of cultural and political hegemony as well as marginality.

Orientalism on the Threshold: In Bakhtin's Margins

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Slavic and Eurasian studies have introduced the literature of the former Soviet Union into world literature debates—specifically in the field of postcolonial studies. Scholars in the United States have begun to think about the application of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) to the former Soviet and Russian imperial space only since the collapse of the Soviet Union (Alexander Etkind, Monika Greenleaf, Katya Hokanson, Adeeb Khalid, Nathaniel Knight, Susan Layton, Harsha Ram, Maria Todorova, and Vera Tolz).[69] Furthermore, as Afrid Bustanov argues the absence of scholarship penned in the former Soviet Union that links orientalist scholarship to state politics is exemplified by the belated Russian translation and publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* only in 2006 (2015, xii). Ronald Suny and Alexander Etkind trace the ways in which the fashioning of Russian national identity was imbricated in the economic and political processes of imperial expansion.[70] Francine Hirsch's (2005) history of the national question highlights the role of the institution of orientalist ethnography in the formation of the political geography of the Soviet Union.[71] As demonstrated in the work of Hirsch, Terry Martin, and Yuri Slezkine, scholarship on nationalities policies has provided insight into the character of the Soviet empire.

Nationalities policies were a Bolshevik anti-imperialist ideology that fostered national consciousness as a step in the historical evolution of class consciousness, as well as to combat an emerging Great Russian chauvinism. The policies that emerged from these debates included the creation of organizations such as the People's Commissariat of Nationalities (Narkomnats), which worked to install local pro-Bolshevik leaders and create alliances with national self-determination movements. Martin's vision of an "affirmative action empire" highlights the central state's promotion of nationalities as a challenge to Russian chauvinism (2001, 1–9). Slezkine (1994) instead emphasizes the formation of a philosophical nationalism, through the praxis of translation, which emulated the structure of the communal apartment.[72] Hirsch's work, perhaps most compellingly, positions nationalities policies as a form of state-sponsored evolutionism, a policy of double assimilation whereby subjects' association with the newly created nations formulated their civic engagement with the Soviet state (2005, 63–97). As this scholarship illustrates, the shift in the discourse of imperialism to one of anti-imperialist evolutionism was thus central to political and social transformations from the fall of the Russian empire through the formation of the Soviet Union.

Although many of the critiques of the application of Orientalism to the Eurasian context have been levied against the Eurocentrism of Said's project, few alternative models have taken precedence.[73] However, it is precisely cases such as those of the Russian empire and Soviet Union that offer an opportunity to critically assess and develop postcolonial theory to accommodate a world literary scope. Indeed, this task requires decentering the Anglophone and European canon of world literature, as well as the genre of the novel.[74] The objective of this book is thus not the application of Orientalism to the Eurasian context but rather the task of exposing the imbrications of imperial and anti-imperial discourses that animate literary representations across the empire and their role in the formation of Russian and Soviet literary modernity. Drawing on Said's definition of Orientalism as a corporate institution, my portrait of Eurasian literary modernity also attends to the role of Eurasianism in shaping North American Slavic studies, through the influential role played by émigré intellectuals. In so doing, I highlight the formation and maintenance of a Russian canon predicated on a Eurasianist totality, which emerged in the Russian orientalist archive.[75] By rejecting the singular model of national

literature, my discussion follows the formation of imperial and supranational identity in works produced by writers and thinkers across the Persian, Ottoman, and Russian empires, as well as in Europe. Placing these texts into dialogue, however, requires an attention to the shifting value of linguistic and religious discourses within the transitional political and social space of the revolutionary period in the Caucasus. In this way, the epistemological shifts in the domains of religious and secular politics, language, and speech illuminate the political and social transformations of the early twentieth century.

