The image of Persian women in Lomnitsky's travelogue *Persia and Persians*

ELAHEH KARIMI RIABI

DOI: 10.31577/WLS.2024.16.4.10

The image of Persian women in Lomnitsky's travelogue *Persia and Persians*

Imagology. Persian women. Russian travelogues. Russian Orientalism. Colonialism.

The article analyzes the portrayal of Persian women in the 19th-century literary travelogues using an imagological approach. The study aims to critically examine the colonial discourse employed by Stanislav Yulyevic Lomnitsky (1854–1916) in his 1901 travelogue, *Persia and Persians*, which establishes Persia and the Persians as the "other" in contrast to the Russian "self". Moreover, it delves into how Lomnitsky's work frames the East from the perspective of the West. By shedding light on these perspectives, the research provides a critical examination of Lomnitsky's colonial discourse within the context of Persia, offering insights into the interplay between cultures.

Elaheh Karimi Riabi
University of Teheran
Iran
ekarimi@ut.ac.ir
ORCID: 0000-0002-8366-0754

Travelogues are significant sources of knowledge about the culture, rituals, customs, geography, and climate of nations, countries, and civilizations. Although travelogues may contain valuable information, they are usually affected by the hegemon's viewpoints about the status of the concerned society, turning them into strategic tools for the purposeful study of that society. Travelogue images are formed and recorded by the following facts: life, social status, and ethical character of the author; the mental stereotype, which was formed about the destination country; the purpose of the trip; the purpose of recording images and writing a travelogue; cultural, social, political, and economic situation of the destination country; diplomatic relations between the origin and destination countries. Having that in mind, the study of the Western intrusion of Persia (known since 1934 as Iran) should be understood in line with their colonial ambitions.

Although the 19th century is marked by the rivalry of Western powers over winning the Persian kings and usurpation of their natural resources, Persia has never been formally colonized. This fact has led to the indirect intervention in the country as visitors, merchants, Orientalists, and spies, giving way to a plethora of travelogues on Persia. These accounts include topics as diverse as the climate, military, commerce, economic and cultural opportunities and challenges, and human and cultural geographic maps of different regions. Manfred Beller's entry for "East/West" in the book *Imagology* presents Persia as one of the cultural centers of the East, with images such as mosques, minarets, fountains, camels, desert dwellers, and harems (Beller and Leerssen 2007, 317). The entry for "Iran" by Natalia Tornesello further adds that in the Islamic world, the Persians have evidenced a national identity more than others (Beller and Leerssen 2007, 189). Travelogues carry a general message about the colonies that label them with backward, primitive, feudal, and pre-industrial badges. The colonized is characterized by passivity rather than agency, the East is framed within a Western perspective and the resulting generalization leaves the colonized bereft of human dignity.

In the middle of the 19th century, Persia became an arena for the clash of economic and political interests of Russia and England. One notable travelogue is Stanislav Yulyevic Lomnitsky's book *Персия и персы* ([Persiia i persy] Persia and Persians, 1901), containing sketches of everything that he saw in a colorful narrative, allowing one to see aspects of the daily life of the country, which are usually closed to the eyes of the "Ferengi" (Christian, European, Westerner). Lomnitsky (1854–1916) nicknamed Rejep (from the Arabic given name Rajab), was a law graduate and a journalist. His book was a kind of response to Lord Curzon's work *Persia and the Persian Question*, published in 1892 in London. Along with general information about the history and the customs of the country, it asserts the priority of Russian policy in the region as opposed to the policy of England. At the time the Russian-British rivalry over the Persian natural resources was really strong and Lomnitsky reflects on the issue (1901, 208, 210, 211, 235). In the introduction he elucidates that: "In all its proximity, Persia is for us a *Terra Incognita*. The fact made me publish it" (3).[1]

The primary focus of this article lies in scrutinizing Lomnitsky's representation of Persian women, specifically examining instances where colonial discursive themes

emerge. By analyzing the discursive nodes embedded within Lomnitsky's portrayal, it aims to provide a deeper understanding of the colonial dynamics. Representation of cultural relations inherently involves cultural confrontation, as the author's own cultural values and presuppositions inevitably influence their portrayal. This introduces subjectivity, blurring the line between a true "image" and objective information. Cultural differences play a significant role in shaping perceptions, often leading to a flawed understanding of a nation's divergence from the rest of the world based on cultural and local variables (see Beller and Leerssen 2007, 3–32). In Lomnitsky's work, cultural differences may explain his portrayal. However, it should be acknowledged that this portrayal may perpetuate a misconception of total difference between nations.

