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READING *ETHIOPIA THROUGH RUSSIAN EYES*:
POLITICAL AND RACIAL SENTIMENTS IN THE
TRAVEL WRITINGS OF ALEXANDER BULATOVICH,
1896–1898

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I

It is hard to imagine so many contrasts united in one person, as are united in the Abyssinian character. Their character is like the nature around them—where precipices, cliffs, mountains and plains alternate among one another, and cold is mixed with tropical heat. If I allow myself a rather free comparison, this is how I would characterize the Abyssinian. He is talented and receptive, like a Frenchman. With his practicality, with the way he deals with those he has conquered and his governmental abilities, he is like an Englishman. His pride is like that of a Spaniard. By his love for his faith, his mildness of character and tolerance, he is like a Russian. By his commercial abilities, he is like a Jew. But in addition to all these characteristics, he is very brave, cunning, and suspicious (Seltzer 2000:73).

For us, Abyssinia can present the following interest. Having cast a glance at the map of Central Africa and on the borders of the Ethiopian Empire, you can easily see that being located in the vicinity of the Middle Nile, halfway between Egypt and the great lakes, which belong to England, Abyssinia, which is expanding each year more and more and taking large tracts of land which had been free-rich and densely populated territory—must become the natural and main enemy of England in Central Africa. England is also our enemy. To help the enemy of our enemy, to make him as much stronger as possible—that is our main goal in Abyssinia (Seltzer 2000:144).

II

The above two seemingly political paragraphs taken from the writings of Alexander Bulatovich, along with seemingly ethnologically rich journal entries that he recorded during his travels, detailing his experiences in Ethiopia in the late nineteenth century, can perhaps be used to examine the “colonial meaning making” and “convention of representation” (Pratt 1992), in writings of the period. Here I argue that, similar to his journal entries, these paragraphs represent a commentary by Bulatovich with an aim to establish similarities between Ethiopians and Europeans. The journal entries have an additional subject matter, which is the private imagination of Bulatovich in the African jungle, which interacts with the Russian readers. These journal entries articulate the social convention of “Africanism” (Morrison 1992) in the late nineteenth century. Through establishing similarities between Ethiopians and Europeans, Bulatovich rendered Ethiopia a possible imperial world power, which would have been taboo to imagine, as an African colonial power. Bulatovich’s private imagination of Ethiopia as a possible black power complicates his written texts, sometimes by contradicting them entirely, other times by providing a subtext that expresses one of his motives, to become an explorer of the unknown regions of Lake Rudolf.

Studies by Mary Louis Pratt (1992), Toni Morrison (1992), and Edward Said (1978) on travel writing and literary criticism portray the complex dynamics of power relations, such as the ones found in Bulatovich’s writings, aimed at articulating different strands of representation that constitute imperial expansionism. These studies are shaped by a number of shared questions which focus on how travel and exploration writings produce particular knowledge about the indigenous people in relation to the Europeans at particular points in history. This paper draws from these scholarly works in examining the travel writings of Alexander Bulatovich in Ethiopia.

I consider, for example, Bulatovich’s attempts to redefine the “geopolitical realignments” (Pratt 1992) and his scientific explorations in the African hinterland. His elaborate ethnographic descriptions of the light-skinned Ethiopian Christians, the dark-skinned pagans, and feminine Muslim Ethiopians, exemplify the politics of “contact zones” (Pratt 1992). My reading of Bulatovich’s journal entries is shaped by a number of shared questions, such as how Bulatovich portrayed Ethiopia as a potential black colonial power in the imagination of the Europeans; and his attempt to legitimate Ethiopian imperialism against the European colonial powers, in particular England.

III

Ethiopia Through Russian Eyes: Country in Transition 1896-1898 by Richard Seltzer consists of the translation of two books written by Alexander Bulatovich about his travels in Ethiopia. *From Entotto to River Baro* was first published in 1897, while *With the Armies of Menelik II* appeared in 1900. Seltzer enriches the accounts of Bulatovich's journal entries with a remarkable introduction, intellectual insights, and explanatory endnotes. In the appendix Seltzer includes selections from Isidor Saavich Kaneltson's work (1971), which provides an excellent view of Ethiopia's history.