Mindful of the Eurocentrism of his own project, Said developed an analysis of *contrapuntal* reading and *secular criticism*. He presents contrapuntal reading in *Culture and Imperialism* (1994) as a method for exposing an entire network of interactions that transcend the dominant narratives of metropolitan history. Said writes, "As we look back at the cultural archive, we begin to reread it not univocally but *contrapuntally*, with a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts" (1994, 51).[76] The practice of contrapuntal reading offers an important corrective to the binary constitution of a colonial "periphery" through metropolitan scholarship. Furthermore, as critical engagements with Said's oeuvre highlight, his model of secular criticism offers a space for contesting another series of boundaries among imperial, national, linguistic, ethnic, and religious discourses of identity (1978, 2–3).[77] Secular criticism transcends the binary relationship between the secular and religious, presenting a heterodox praxis of reading across the boundaries of empire, nation, religion, and language. Framing Said's work as a heterodox praxis also offers a mode for thinking critically about the role of academic institutions in constructing and maintaining ontological and epistemological distinctions between the Orient and the Occident, or in the case of the Russian and Soviet empires, in constructing an idea of Eurasia.[78] One of the most important elements in this process is a critical approach to canons and the idea of canonicity, whether literary or disciplinary.

As a critical practice for reading literature across cultural discourses, as well as institutional affiliations, Said's secular criticism finds an analogue in Bakhtin's work on the novel, which for Bakhtin is the genre that most embodies his vision of literary modernity. Whereas an engagement with

Said offers the opportunity to intervene in the Eurocentric focus of studies of empire through heterodox praxis, a discussion of Bakhtin's work similarly invites a critical assessment of appropriations of his understanding of heterology in the (post)colonial context. The intersection and complication of these discourses of imperial hegemony and anti-imperial heterodoxy, in the context of the fall of the Russian empire and formation of a Soviet literary modernity, present a compelling context for revising these theoretical frameworks.

Bakhtin's discussion of novelistic discourse outlines the ways in which heterogeneous linguistic histories or heteroglossia (*raznoiazychnost'*) inscribe diverse registers of speech or heterology (*raznorechivost'*) in literary discourse. Often conflated in English translation, these two terms clarify the relationship between intersecting linguistic histories and their animation in speech acts. For Bakhtin, literary or novelistic discourse is constituted through heterology—that is, *in* and *through* the diverse dialogic interactions among literary, cultural, and historical discourses, in which discourse (*slovo*), signifies not only a word but its authoritative function in language (1997–2012, 3:9–179).[79] Bakhtin's writings on novelistic discourse, influenced by his interest in Hegelian dialectics, crucially foreground a model of literary modernity predicated on intersubjective and heterogeneous speech acts. While novelistic discourse emerges from a textual world, at its foundations it envisions interactions between individual utterances and literary forms, as well as the space, time, and sociolinguistic codes that animate them.

While the relationship between the world and the text in Bakhtin's work, as well as Said's, is marked by the shift in the value of language as a primary category for determining knowledge, the relationship between language and meaning in Bakhtin's work is not entirely symbolic.[80] For Said, the text remains founded in the historical moments in which literature is produced and read.[81] For Bakhtin, literature generates exchanges between the speech acts of historically and materially constituted conscious subjects. In *Problems in Dostoevsky's Poetics* he writes that the idea is not fixed as an "individual psychological formation" but rather "the idea is inter-individual and inter-subjective—the realm of its existence [*bytie*] is not individual consciousness but dialogic communion [*obshchenie*] *between* consciousnesses" (1984, 88; 1997–2012, 6:99). In this sense, Bakhtin argues for a sociological rather than a psychological

theory of consciousness. The idea is a *live event*, played out at the point of dialogic meeting between two or several consciousnesses . . . Like the word, the idea wants to be heard, understood, and 'answered' by other voices from other positions." For Bakhtin the idea formulates the space-time of an interchange or encounter (*obshchenie*) between individual, conscious subjects. While Said highlights the "worldly" ideological function of literary discourse, Bakhtin develops its ontological dimension through the intersubjective event of being in language.

The parallel between Said and Bakhtin's work also renders legible the endemic relationship between semiotics and anthropology, the notion that cultural models can be understood *as if* they were forms of communication. Literature in this sense is a mode of authoring that organizes experience—that is, makes it intelligible. The Kantian symbolic relationship between the linguistic model and its production of meaning about culture retains a necessary critical distance from the empirical world while asserting its claims to practicality. However, in the context of a discussion of the real violence of the colonial encounter, this disengagement from the political world is rarely possible and presents a problematic ethical relationship between the critic and the literary object. This is perhaps why Said emphasizes his methodological ties both to a Foucauldian model of discourse that exposes relations of power embedded in forms of knowledge about the Orient and an intertextual system of writers and works that generate a collective representation of the orient. The tension between Foucauldian discourse and intertextuality accounts for Said's description of the Orient as both a real and imagined place. Bakhtin's dialogism instead describes these relations of power, not only as institutions that produce knowledge or a set of texts that generate a collective consciousness through repetition but through the sociopolitical function of language. Foucault's conception of discourse relies on a critical approach to the epistemological foundations of the culture, whereas Bakhtin understands discourse through the social life and creative power of the word. Indeed, this very notion of creativity is in part indebted to a line of German romantic thought, as well as the aforementioned German and Russian engagements with evolutionary biology.