RUSSIAN ORIENTALISM

Edward Said's exploration of Orientalism reveals it to be more than a mere geographical categorization of the world into two disparate halves – the Orient and the Occident. It encompasses a complex web of "interests" that are pursued through various methods such as scholarly discoveries, philological reconstructions, psychological analyses, and sociological and landscape descriptions (1978, 20). This comprehensive framework not only creates a hierarchical division but also serves as a vehicle for the construction of cultural narratives. It shapes his critical insights into the construction and perpetuation of cultural biases inherent in Orientalist discourses.[2]

In the second half of the 19th century, the struggle for influence in the Middle East between the European powers intensified dramatically. In the words of Denis Volkov:

> Having been defeated by Russia in the wars of 1804–13 and 1826–28 and, due to further developments in its domestic political and economic life, by the end of the century, Persia had ceased to be any military threat whatsoever to its "big northern neighbor" and had turned into an arena of diplomatic rivalry, mainly between Russia and Great Britain. This very rivalry, solidly based on two differently nuanced senses of the superiority of the two powers towards the object of the contest, shaped the nature of Russian–Persian relations during the latter part of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. (2018, 59)

In 1897, the Russian War Minister Kuropatkin advised Tsar Nikolas II against the annexation of new territories in Persia and suggested, instead, to pressure Persia to equally cut the hands of other Western forces off its territories and resources (Volkov 2018, 60). Therefore, the Russians started sending delegates to sketch a map of Persia's major resources. The northern parts of Persia were prioritized due to their borderline location and geographic proximity to Russia. This way, the Russian Persian policy began to be gradually shaped by the Russian version of Orientalism known as "Persian studies" and the early delegates became the original sources of the field.

Volkov notes that by the late 19th/early 20th century Russian Oriental studies had evolved into a rather developed multi-branched system for the production of scholarly knowledge on the Orient. It comprised manifold Orientological scholarly (research-oriented) and academic (teaching-oriented) institutions as well as re-

lated structures in the Russian military and diplomatic services, and even within the Russian Orthodox Church. All of them were deeply intertwined in terms of both administrative organization and the content and forms of the activities they carried out (57).[3]

The Russian Cause (*Russkoe delo*) is the idea of "civilizing" the Orientals and promoting the Russian competition with the rest of European forces over access to the resources and geographic regions in Persia. The idea is reflected in almost all accounts of Russian diplomats, military officers, and practitioners, books and official correspondences, and the existing literature and Oriental studies programs.

If Edward Said's work is not wholly relevant to Russian Orientalism, it does raise some important questions about the relationships between knowledge and power (Schimmelpenninck van der Oye 2010, 19). Regarding Russian exceptionalism, Stephanie Cronin argues that the Russian empire is distinct from the other European powers in their scholarly reflections of colonialism. She points out that the tsarists turned into the major figures of Oriental studies, while the Orientalists, in turn, were employed in Central Asia and the Caucasus administrative bodies as well as in the Russian foreign ministry. Another point that Cronin mentions is that key figures of imperial Russian Orientalism were themselves not European but Oriental, like the Iranian-born Mirza Alexander Kazem-Bek (2015, 650). Of course, in the end, from his point of view, many imperial Russian Orientologists appear to conform neatly to Said's paradigm, and even perhaps to illustrate its central tenets more perfectly than their Anglo-French progenitors (652).

In her book *Russia and Iran in the Great Game*, Elena Andreeva, while pointing out the Russians' efforts to dominate the East through Russian Orientalism, asserts that Russian Orientalism differs from the familiar Western Orientalism in its intertwining with a specific Russian identity, forming a blend of Western and Eastern elements. This dual identity has numerous consequences, one of which is a profound feeling of inferiority. This trait is particularly evident in Iran-Russia relations because Russians, when interacting with Iran, define it as their "other" while simultaneously competing with the British, who see themselves as the true embodiment of the Western European "self". Russians have always tried to conceal this feeling of inferiority (2007, 144, 145).

Susan Layton carefully weighs the contradictory ideologies competing to contextualize Russia's interactions with the Muslim mountain peoples. On one hand, the state was promoting a view of a European mission to civilize these tribes, positioning themselves as bringers of progress. On the other hand, romantic perceptions of these same tribes emerged through noble primitives whose extermination was viewed with unease. Layton highlights how such narratives of chivalric and gallant Russians who saved the womenfolk from their home "barbarism" legitimized the Russian expansion. However, the way this was instituted in literature set a deep division along lines of gender: if men here were constructed as barbarians, then women were built as helpless victims that needed to be rescued. This stark binary, as Layton points out, served to reinforce the colonial narrative of legitimation for the Tsarist conquest (2009, 166).

IS RUSSIA EUROPE OR NOT?

After the decline of the medieval realm of Rus', around Kiev, in the 13th century, Russia emerged onto the European political scene, and into the European imagination (Beller and Leerssen 2007, 226). While already a major European power by the 18th century, the Russian political system was rather different from the rest of Europe – which were modern nation-states with constitutional politics. Besides, Russia's sizeable territory was considered an alarming threat to most European countries. Europeans often viewed Russia as uncivilized and backward, its vast territory and distinctive political system, a far cry from the constitutional monarchies of Western Europe.