Alexander Bulatovich (1870-1919) arrived in Ethiopia during a politically turbulent period in Africa in order to aid the Red Cross mission, which was sent to provide medical care for the Menelik's soldiers after the battle of Adowa. In the 1890s, while European colonialism in Africa was accelerating, Ethiopia was emerging as an indigenous imperial state under the Menelik II, who was pushing his frontiers and playing the European powers against each other. During this time France was struggling with Britain over the upper Nile, and Italy was keen to colonize Ethiopia.

During his stay in Ethiopia Bulatovich was sympathetic to the ruling Amhara people and the Galla/Oromo people, perhaps because as the ruling elite, the Amhara people were important players with regard to world geopolitics and the foreign policy of Russia. The Galla people's legends and folk traditions, especially the tales of Ras Gobana, inspired the admiration of Bulatovich. Apparently, Bulatovich was prejudiced against the "negroid" features of the southern Ethiopians and he expressed his feelings openly, but surprisingly, he cared deeply for a three-year-old southern Ethiopian child who had been castrated and thrown into a ditch during one of his military expeditions. Bulatovich named the child Vaska and took him to Russia, where he educated him. In 1907 Bulatovich sent Vaska back to Ethiopia because, after the onset of puberty, Vaska was subjected to cruel jokes and he was ostracized by his classmates. In 1911 Bulatovich visited Vaska in Ethiopia. In this final trip to Ethiopia, Bulatovich tried to establish a Russian Orthodox monastery on an island to the south of Addis Ababa, in an effort to heal the dying Menelik with his prayers.

From Entotto to River Baro consists of journal entries of his travels during his first journey to Ethiopia in 1896, as well as his discussions of Galla/Oromo, Sidamo, and Amhara people and their history, traditional government, commerce, and religious beliefs, based on his observations

during his one-year stay with the Russian Red Cross mission. Bulatovich transformed his observations into ethnological evidence that demonstrates the presence of long-civilizing influence of outside races on Ethiopia, which confirms the “Hamitic” and “Semitic” influences and the Christian past of southwestern Ethiopia.

In this first book readers were encouraged to know that the Europeans share history, blood, and cultural inheritance with Ethiopian Christians, thus distinguishing them from other dark Africans, and neutralizing the distance separating the Europeans from the mixed Ethiopians. By recognizing Ethiopia’s ability to compete with England in the colonization of interior Africa, Bulatovich demands new models for European contacts and new ways of encoding Europe’s imperial ambitions with an intention to disempower England. With his ethnological evidence, Bulatovich deemed Menelik’s colonization of interior Africa possible because under its bureaucratic efficiency. Menelik integrates a number of racially powerful people whose ancestors are mixed with the descendants of emigrants from elsewhere. Hence, Menelik can present challenges to England’s expansion in East Africa.

The main question which Bulatovich’s first book poses and addresses is why England should be privileged to bring civilization to negroid Africa if the Ethiopians are a civilizing race. The recognition of Ethiopia as a civilizing race is to legitimate its role in the colonial expansion in the east and central Africa and become a competitor to England in the same region. Two institutions are key to ensuring this outcome: Europe’s acceptance of Menelik’s empire as a legitimate colonial power, with efficient administrative apparatus and adequate military power necessary for an imperial expansionist project. For Bulatovich, with the cadre of Hamitic and Semitic ethos (Seltzer 2000:51), it should be possible for Menelik to expand his territories and create a local administrative system under its racial elite rule.

Throughout his travels, Bulatovich saw Christian roots in the non-Christian ways of living in Galla and Abyssinian villages, exemplified by their polytheistic traditions, and epitomized in their sacrifices and offerings. Along the way, he discussed in an evocative way how the textures of Christianity are embedded in these sacrifices and rituals. Bulatovich repeatedly compared the cultures of the local people to that of the Orthodox Christian Russians, in an effort to buttress his political claim that, if not racially, Ethiopian Christians were culturally similar to the Europeans. He made extra efforts to gain the trust of the reader about his claims. “The Galla family,” he wrote, “is not comparable to our Northern Russian family, but rather is closer to the White Russian”

(Seltzer 2000:57). With numerous similar statements, Bulatovich evokes in his readers a sense of similarity between the Orthodox Christian Europe and the Galla people emblematic of Ethiopia, which, according to him, can become a mediator between the civilized Europe and the uncivilized African interior.