The creative vitality of discourse in Bakhtin's work is rooted in many sources including his interest in Russian Orthodoxy, German romanticism, and the avant-garde art of his day.[82] In turn, the aesthetics of the

avant-garde, which Bakhtin would have encountered during his youth spent in Petrograd and Vitebsk between 1917 and 1923, also left a mark on his theories of the literary language.[83] These influences surface in Bakhtin's references to popular avant-garde topoi such as the unstable play among the positions of the author, character, and reader that characterize the carnival environment. While Bakhtin discusses these concepts in the context of a historical study of Rabelais, his theory of the *carnivalesque* can be read as a critique of the verticality of Soviet power under Stalinism through its allusions to the Commedia dell'arte, a popular theme within the avant-garde (1997–2012, 4:11–506).[84] Bakhtin's appreciation of the vitality of the word thus hinges on his location within the intellectual history of the early twentieth-century Russian empire as it marks his belated interests in the avant-garde.

Bakhtin's interpreters in Euro-American academia have often read him as a semiotician *avant la lettre*, emphasizing the centrality of intertextuality, as both a collection of texts and their attendant linguistic systems, to his model of novelistic discourse.[85] However, for Bakhtin the text does not represent but *is* an intersubjective event implicitly connected to the truth value of speaking consciousnesses.[86] In this way, his work shares close ties with historical poetics and in particular the work of Alexander Veselovsky. One of the central concepts in Veselovsky's work is *perezhivanie*, which as Boris Maslov describes, carries both the ethnographic sense of survival and the more common connotation of experience: that is, it describes a historically rooted experience that recycles or perpetuates cultural forms (2016, 63).

As a counterpoint to the Eurocentrism of this historical approach to poetics, the Azeri poet Abbas Sehhet introduces his vision of poetic empathy, which I discuss in detail in chapter 2. For Sehhet, the author must submit to his or her feelings in order "to make the word touch the heart of the reader and awaken feeling in another's heart" (2005, 243–45). In this sense, the affective power of literature is shared between author and reader through the historical experiences embedded in the text. For Sehhet, like Bakhtin and Veselovsky, sentiment invigorates the immediacy of the past in the present act of reading. However, for Sehhet this process is connected to the goal of generating a new poetic tradition through, in part, the translation and transformation of a Russian romantic imaginary of the Caucasus according to an aesthetics of empathy. One of the images

central to Sehhet's reading is his analogy between writing and a sunset. For Sehhet crucially the moment of creativity in the poetic word is not only inspired by nature but "reveals itself in every particle." He continues describing the passage from day to night: "We (the author) elaborate on our feelings and our dream-thoughts while watching this scene" in order to "awaken another's heart-feeling." Indeed, experience is importantly exemplified for Sehhet in the romantic transient effects of nature: steam rising, sunset, moonrise, and dusk. The natural environment, poised on the threshold of transition, animates the process of empathy and exchange among author, reader, and text.

Bakhtin also identifies the social or active quality of language in the spatial figure of the threshold. The concept of the threshold, although located in the marginalia of *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, provides a useful model for understanding his dynamic framing of a relational ontology between the individual and the social. In this way, it can be applied to interactions between literary discourse and the social world, as well as between the literary text and the world of the critic. Bakhtin situates a crisis in consciousness in Dostoevsky's work along the discursive fault line of the threshold. The threshold is a *chronotope*, or as Bakhtin notes, the "image [*obraz*] of man in literature" (1981, 84–85; 1997–2012, 3:342). As a defining feature of genre, the chronotope is an important figure for Bakhtin because it brings the historical world, individual consciousness, and the master codes embedded in language into contact. It is the site where the historical traces of multiple languages (heteroglossia) and diverse registers of speech (heterology) are revealed. Bakhtin describes the threshold chronotope in particular as an intersubjective space of dialogization, "the *boundary* [*granitsa*] between one's own and someone else's consciousness, on the *threshold* [*porog*]" where "everything internal gravitates not toward itself but is turned to the outside and dialogized, every internal experience ends up on the boundary, encounters another, and in this tension-filled encounter lies its entire essence" (1984, 287; 1997–2012, 5:345).[87] The threshold chronotope thus describes the points of contact between individual and social codes in language, which are rendered more visible by the ruptures in consciousness exposed in the intercultural colonial encounter.[88]