The late 18th century is the period when a new understanding of the West's self-definition and its alleged racial superiority emerged, crystallizing in the mid-19th century. This shifted the approach toward "internal Orientals" such as Eastern Europe, who, though highly lacking in civilizational elements, were considered superior to people of the East, for example in Asia. Zhand Shakibi points out that the belief in the innate differences in temperament and abilities based on race of different human groups assisted greatly in the development of Orientalism and colonialism. This racial explanation was quite attractive to the Romanov government and Russia since they had claimed a racial affinity with the West (2018, 46).

In the second half of the 19th century, two major groups represented Russian politics. Some among the Western commentators held that in order to progress, Russia needed to either follow the European constitutional and parliamentary model in favor of forming a republic, or to develop into an industrial nation-state under monarchy. The Slavophiles, on the other hand, defended the Russian exceptionalism by maintaining autocracy, the Orthodox Church, and the empire system – rather than the nation-state – as the distinctive features that distinguished the Russian politics and society from the rest of Europe.

It is noteworthy that the concept of Eastern Europe as a separate and unique region was actually a construction of Western European powers during the 18th and 19th centuries. Larry Wolff traces the origins of this concept to the Enlightenment period when Western European intellectuals and travelers began to view Eastern European countries as "backward" and "barbaric" in comparison to their own societies. This perception was further reinforced by the rise of nationalism in the 19th century, where Eastern Europe became a symbol of the "other" and a threat to Western European identity (1994, 32).

As Mary Roberts states, since the Enlightenment, Russia has persistently been positioned as Western Europe's East while elite Russian culture often defined itself as European in contradistinction to its Eastern neighbors, and the Russian imperial imaginary sustained self-defining differences between a Western center and Eastern periphery of the Empire (2023, 253). This issue is also reflected in Russian literature. For example, Petr Chaadaev writes: "We are neither of the West nor the East and we possess the traditions of neither" (quoted in Taroutina and Leigh 2023, 14). According to Fyodor Dostoevsky: "In Europe we were hangers-on and slaves, whereas we shall go to Asia as masters. In Europe we were Asiatics, whereas in Asia we, too, are European. Our civilizing mission in Asia will bribe our spirit and drive us thither"

(quoted in Taroutina and Leigh, 2023, 94). Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz states that, "Russia's destiny is to become the link that joins two worlds, the western and the eastern" (quoted in Schimmelpenninck van der Oye 2010, 31).

The Russian understanding of national identity, coming as it did from Western-oriented narratives and imagery, has determined in many ways its relationship with the West. As such, this element has been a strong determinant of Russia's behavior toward Iran. The self-understanding of Russia as a great Christian power and a world empire has essentially molded its approach to national identity, and then to the world – specifically, to Iran. It is in this framework that one can assess how Lomnitsky attempted in his work to convince the readers that Russians are indeed Europeans: "The house of Mr. Panyanets is truly a hospitable shelter for all Europeans, especially for Russians" (1901, 352). This excessive emphasis on being European, together with an orientation toward European standards, served as a means for hiding inferiority complexes.

Until the end of the 19th century, Iran had not been widely explored by Russian geologists from the point of view of mining, a niche that was rapidly occupied by German and British entrepreneurs. In September 1898, Lomnitsky visited Persia as the representative of the Russian government and the mining association A. M. Goryainov and F. E. Yenakiev for the purpose of negotiations on the extraction of ores. With the assistance of the Russian government, Goryainov and Yenakiev were granted a concession by the Persian government for the exploration and operation of mines in the Azerbaijan province of Iran. The activity of the partnership consisted of the acquisition for the purpose of selling all mines, as well as applications for deposits in the concession area. Lomitsky examined the little-known mountain route from Tehran to Babolsar in north Persia and to the Gaz trading post, and according to Russian sources, he also prepared geological surveys in the region. Seemingly the reason why Andreeva (2007, 56) introduces him as an engineer.

THE DICHOTOMY OF WESTERN/EASTERN WOMEN

The central theme of Lomnitsky's book is the dichotomy between the East and Europe. The Russian author considers himself a European in the East without making a distinction between Western and Eastern Europe. In several parts of his book, he indicates that Russia is part of Europe by descriptions and comparisons that reproduce the dichotomy. According to Lomnitsky, Persia is positioned as an Eastern country within the framework of Orientalism, thereby reinforcing various Eastern stereotypes.

The dichotomy leads to prejudice as the author's first description of a Persian woman attests: in the early pages of the third chapter, the initial mention of the word "women" is observed: "Walking through the regions and observing scenes of people's lives, the idea developed in me that the eastern women are very shy" (1901, 30). He observes a group of women who are busy weeding the crops in the farms while "The presence of foreign passerby or native non-Muslims does not disturb them" (30). As they go their way and approach the route that the Russian convoy normally takes, "They bid farewell with their curious stares, laughing and prancing in their

pleated, embellished clothes" (30). The final statement does not suggest a sign of shyness as women are going ahead with their normal activities. Meanwhile, the East-West dichotomy and the generalization of the East to Persia reproduce the imagery. As mentioned, although this is the seemingly the first encounter with women in Lomnitsky's account, his stereotypical imagination toward the East leads him to the cliché of the "eastern woman" and by extension, the "shy Persian woman"; thus, in this section, the one-way perspective of subject to object is quite prominent. In Andreeva's opinion, however, this author "does not always stereotype Iranians" unlike typical Russian visitors (2007, 124). Matvei Gamazov (1812–1893) states that there is a lack of feminine delicacy among Muslim women (1857, 19). According to Susan Layton, the Islamic East monopolized a contemptible traffic in human beings and the treatment of women in particular as marketable property (2009, 172).