Bulatovich invoked certain Ethiopian legends for his “political nomenclature” (Pratt 1992), mainly because they supported the idea that the ancestors of the Ethiopians were mixed with Caucasians. The legends epitomize the continental and transnational aspirations of Europe’s Hamitic hypothesis that explains the presence of civilizing influence in Ethiopia in the late nineteenth century. In his interpretation Bulatovich uses his biblical knowledge to translate his vision of civilizing mission in Ethiopia into a historical and “institutional imprint,” in Mahmood Mamdani’s sense of the term (2001:79). Central to this imprint was the transformation of Ethiopia from racial supremacy into political and administrative superiority, one that could fight against “England’s Colonial expansion and become the enemy of [Russia’s] enemy” (Seltzer 2000:144).

For Bulatovich the immigration of the Semitic people to Ethiopia had long prepared the Abyssinian people to become the propagators of culture in the Ethiopian mountains and in the regions adjoining them. In Bulatovich’s portrayal, the Abyssinian people historically were not conquered by other societies, but in the early sixteenth century, he maintained, forces headed by the “fanatic Moslem hordes—of Galla and Adaltsevs had struck heavy blows at Abyssinia” (Seltzer 2000:176). The southern regions of Abyssinia were subjected to continuous invasions by “wild nomadic tribes,” who weakened the unity of the empire, separating Kaffa, the southern part, from the north for several centuries. Bulatovich maintained that in the middle of the nineteenth century, the Tewodros, Yohannes, and finally Menelik II reunited Abyssinia, and fought against Italy, winning a series of victories over various enemies.

According to Bulatovich Menelik needed to extend his territories and unify all the inhabitants of the Ethiopian mountains and the related people, since he possessed an enormous and powerful army. Bulatovich argued that, by doing so Menelik would be “carrying out the traditional mission of Ethiopia as the propagator of culture and the unifier of all the inhabitants.” (177). In Bulatovich’s view, if Menelik developed and consolidated the black power of Ethiopia, the Russians would not help but sympathize “with his intentions, not only because of political considerations, but also for purely human reasons.” (177)

IV

Bulatovich's second book, *With the Armies of Menelik II*, was based on his journal entries during his second trip to Ethiopia. The book discussed Bulatovich's military excursions with the armies of Menelik II that culminated with his scientific exploration in the Lake Rudolf region. When Bulatovich returned to Addis Ababa in 1897 as a Russian diplomat to Ethiopia, he was requested to accompany the army of Ras Wolda Giyorgis, the governor of Kaffa, on a mission to expand the territory of the Menelik to the shores of Lake Rudolf. Bulatovich's journal entries during this journey contained some of the most graphic descriptions of pillaging episodes of Giyorgis' army. He gave vivid and detailed descriptions of violence that the Ethiopian soldiers, as well as he himself, committed.

In the introduction to *With the Armies of Menelik II*, Bulatovich attacked the European powers for not paying attention to the humanism in certain African peoples. "At the conference of Berlin," he wrote (176),

all of Africa was partitioned by the interested powers into "spheres of influence" that is regions where they could carry out their aims of conquest and colonization. The rights and interests of peoples living in these "spheres of influence" were completely disregarded; and Abyssinia, in this manner, fell under the protectorate of Italy. If such treatment of the populace of Africa was justified to some degree by their low level of culture, it was completely unjust and arbitrary in regard to the Abyssinian people, who professed Christianity much earlier than any European nation (in the fourth century A.D.)—a people with a rich historical past.

Acutely critical of how the Europeans lumped all the Africans in the same category, Bulatovich sought to emphasize the depth of the Christian Abyssinians' commitment to Christianity. He seemed to insist that the Christian Abyssinians should be understood in the same terms in which the Europeans understand themselves, with regard to having the same rights, to colonize and to bring civilization to the Africans who possess a "low level of culture."

