

## 8. Conclusion

The main goal of this dissertation was to demonstrate that how the Soviet Union was depicted by Western scholars during the 1950's was a Western representation that emerged within a discursive formation which I have named *sovietologism*. In other words, the goal of this dissertation was to show that descriptions about the Soviet Union had more to do with the "lenses" scholars wore, than with a "real object" they "saw." By "lenses" I mean discourses, because, as the reader will recall, I based my analysis on a power-as-productive ontology that conceives of discourses as producers of subjectivities. From this perspective, there is subject *per se*, but only subject conditions in discursive formations. An alternative way to conceive of subjectivities is based on the juridico-discursive representation of power, according to which subjects attain independent ontological status relative to other subjects and to the social practices that, in the power-as-productive figuration, constitute them. As the second chapter demonstrated, critical theorists usually accept the power-as-productive figuration when criticizing the reified subjectivities attached to the juridico-discursive mode of representation.

This mode of critical theorizing is exactly what I tried to deploy in this dissertation. I intended to destabilize the 1950's dominant description of the USSR as inferior, expansionist, contradictory, and immutable by showing how other discourses made the emergence of this description possible. Hence, the description was not based on an external reality, which is allegedly the ontological foundation of juridico-discursive representations of power, but was instead conditioned by the interplay of discursive formations of culture, the State, and personality conceived through the lens of the power-as-productive figuration. Because discourses are opaque and not transparent,

they are not founded on any external reality, but are the reality they portray. From this critical perspective, therefore, subjectivities assume a fluid, ever-changing character, that can seem fixed only through relations of power that reify the subject, rather than through any intrinsic properties of the reified subject. The critical treatment of the notions of culture, the State, and personality as discursive formations, and not as concepts reflecting an external reality, served to demonstrate the contingency of *sovietologism*. In fact, the USSR alluded to by the specialists was the result of interplay among the notions of culture, the State, and personality that borrowed from many areas of knowledge as well as from the power relations operating in the historical context from which it was born, i.e., the cold war. This discursive interplay and the Cold War *epistème* were the conditions of emergence that determined the contours of a subject depicted as inferior, expansionist, contradictory, and immutable.

I would like to conclude this dissertation with a reflection on how Russia was treated by the West after the end of the Cold War, specifically in the debates involving NATO's expansion in the 1990's. According to the official version, the alliance's expansion toward the East was justified because the promotion of market economies and liberal democracies in the region would increase the security of Europe as a whole. By delivering democracy and free market capitalism, the expansion sought to fulfill the "security vacuum" left after the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Eastern Europe. Against this official version, Haslam (1998) points out that Eastern European countries' fear of renewed Russian colonization is behind NATO's expansion. Indeed, McGwire (1998) assured his readers that the expansion was the result of Eastern European countries lobbying the American Congress, due to a perceived Russian threat to their security. Perlmutter & Carpenter (1998) suggest that expansion plans should take into consideration the costs that would be borne if the Russian threat turned real. In sum, according to these scholars, the alliance's expansion was meant to protect the West and its allies against Russia's likely rebirth (Smith, 2002).

Many analysts who study recent trends in contemporary Russian foreign policy share this perception. According to them, Russia's withdrawal

from the CFE, the new dispute to conquer the Arctic, the flights of spy planes close to territories controlled by the Alliance, and its assertiveness of power in relation to its near abroad confirm the appearance that Russia poses a threat and must be contained. Russia exploits international crises to weaken trust among Alliance members and to enhance its power relative to its former Cold War enemy (Kubicek, 1999). This is allegedly why Russia played the card of pan-slavism and tried to interfere in western management of the Balkan crisis (Bowker, 1998; Headley, 2003). It is also why Russia tried to foment discord between USA and its European allies, forging close ties with France and Germany in the period immediately before the Iraq invasion (Katz, 2005). Russia's new partnership with Central Asian countries — fearful as they are that “colored revolutions” sponsored by the White House could reach their territories — is also a sign of renewed Russian assertiveness (Herd, 2005). Following this rationale, today's Russia seems to increase international tension simply by defending the regional distribution of power under the aegis of multipolarity. Russia's strategic nuclear partnership with Iran and its selling of military material to Syria also reinforce this stereotype.

Meanwhile, Russia tries to present itself to the world in a different manner. After the end of USSR, President Boris Yeltsin and his minister of foreign affairs, Andrei Kozyrev, strove to assure the international society that Russia had a western lineage. All in all, Russia adopted human rights discourse, defended the advantages of multilateralism, and reassured members of the “global community” that free markets were needed to guarantee political freedom. The leaders even affirmed that the communist period was a gap in the Soviet countries' history of learning with the West.

Nonetheless, in spite of these efforts, Russia's conciliatory discourse was not recognized by the West. The state's lack of political will to solve Russia's economic problems and continuing worries about the country's military revival ensured that the self-image Russia was trying to sell about herself was not convincing. The consequent lack of support for Russia's leaders resulted in social animosity against the West. Neocommunists and ultranationalists, both political groups with clear anti-western platforms,

gained popular appeal. This fact forced Yeltsin to shift Russia's foreign policy. To maintain the support of Russia's constituents, the country's foreign policy in the near abroad became more assertive. This tendency was then reinforced by Yevgeny Primakov's replacement, in 1996, of Andrey Kosyrev, and has persisted in Russian foreign policy since then, even despite the short honeymoon between presidents Putin and Bush after September 11<sup>th</sup> (Arbatov, 1993; Lynch, 2001). Russia's confrontation with Georgia, in 2008, appears to only confirm this tendency.

These episodes in the recent history of Russia's engagement with the West invite several questions. First, it should be asked if the way western scholars represent Russia accords with Russia's realities. This question is appropriate, given that Russia tried to present itself in a different way but did not succeed. It is at least curious when social scientists describe their object in a certain way and the object accuses them of being wrong. This leads to another question: is it possible to assert some division between subject and object when western scholars describe Russia in a way that it does not accept? If the answer is affirmative, then one has to return to the first question. If it is not, then a third question arises. If there is no separation between subject and object, then how is it possible, if at all, to affirm that scholarly representations correspond to any "external" object, i.e., to what really is? Can one say that there is a Russia that exists regardless of scholarly references about it?

Based on this dissertation's analysis, my answers to these three questions are negative. My position follows from a theoretical sensibility that denies any attempt to apply claims of "truth of correspondence," separation between subject and object, and separation between fact and value, as criteria of validate knowledge production in international relations (see Neufeld, 1995; Smith et al., 1996). Following Foucault's remark, I do not believe that the world turns toward us a legible face that we have only to decipher (Foucault *apud* Shapiro, 1989, p. 11). The way we decipher the world is never detached from power relations that order that world. That is why Russia is not some entity apart from what scholars produce about it, and what scholars produce about Russia is never a value-free knowledge. To what

measure representations of today's Russia are a tributary of *sovietologism* is an exciting topic for future research.