Another characteristic of the book is generalizations that normally lead to clichés about Persia within the conceptual framework of the "East". In describing his residence in a village near the city of Rasht, he points to the absence of furniture in the place and adds: "A proverb says you cannot find furniture and women in an eastern guestroom" (Lomnitsky 1901, 33). In a similar move, Lomnitsky states: "I was once talking to an intellectual Muslim about the harsh lives of eastern women. He protested, saying that is not the case as there is no place for brothels and prostitution in Islam" (103–104). He then adds his own comment:

> Apart from the Quran, the eastern system of habits, images, and traditions, particularly the Quranic interpretations by certain clergies downgrade women in society. It is so severe that if a man sees his wife in the street, he hesitates to talk to her. Talking to one's womenfolk in streets is shunned and it is rooted in the belief that women are low, impure, and disgusting creatures with whom you would better keep all relationship clandestine. (105)

In another comment, Lomnitsky remarks:

> Overall, the eastern women are wary of the tradition that obligates them to cover their faces. In no area in the East, in streets or other public places, one can spot a man with his wife, a brother with his sister, or a father with his daughter. It happens that they even pretend to be strangers. And it is not common for strangers to meet in public especially if one side is a lady. (108)

In another part, he elaborates on the physical beauty of Persian women by pointing out that they do not rely on blushes for beautification: "Yet, 90 percent of the eastern could fare without cosmetics" (115). The generalization of the prejudice peaks here:

> Male lust, domestic solitude, unemployment, and eastern temperament in most cases force women to unbelievable behaviors that are shameful to describe. It seems that nymphomania does not take victims anywhere as in the East. Besides, this numbness and inert life of Persian women entails illnesses that begin with obesity. (117)

The author's prejudice extends beyond women to encompass girls and children as victims, as evidenced by the statement, "Children and especially girls are known for early puberty in the East" (172).

He resonates with the myth of Eastern indolence: "Laziness in the Orient cannot be judged from our point of view; it is a traditional phenomenon, caused by the climate, the abundance of natural resources, and many circumstances of the social order" (118). One of the most obvious sources of the topic, *The Myth of the Lazy Native*, is written by Hussein Al-Attas (1977). The author confronted the question of why the natives of Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines were for centuries being described as "lazy" by the ruling colonizer. He took neither the behavior of the natives, nor the attempts at justifying tyranny, as the reason for this allegation. Instead, he concludes that the assumption reflects the prejudices of the West and has been part of a political project. In Al-Attas's own account, his book is "an attempt at correcting the unilateral view of the colonizer toward the native Asian and his society" that tries to illustrate how the image of the "lazy, boring, backward, dishonest native" gave the colonizer the prerogative to define them as dependent beings in need of intervention for betterment. The application of the concept of "myth" for the indolence allegations of the Eastern people assists Al-Attas in explaining its constructivist nature and showing how it is constructed by the ruling mechanisms of the colonizer, rather than reflecting the objective realities in the field.

The application of "climatological" clichés based on the climate zone theory would also be useful in understanding the theme of the lazy native. This theory "attributes variations between human societies to climate differences (alongside climatologically-influenced factors such as properties of the soil and nutrition), both with regard to people's physical stature, skin color, and vitality and with regard to their practical and spiritual abilities and their personal characteristics" (Beller and Leerssen 2007, 298).

The opposition between North and South is largely determined by the climatological arguments (which are also activated in Orientalist discourse); the opposition between West and East reflects historical events and political and religious cleavages. Its mythical character is demonstrated, however, by the mobility of the imputation of "Easternness". The idea of despotic empires or cruel hordes threatening true civilization from the East can be applied in widely different contexts (317).

The western travelogues of the East are fraught with similar descriptions, such as the following one of the spring climate: "The odor of almond and olive buds fills the air… No wonder why they say women go crazy in the season of almond and olive flowers" (Lomnitsky 1901, 135). It connects the beautiful fragrance of almond and olive blossoms with the stereotype that Eastern women cannot restrain themselves during this time. This kind of linking of natural beauty to supposed feminine instability is typical of the orientalist intention of exoticizing and misrepresenting the cultures of the East. It is important to realize how these innocent-sounding descriptions add to a problem in understanding the East, framing the Eastern woman as eternally passionate and volatile, thereby reinforcing old prejudices.