When Bulatovich arrived in Jimma, one of the commercially thriving centers, he encountered the Muslim Galla people, and met Aba Jefar, the Muslim feudal lord of the town of Jeren. Bulatovich's description of Aba Jefar, his performances of daily Islamic ritual, his Islamic clothing, and his mannerisms, along with that of exotic scenes in the palace, creates sharp contrast with Galla and the Abyssinian people who exhibit a degree of

Christian values and Semitic influences. From Bulatovich's description, it is clear that the landscape, the palace, the people, and the cultural and the religious performances are all estheticized and they are represented as extremely rich in semantic substance and articulated with theatrical vocabulary. Bulatovich's description of Aba Jefar, with his "thin nose," "bright, handsome eyes," "graceful hand," very small "handsome feet," and the sight of "imprisoned beauties" looking through the windows of the "harem building" under the flickering light of a bonfire that blazed are representative of a discourse peculiar to the discussion and understanding of Islam in late nineteenth-century Europe (Said 1979:90).

What Bulatovich does with this esthetic discourse is to define and evaluate the portrait of Aba Jefar and his performance of Muslim ritual, and the Islamic architecture of his compound with its "captured beauties" and "mullahs" as the opposite of his home culture. The Islamic esthetic scene here reflects Bulatovich's deep ambivalences towards non-Christian Ethiopian cultures, their destructive forces that prevent the unity of the Christian Abyssinian state and its progress towards becoming a colonial power, which necessitates intervention by his own European culture.

Bulatovich slurred and stereotyped (199) Aba Jefar's religious performance for showing "off to a European his knowledge of all the Moslem rituals ..." Later on there is an apparent engagement between Bulatovich, Aba Jefar, a nameless king, and other Muslims in the room. The king aggravated Bulatovich when he asked him "Stambul (Turkey) and Mysyr (Egypt). He wanted to know if it was true that Stambul was the most powerful state in the world." Apparently agitated by this question, Bulatovich withheld his knowledge of "Stambuli" and its powerful presence from the king since Bulatovich felt obligated "to some degree, to disillusion [the king] and refute the biased tales that Arabs had told him." (199)

The following day Bulatovich visited Aba Jefar who was "sitting on the throne crossed-legged, Turkish-style" (201), surrounded by Galla chiefs. Bulatovich's depiction of this scene portrays rather reworked images that bring an associative flash of an orientalizing scene. This depiction also suggests possible writing tactics on Bulatovich's part, articulating the cultural dynamics of the contact zone politics of the time. There is the intended portrayal of the scene that gives continuity to Bulatovich's narrative voice, opening up a space for him to put down Aba Jefar and the king's positive vision of "Stambul" by talking about an industrialized Europe. It is clear that with his conversations, Bulatovich dismisses the powerful presence of "Stambul" in an effort to highlight the image of Europe.

During these conversations Aba Jefar, who knew that Bulatovich has a medicine chest with him, therefore asked him to treat his sick mother. As Muslim custom requires, Bulatovich was expected to maintain a distance between himself and the “queen mother” who spoke with him through the help of a translator as she sits behind the silk curtain. Feeling uncomfortable carrying out a conversation with the queen mother who suffered from “heartburn, cough, and headaches,” Bulatovich went behind the curtain to see her. According to Bulatovich, the queen mother was “remarkably beautiful” despite her forty years of age. “The color of her skin,” he wrote, was “quite light.” The queen mother was heavily scented and “a crowd of pretty maids of honor” surrounded her. Bulatovich’s unexpected appearance produced “diverse impressions” on the women in the harem. Some of the women, he wrote, “stood, with downcast eyes and did not dare” to look at him. Others however, “stared with curiosity at the white man, the likes of which they had never seen before.” (202).

Again, the depiction of Bulatovich’s encounter with the queen mother has the orientalist flavor, which featured him as the hero of the Muslim women’s fantasy. These features are evident in the way Bulatovich described his presence in the harem and the way the women respond to him, which allegorized race and gender in the contact zone in highly political terms. Perhaps the light skin color of the queen mother and her unexpected intelligence are due to her possible contact with the Semitic influences. Bulatovich’s transgression in the harem facilitated an opportunity to reinvent himself as a hero of the repressed fantasy of the Muslim women, and gave him critical space to address and elaborate on the position of Muslim women in a society disagreeable to the west.