One of the inaugural applications of Bakhtin's work to postcolonial theory is Homi Bhabha's discussion of intersubjectivity in *The Location*

of Culture (1994). Engaging with elements from Bakhtin's work collected in *Speech Genres & Other Late Essays* (1986), he frames nations and cultures as narrative constructions, which emerge from hybrid national and cultural constituencies. In so doing, Bhabha inverts Bakhtin's model, applying an analysis of narrative to culture, rather than applying cultural interactions to the literary text. His specific engagement with Bakhtin focuses on the latter's "attempt to individuate social agency as the after-effect of the intersubjective" (1994, 269). However, Bhabha's location of agency in the after-effect of the intersubjective is premised on his contention that the site of enunciation and enunciative modality are displaced from the intersubjective encounter and thus are unable to individuate and localize the utterance (1994, 270). Notably Bhabha reads Bakhtin's discussion of the chain of communication as a metaphor. In this way, his reading renders Bakhtinian intersubjectivity as a symbolic dialogism that locates culture beyond the text. Contemporaneity, however, is crucial for Bakhtin (as for Sehhet), and I instead insist that the model of the threshold provides both a site and modality for the enunciation of the subject. Bakhtin exposes the synchronized diachrony of the event by drawing on a verbal play between the word for "event" (*sobytie*), and its root meaning "co-being" (*so-byt'e*). The concept of authorship is central to Bakhtin's phenomenology of aesthetic experience, in which the independent position of the author as both conditional to but also outside of the character's consciousness constitutes the sense of verisimilitude in the novel. Dostoevsky's characters, Bakhtin writes are "*free* people, capable of standing *alongside* their creator, capable of not agreeing with him and even of rebelling against him" and "combine but are not merged with the unity of the event [*sobytie*]" because they are "*not only objects of authorial discourse but also subjects of their own directly signifying discourse*" (1984, 6–7; 1997–2012, 6:10). For Bakhtin these cultural exchanges are not transcribed as a narrative but acquire a livelihood and agency within the narrative. They are capable of rebelling against their author and of becoming the signifying subjects of their own discourse. In this way, their agency is constituted *in* and *through* the threshold time-space of the textual event.

One modality through which this vision of the literary event manifests is in the act of translation. In an analysis of translation in colonial Egypt, *Disarming Words: Empire and the Seductions of Translation in Egypt*, Shaden Tageldin adopts the model of what she terms "translational seduction"

as "a semiotic and intersubjective strategy of displacement, a mastery of diverted (thus diverting) appearances" (2011, 11). Tageldin outlines three forms of translation as interlingual, intercultural—or the "transaction of epistemic 'equivalence' in economies of cultural exchange"—and intersubjective—or "the translation of one's self to resemble an Other's" (2011, 13). The model of translation, Tageldin argues, fills the lacuna left by Said's incomplete model of contrapuntal reading by describing how subjects negotiate the terms of their transformation. In this way, Tageldin, who also engages directly with Bakhtin's theory of novelistic discourse, compellingly renders the subject's agency to negotiate its own terms.

Like Tageldin's translational seduction, reading on the threshold renders legible the freedom of the literary subject to develop its own signifying discourse. In this way, the threshold is not a hybrid space, if as Bhabha posits, hybridity is understood in opposition to Western history's claims to the "holism of culture and community" (1994, 142). Rather, the threshold is a site in which the subject engages in the dynamic event of dialogue by placing into question the orientalist fantasy of Eurasian cultural unity. The threshold thus not only reveals the ways in which Bakhtin's novelistic discourse is tied to the intellectual history of structuralist linguistics, but also how these intersecting Eurasian imaginaries can render legible forms of literary modernity as central to both imperial and anti-imperial politics across the Russian and Turkic Muslim linguistic and cultural divide. The emergence of porous boundaries among political, linguistic, and cultural epistemologies activates the modalities of intercultural exchange at the heart of translation theory. However, while translations compose a significant portion of the corpus of texts produced in the Caucasus and account for their multilinguality, the heterodox praxis of reading on the threshold describes an intersubjective event. In so doing, it challenges political, linguistic, cultural, and disciplinary borders to expose the representation of a modernist Eurasian imaginary.