In Chapter 5 of his book, entitled "Women's Status in Persia", Lomnitsky refers to the Quranic verse on the obligation of hijab, and proceeds to posit the Muslim/Arab woman against the European woman (while there is no mention of the Persian or eastern woman in these accounts, the conceptual framework implies them):

> Nonetheless, the Quran stands against the fundamental European thought system, especially when it comes to the question of how a European woman who is used to freedom could conform to the slave-like condition with three to four co-wives in a harem of a dirty, careless, bad-looking husband? […] most of our women caught up in the Persian harem come from a humble background. They get corrupt there and once released, turn into harlots. (88)

In parts of the book, the author departs from the dichotomy between the East and Europe to highlight the resemblances: "It should be noted that prostitution is there in Persia, although clandestinely. […] There are also brothels not always available to Europeans. […] The evenings of some streets resemble those of boulevards of Paris or Nevsky Prospect" (104). Instead of generalizations, here the author takes advantage of unification to compare Persia to Europe or Russia.

He points to two differences too, the first in dress, addressing the antagonism of the clergy and most traditionalists to women's education: "Nonetheless, a woman who has the least of knowledge does not waste her time and will not wear the revealing clothes that women in our European culture do" (112). The second difference is in marriage: "There is no spinster among the Muslim women. Also, they are alien to mean European concepts of mésalliance, illegal cohabitation, and illegal childbirth" (104–105).

ORDINARY AND NOBLE WOMEN

Most descriptions of women in the book refer to ordinary women. The author's two-year travel to the northern parts and the capital city of Persia gave him the chance to visit women from various ethnicities and backgrounds. Most of the images he presents of the Persian women point to their physical beauty. The discourse of Orientalism is not monolithic, and in Lomnitsky's writings, Iranian women are not presented as the "other" or inferior to European women. For example, he describes their beauty in this way: "The tawny skin of Persian women brings them a special beauty that finds a humorous, delicate paradox under cosmetics. […] Overall, the face of the Persian woman is pretty and intricate" (115). In his opinion, this beauty becomes more elegant in mountain areas as people there have not intermingled with other ethnicities and have preserved their originality.

Lomnitsky praises the beauty of Iranian women because their originality reminds him of the ancient Egyptian images:

> In remote villages of Damavand highlands, you see acient Egyptian women whose faces are engraved on vases. […] I believe that the original beauty exclusive to the Iranian woman could best be described this way. These women are of a natural attraction and absorb not only the ordinary man but also even the typical sculptor. Enough to say that mostly they have big, black and slanted eyes, thick brows, long, soft hair, and small mouths in tiny, oval-shaped faces. (115)

In comparing the beauty of Iranian women to that of ancient Egyptian women, the author attempts to bridge the gap between the "self" and the "other". The Iranian women are beautiful because they are in possession of Egyptian beauty.

The image of women's bodies from all nomad groups "are very similar to delicate brass sculptures" (116). Along the eastern hillside of Damavand, by a river, he is attracted by a young woman and describes her face:

> I stare at this attractive face with its delicate, oval shape with an ambiguous sense of satisfaction. Her eyes are big, slanted, and happy. Meanwhile, under the long eyelashes that bend upwards, she looks at me. The small lips and long nose that seem to move with every smile, and the natural, thin brows that sluggishly move upward are cherishable. (350)

To the author who is absorbed by the woman, every feature of her face and body is alluring: "Her light, charming voice, her tall body, and her balanced happiness. You think her body is made of bronze" (269). The conversation with the fair eastern woman reminds the author of a poem by Nikolay Nekrasov (269). After the woman leaves, Lomnitsky notices that he is in chilly water to his ankles. In his view, the only exceptions are women in Gilan and Mazandaran: "Women of Gilan and Mazandaran are not beautiful the way women in central and southern parts are. Here, women look like Greeks and Italians" (359).

It seems that the age of women has impacted the author's evaluation: "The sight of women sitting four-angled by the hookah with a long piece of wood in their mouths is not very pleasant" (40). Somewhere else we read: "Women have eccentric faces. When sitting, all Persian women look like an upside-down horseradish" (139). As if the older, the uglier: "Among the ten women, two were younger. […] The other women with their wrinkled faces and hanging noses looked like ghosts who are installed on mountains to freak humans" (316).

In some of these images, the cultural "other" is depicted. These are personal descriptions of women with whom he has had more interactions for various reasons (such as his host). "The wife of our hostler, like other Mazandarani women, did not wear a mask and I had the chance to see her kind, attractive face. A neat woman with a large skirt that was not enough to cover all her body, and indeed her small, feminine feet" (350).