Predictably, Bulatovich started to talk about his ideas with regard to the Muslim women’s lack of freedom and their powerlessness claiming that the notion of freedom is “quite incomprehensible” to the queen mother, yet it is conspicuous in Bulatovich’s writings that his culture and the culture of the queen mother are different. Bulatovich documented the powerlessness of Muslim Ethiopian women through the queen mother, but he categorically refused to understand the internal values of Muslim Ethiopian culture and the articulation of their freedom and power in their own terms. The moment Bulatovich expressed pity for the queen mother for not being free is the moment when the queen mother brings him face to face with the limits of his anthropological instinct in understanding the conceptual framework of freedom in the culture of the queen mother. Bulatovich’s expression of surprise over the intelligence of both Aba Jefar, and the queen mother, contrary to his expectations, elucidates his igno-

rance and prejudice which in turn demonstrate his profound limitations in understanding other cultures.

V

On the way to Lake Rudolf, during Bulatovich's participation in the Ethiopian military expeditions in the south, his journal entries shift the mode of his travel writings from exhaustive ethnological documentation to that of aggressive military action against dark-skinned southern Ethiopians who, according to Bulatovich were racially and culturally inferior. Through his journal entries, Bulatovich reinvented southern Ethiopian ethnic communities as pagan and uncivilized, which do not resemble the Europeans. For Bulatovich, hidden away from the centers of civilizing influence, the people in the south were close to nature, and they were not comparable to the Russians, British, French, or Italians. These were the people who, like the nature of their environment, are waiting to be conquered, colonized, and civilized. As such, some of the villagers aroused Bulatovich's passions, and defied his scientific perception, and he became engulfed with pain of remorse and guilt, amid the violent military excursions. He distanced himself, and apparently he did not describe and analyze the culture of these people, as he tried to do for the people of southwestern Ethiopia. Having distanced himself from the local people, Bulatovich set about elevating the power of the Menelik, describing the magnitude of the Abyssinian army filling the wasteland stretching before him with dense and powerful metaphors, as he displays the power of a racial elite of the southwestern Ethiopia.

As thousands of Ethiopian soldiers traversed the wild landscape, Bulatovich's thoughts moved back and forth in his mind, from his positive scientific vision concerning Lake Rudolf, to vindicating Ethiopia's capabilities within European-based African colonial paradigms. Much of Bulatovich's journal entries depict vivid descriptions of violent warfare and organized military attacks against the helpless local communities. In part, Bulatovich abandoned his role as an Orthodox Christian, and held on to war and violence as fundamental material of civilizing imperial projects. In his journal entries, Bulatovich rather unself-consciously highlighted the differences between Europeans and southern Ethiopian Africans, thus marshaling evidence to justify the domination of the southern Ethiopians by the peoples of southwestern Ethiopia.

As the soldiers marched through isolated villages, they plundered fields and destroyed homes, killing and capturing innocent people. At times Bulatovich was torn and anguished by this suffering. What passage could

be more appropriate to illustrate Bulatovich's ambiguity and mental anguish than the episode of military conquest near a valley around the Oyma river, where the Ethiopian soldiers pillaged a village. That evening while the Abyssinian soldiers rested in the valley outside the village, before they demolished it, Bulatovich climbed a hill to describe the village in the following manner:

As far as the eye see, the valley and hills were densely settled. Smoke arose from the houses. Evidently, food was being prepared there. Cattle were returning from the pasture . . . The field around us was cultivated. The quiet hardworking life of a peaceful people was evident in all, and it was sad to think that tomorrow all this would be destroyed. . . The picture will change: the inhabitants will flee, driving their livestock and carrying their goods and children. They will, most probably be killed, wounded, and captured. Their houses will go up in a blaze, and all that will remain of them will be the hearths (Seltzer 2000:263).

Implicit in the above description is the fact that the village was analogous to a European village, one that Bulatovich could identify with, and the description of the Africans appeared consistent with the hard-working Europeans, who went about their business in their villages. With a strong Christian disposition, Bulatovich lamented over the anticipated destruction of this rather romantic scene, but as a guest of Giyorgis, he felt that he must detach himself from local affairs. The next day the Abyssinian soldiers attacked the village, plundering houses, confiscating grains, killing and scattering the people. During the aftermath of the destruction, when Bulatovich came face-to-face with some of the villagers who were captured, he distanced himself from them instantaneously and completely displaced the melancholic reality of the village that he mourned before its destruction. Unlike the village that he had espied from the top of the hill, these prisoners lacked esthetic qualities, and "[a]ll of them were extremely ugly. Their facial features were typically Negro." (Seltzer 2000:266)