While this book opens with a discussion of the diversity of languages, speech, and doxa—that is, the heterodoxy and heterology of the cultural space of the South Caucasus—it concludes with a vision of the foreclosure of these potentialities through the crystallization of Soviet colonial power during the mid-1920s. The first section contests the doxa that cemented a singular idea of the Caucasus and its attendant Eurasian imperial politics. The second section, in turn, chronicles the gradual disappearance

of heterological networks that connected the Russian, Persian, and Ottoman empires with the creation of new forms of Bolshevik national consciousness. However, a linear historical narrative of the transformation of a culturally heterogeneous Russian empire into a monolithic Soviet empire would be a considerable oversimplification of the revolutionary transition. Indeed, during the 1930s, forms of performance such as the theater and the ballad tradition of *mugham*—or sung dialogues on various themes—blended Azeri, Russian, and a new Bolshevik jargon, generating networks of intertwining meanings and diverse registers of speech while challenging doxic conventions in both musical and poetic genres.

The chronological organization of this book instead presents the development of an orientalist vision of a revolutionary Caucasus from 1905 through 1929 as both a Eurasian imaginary and a real public space that shaped the aesthetics and politics of literary production in the Azerbaijani Soviet republic and in the Soviet Union more broadly. It also exposes the imperial politics and forms of anticolonial subjectivity that generated the poetics of the Eurasian threshold. The shifting conception of a Muslim Turkic identity during the revolutionary period, in turn, illustrates the role of materialist aesthetics and Marxist-Leninist anti-imperialism in the formation of a supranational Turkic Muslim identity, albeit one quickly succeeded by Azerbaijani Soviet nationalism.

The contemporary political resonances of these orientalist discourses and the forms of anti-imperial resistance that developed alongside them shed light on the nationalist reactions of Putin's new Russia and his so-called neoimperial expansion. While scholars such as Marlène Laruelle have traced the resurgence of the intellectual currents of Eurasianism in the 1990s post-Soviet moment from Alexander Dugin's neonationalist Eurasianism in Russia to pan-Turkic Eurasianist movements in Tatarstan and Kazakhstan, this book argues that the intertextual encounters between Turkic Muslim and Russian writers during the revolutionary transition a century earlier shaped the resurgent forms of national identity that have since developed during the post-Soviet period (Laruelle 2012, 145–88). This is not to say, however, that Putin's campaigns replicated either a neotsarist or Soviet multinational state, but rather that they can be more critically envisioned as a response to the Eurasian imaginary as a cultural evolutionist project that took shape on the imperial-revolutionary threshold. At once a study in poetics and geopolitics, *On the Threshold*

of Eurasia seeks to destabilize a singular vision of Russia's empire as the product of an anxiety about European modernity. It instead examines the interactions between the work of Russians and Turkic Muslim writers as they envisioned the Eurasian imaginary on the imperial periphery and its stakes in the formation of new cultural, artistic, and political forms of life.

Although this book is centered on the particular history of the development of an aesthetic and political project in the Caucasus during the revolutionary period, its implications on the relationship between (post) coloniality and the construction of forms of literary modernity beyond the secular, capitalist West find resonances in work on global modernisms. Additionally, it offers a corrective to the reductive center-periphery binary by thinking through the ways in which Eurasia not only served as Europe's Other, but was reimagined through writings across radically disparate linguistic, cultural, and disciplinary conventions. In so doing, this book offers an alternative reading of literary modernity, which did not mimic the aesthetics of the German/Russian avant-garde or Anglo-French orientalism but in engaging in dialogue with a supranational vision of Persian-Ottoman poetics, Islamic thought, and an internationalist Marxist-Leninist aesthetics generated a new language and shape for poetry. While at once radically local, this story also offers a theoretical model for thinking through a new type of comparative historical poetics, which critically engages with the orientalist vision of Eurasian totality by opening up a hidden archive of intertextual encounters on the threshold of the Eurasian empire.