In what follows, we go through the image of a Persian women's clothes. The clothes of the Iranian women outside the house is very different from that at home, due to the Islamic rule of hijab: "Upon exiting the house, the Iranian woman wears a bad-looking chador – for the rich, silk and for the poor, woolen – complemented in ugliness with very loose trousers, long socks, and a white cotton mask" (111). It is noteworthy that the clothes have been shared by women from all classes. The author confesses that the image does not attract him. However, Persian women have another reaction: "Large groups of women in thin, domestic chadors and smiling faces are weeding… laughing and prancing in their pleated, embellished clothes" (30). Women don hijab even in prayer: "They worship like men except they cover their heads and faces" (1901, 64). It is noteworthy again that, unlike the author's description, the face of the Muslim woman is not covered in prayer.

Ordinary women's clothes vary in different regions: "The women of nomad tribes do not cover their faces and enjoy more freedom. Their family position is much better than urban women" (116); "Women of mountain tribes usually wear white chadors

and no veils" (316). In Mazandaran, "Women villagers rarely use veils. Like mountain women, they mostly cover part of their faces with their headscarves" (350).

From the viewpoint of the author, the domestic clothes of the Persian woman, particularly rural and poorer ones, are strange: "The clothes of farmer women and generally the poor Persian women astonish the observer: using long, stretch socks by them is unfathomable. The rest of their clothes are limited to a shirt and a bust. The shirt is as small as the bust, covering only to the edges of the skirt" (112). However, he clarifies that this is so only to the European visitor's eye: "So, the movements of the Persian woman look risky to the European's eye as the upper body clothes are of a kind that they move up much with every movement" (112).

The author's familiarity with the internal condition of Persia and his knowledge of its social affairs allows him to provide a more complete image of Persian women's clothes in the 19th century. He explains that Persian women have not always been obliged to cover their faces as in different eras, their clothes have had variations:

> The old clothes of women were not much different from that of European women. In old Persian paintings, women are seen in long, beautiful clothes with not very open necks. Based on these pictures, one can validate that the tradition of covering the face and wearing a chador is not a very old one. The clergymen have recently protested the modern clothes. (Lomnitsky 1901, 113)

Lomnitsky notes that older Iranian women were unfamiliar with the practice of covering their faces, suggesting that it was a newer custom not widely followed by Zoroastrian women at the time. He continues:

> The late Nasiruddin Shah (1896–1831) allowed women to appear in public without a veil. But the stupid critics were horrified by the decision and threatened to protest. Despite the agony of the eastern beauties, the decision was annulled. Some people hold that the late Shah was so impressed by the ballet he saw in Europe that immediately after his return to Tehran he ordered his women to wear ballet costumes. (111)

In another part of his book, he further goes through the clothes and behavior of Zoroastrian women as distinct from Muslims, and further separates himself from the European and eastern dichotomy:

> Guebre [a Zoroastrian] and Parsi women do not cover their faces and enjoy some freedom. They even dress like Europeans in India. Most of them are also very attractive. Guebre women usually wear long gowns and baggy pants, and they do not change their outfits when they go out. Their faces are friendly and pleasant, unlike any other I have seen. They greet a European with respect and modesty, but without any hint of flattery or coquetry. They may be the only women in the world who are not whimsical. (230–231)

Lomnitsky has also provided a full description of noble women's clothing:

> Very short silk skirts tied with a ribbon above the knees. Then a pair of blue or white stretch socks comes up close to the many flounces of the skirt. And a pair of light shoes. The breast is covered with a short blouse that comes to the edge of the skirt, and a second blouse of wool or silk. And lastly, a very short velvet or silk blouse like a bust that is either sewed or tied with ribbons. (113)

In his belief, even their black chador is bad-looking and its only difference with the poor is that it is made of silk (112). He points out that European clothes are common among noble Persian women:

> They say that one of the princesses who wanted to show off her beautiful figure started to imitate the costumes of European ballet dancers. Noble women order clothes of European styles. They have made changes to the styles, as Persian women do not know corsets. Maybe that is the reason they always give birth to healthy children and are immune from women's diseases. (114)

In another account, we read: "Tens of Persian women move easily on beautiful, saddled horses. Their black chadors are tied, but the white veil that covers the face is removed to the left side of their shoulders. It looked like they were wealthy women of nobility with urban mannerisms" (316).

Lomnitsky is not afraid in some cases to be seen; he describes his own position with irony. He speaks about himself as an object and informs the reader about the interrelation between himself and the "other". Without any false modesty, he says that he is simultaneously a subject and an object.

WOMEN AS SEXUAL OBJECTS

According to Lomnitsky, a large proportion of the Persian people were illiterate, including three-fourths of Persian farmers (190). Apparently, the rate was higher among women, due to prejudices against their education: "No one cares about women's education in Persia. Even among the nobility many women are illiterate" (100). Pointing to this fact, he mentions religious beliefs as the main obstacle:

> Mohammad has forever downgraded women in the Muslim world to slavery: "Women are your farms, do tilth as you please."[4] This statement accosts men. Thereupon, a woman is only reared up to be a wife and upon reaching 12, she gets married. She is taught all arts in a way to regulate her husband with her beauty. The 10-year-old Persian maiden is a full-fledged woman, and in case her parents are rich enough, she could find a husband of her own folk. The pretty, but poor woman in most cases, finds a secondary place in the harem of a rich man. Nowadays, Persian people let their daughters read and write. (115)

This image is apparently indicative that in the dominant Persian discourse, women are recognized only in their sexual roles. It indicates that women in Persia are treated in a way that they do not envisage any other relationship other than sexual intercourse with men (116). Lomnitsky brings temporary marriage or concubine as a testament to the sexual objectivity of Persian women:

> Concubine is a tradition that is held on special occasions. The man, who goes on pilgrimage, trade, or hunting trips, can hold such a kind of marriage in his temporary stays. The continuation of such marriages depends on the duration of his stay in the place of concern. There are cases in which the contract extends to the death of a woman as his sole beloved. When returning from the trip, the new concubine takes place at the grave dismay of the former wife. But then again, the man says the helpful statement *sic volo, sic iubeo* which the upset woman can only obey. As most usually is the case, a clandestine fight with the hidden beloved starts at this point. In many cases, concubine is a mere prostitution which is mediated by a middleman. (101)

Lomnitsky gives another Persian tradition as proof of his claim, according to him, in some less culturally advanced areas of Persia, it was customary for women to receive a form of dowry known as shirbaha upon their marriage. In northern Persia, there was a small village called Miandoab situated along the Tehran–Tabriz highway, notorious for its market where girls are available for marriage. For a sum of 30 to 40 tomans (equivalent to 40–50 rubles), any Persian man could find a suitable wife.

In Lomnitsky's perception, the Persian man's extensive privileges in family life were an indication of the Persian woman's sexual objectification. According to him, the head of the family had absolute power over his wives and can at any time divorce them, without giving any reasons. In his portrayal, women had no place in the Persian family:

> Women play a very sad part in family life; their husbands treat them as animals, and a poor Persian always mourns over the death of his donkey more than the death of his wife. If his donkey dies, it often means losing his whole property; if his wife dies, it is easy to find ten others to replace her; he only has to be able to feed her, while marriage itself will cost him a few *krans.* (103)

Of course, there were exceptions to the rule. For example, he states that his friend's sister was married to an accomplished Persian gentleman, famous for his wisdom and self-control. She was his only wife, was in charge of household matters, and they had three children who continue their studies in Russia and France.

Despite his attempt at impartiality, Lomnitsky admits the incomprehensibility of a Persian's inner feelings: "When a Persian becomes part of a European family, for instance, as a long-term servant, their human emotions gradually awaken and develop. While Persian men have more opportunities to integrate with Europeans, this is nearly impossible for women" (1901, 363). By expanding the focus on subjectivity in cultural representation and the impact of cultural differences, Lomnitsky's statements can be better understood within the broader context of cultural confrontation and the challenges of accurately capturing the inner experiences of individuals from different backgrounds (363). This recognition of subjectivity and cultural confrontation in representation is crucial as it underscores the importance of critically examining and questioning our own cultural biases, fostering a more nuanced and empathetic understanding of diverse cultures and societies.

CONCLUSION

Lomnitsky's travelogue is not the first about Persia and the Persians; previously, other travelers had visited Iran and prepared materials. However, his distinction lies in the creation of specific images and his relatively precise classification, which might not have been collected with such quality and accuracy before. The author stands in the position of an omniscient being, looking down at the object and describing it. He speaks from a position of superiority, borrowing stereotypical views from the Western world and preconceived views of himself about Easterners as others.

In Lomnitsky's *Persia and Persians*, there is a recurring presence of colonial rhetoric, wherein he compares Persian cultural shortcomings based on his internalized cultural ideals. This creates a tone that exhibits self-perceived intellectual superiority

from the Western perspective, leading to the imposition of ideas that are often humiliating. Occasionally, he draws comparisons between Persia and the West, reinforcing the concept of self-superiority and perpetuating the "otherization" of Persia – an approach that reflects colonial tendencies found throughout parts of his book. His use of terms such as "Easterners", "Iranian", "Muslims", and "harem", whose Latin equivalents are not used but instead are used in their direct Persian spelling and pronunciation, may suggest an image of a chasm deep between two identities. This analysis demonstrates how Lomnitsky's work, along with Russian travelogues generally, perpetuated and was influenced by colonial perspectives. These perspectives were rooted in the belief of Western intellectual and cultural superiority, resulting in the objectification and marginalization of Eastern women within the broader discourse of colonialism.

NOTES

[1] Unless otherwise stated, all translations by E. K. R.

[2] As Schimmelpenninck van der Oye notes, "some Russian Orientologists do not fit Said's mould, while others do. It is impossible to reduce Russian scholars of Asia to a single archetype" (2011, 45). Therefore, though Lomintsky is not known as an Orientalist, he could be read in relevant frameworks.

[3] For more study on Russian Orientalism, see Taroutina and Leigh 2023, and Schimmelpenninck van der Oye 2010.

[4] This statement is part of the 233 Verse of Chapter 2 of the Quran that is wrongly attributed to the Prophet (PBUH) by the author. The complete Verse reads: "Your wives are a place of sowing of seed for you, so come to your place of cultivation however you wish and put forth [righteousness] for yourselves. And fear Allah and know that you will meet Him. And give good tidings to the believers." For more information on the meaning of this verse, refer to: Al-Mizan (an exegesis of the Quran), Vol. 3. https://www.al-islam.org/al-mizan-exegesis-quran-volume-3-sayyid-muhammad-husayn-tabatabai/suratul-baqarah-verse-222-223.

REFERENCES

Al-Attas, Syed Hussein. 1977. *A Study of the Image of the Malays, Filipinos and Javanese from the 16th to the 20th Century and Its Function in the Ideology of Colonial Capitalism*. London: Frank Cass.

Albrant, Lev. 1867. "Komandirovka kapitana Al'branta v Persiiu v 1838 godu." [Captain Albrant's mission to Persia in 1838]. *Russkii Vestnik* No. 3.

Andreeva, Elena. 2007. *Russia and Iran in the Great Game: Travelogues and Orientalism*. London and New York: Routledge.

Artwińska, Anna. 2017. "The (Post-) Communist Orient: History, Self-Orientalization and Subversion by Michał Witkowski and Vladimir Sorokin." *Zeitschrift für Slawistik* 62, 3: 404–426. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1515/slaw-2017-0023.

Beller, Manfred, and Joep Leerssen, ed. 2007. *Imagology: The Cultural Construction and Literary Representation of National Characters. A Critical Survey.* Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi.

Cronin, Stephanie. 2015. "Introduction: Edward Said, Russian Orientalism and Soviet Iranology." *Iranian Studies* 48, 5: 647–662. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/00210862.2015.1058633.

Gamazov, M. 1857. "O Turtsii i Persii, iz zapisok puteshestvennika." [On Turkey and Persia, from the notes of a traveler]. *Sovremennik* No. 64.

Graham, Loren R. 1994. *Science in Russia and the Soviet Union: A Short History.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Karimi Riabi, Elaheh, and Mazyar Mozaffari Falarti. 2022. "Investigating Russian Perception of the Iranians Based on Russian Travelogues." *Journal of Iranian Social Studies* 16, 3: 81–96. DOI: https://doi.org/10.22034/jss.2023.1995958.1766.
Knight, Nathaniel. 2000. "Grigor'ev in Orenburg, 1851-1862: Russian Orientalism in the Service of Empire?" *Slavic Review* 59, 1: 74–100. DOI: https//doi.org/10.2307/2696905.
Layton, Susan. 2009. *Russian Literature and Empire: Conquest of Caucasus from Pushkin to Tolstoy.* Cambridge: Cambridge University. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511554094.
Lomnitsky, Stanislav Yulyevic. 1901. *Persiia i persy* [Persia and Persians]. Saint Petersburg: A. S. Suvorina.
Peters, Christine. 2021. "Text Mining, Travel Writing, and the Semantics of the Global: An AntConc Analysis of Alexander von Humboldt's Reise in die Aequinoktial-Gegenden des Neuen Kontinents." In *Digital Methods in the Humanities: Challenges, Ideas, Perspectives*, ed. by Silke Schwandt, 185–215. Bielefeld: Bielefeld University Press. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1515/9783839454190-007.
Roberts, Mary. 2023. "Afterword: Peripheral Horizons: Russian Orientalism in a Global Context." In *Russian Orientalism in a Global Context: Hybridity, Encounter, and Representation, 1740–1940*, ed. by Maria Taroutina and Allison Leigh, 253–260. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
Said, Edward W. 1978. *Orientalism*. London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan.
Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, David. 2010. *Russian Orientalism: Asia in the Russian Mind from Peter the Great to the Emigration.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, David. 2011. "The Imperial Roots of Soviet Orientology." In *The Heritage of Soviet Oriental Studies*, ed. by Michael Kemper and Stephan Conermann,, 29–46. London: Routledge.
Shakibi, Zhand. 2018. *Russia and the Politics of Occidentalism*. Tehran: IRAS.
Taroutina, Maria, and Allison Leigh, ed. 2023. *Russian Orientalism in a Global Context: Hybridity, Encounter, and Representation, 1740–1940*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
Tavakoli-Targhi, Mohamad. 2001. *Refashioning Iran*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
Tolz, Vera. 2008. "European, National, and (Anti-) Imperial: The Formation of Academic Oriental Studies in Late Tsarist and Early Soviet Russia." *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 9, 1: 53–81. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1353/kri.2008.0004.
Volkov, Denis V. 2018. *Russia's Turn to Persia: Orientalism in Diplomacy and Intelligence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108645270.
Wolff, Larry 1994. *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
Yarshater, Ehsan. 2001. "The Qajar Era in the Mirror of Time." *Iranian Studies* 34, 1–4: 187–194. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/00210860108702005.