As Bulatovich and Ras Wolda Giyorgis proceeded toward Lake Rudolf, thousands of soldiers continued to plunder villages, capture people, and use some of them as guides and porters. In this prolonged march under the heat of the sun, the prisoners became exhausted, hungry, and sick, and they rebelled despite the fear of death. Threatened by the vastness of the wild landscape, Ras Wolda Giyorgis and Bulatovich force the prisoners at gunpoint to walk, and show them the way. The scenery of violence and the struggle with rebellious guides was repeated in the vast wilderness, sometimes in the darkness of the night, at other times in the

disparate gullies and river beds. Amid these disorders, violence, and exhaustion, Bulatovich sought to find something worthy of the grandeur he anticipates when he reached shore of lake Rudolf as an explorer. The impulse of this anticipated exploration trivializes the violence and disorder, and he disassociated himself from it by writing about the events as an observer.

Bulatovich often dramatized the violence and terror of the contact zone, with a mystified mode of “gender and race allegory.” (Pratt 1992) The allegory embodies the triad of a European man, African men with the Hamitic civilizing influence, and ugly and weak dark African women and their children, who were captured in large numbers from the defeated savage African men, and interrogated at gunpoint and death threats. Almost all the southern Ethiopian women Bulatovich described were very dark and “ugly,” representing the antithesis of the light-skinned Galla and other Abyssinian women. Thus he displayed his own notion of racial consciousness, by comparing the mixed races of Abyssinian and the Galla people alike with the dark women of interior Africa.

As the army moves towards the Lake Rudolf under the command of Ras Wolda Giyorgis, Bulatovich shifted his thoughts from the power of Menelik’s army and began to think about a whole series of unresolved scientific questions concerning Lake Rudolf. He engaged in self-dialogues that reveal his personal reasons to advance himself and pursue his own self interests, while purporting to empower and give voice to Ethiopia. This sudden shift from all “ideological-colonial explanatory” thoughts to “scientific exploration” in Pratt’s sense of the term, makes it obvious that Bulatovich was not only simply assisting the army of Menelik to conquer the “uncivilized” southern Ethiopia, but was also trying to be the first explorer to reach the northwest of Lake Rudolf which was “unexplored.” As a scientist, observer, and soldier, Bulatovich felt awkward in intervening in local matters, since he is “a guest and it was not fitting for [him] to push [his] opinions on [Ethiopian soldiers].” (Seltzer 2000:303). On the other hand, when Ras Wolda Giyorgis was on the verge of giving up the idea of reaching the shores of Lake Rudolf, which will enable Bulatovich to become a famous explorer, Bulatovich encouraged him by saying: “We mustn’t lose spirit. . . You know that no great deed is easily done; yes, even a woman, when she gives birth, suffers.” Amused by the statement, Giyorgis laughingly replied: “God grant that we soon give birth to your lake.” (Seltzer 2000:338).

Sometimes Bulatovich felt obligated as an observer not to take part in military action, but ironically became involved in cruel interrogations of the local people. In his diary he wrote about how he forcefully interrogat-

hero. Bulatovich described himself as the lost explorer while pursuing his scientific quest with his unfortunate African companions who vanish in the desolate landscape, along the shores of Lake Rudolf. Bulatovich's narrative accounts invoke in many ways, "survival literature" (Pratt 1992) in a rather interesting way, expressing the themes of violent struggles with natives in a mysterious exotic landscape, where many people die, except Bulatovich who lives to tell the story, and to express his guilt and sorrow to win the empathy of his readers. The drama justifies the deaths of a number of Africans in the name of science and knowledge, which in return enabled Bulatovich later to express his passion for the dead Africans as unfortunate heroines and heroes.

With empathizing vocabulary, he drew readers to understand his guilt, as a man of science on one hand and as a soldier of empire on the other. Take, for example, Bulatovich's self-reflections in his tent at the foot of a mountain range in southern Ethiopia, when he enters into "a dreamy-philosophical mood," and whispered to himself saying (370):

how many victims had the conquest of this land cost? It seemed to me brim-full of violence and injustice. Of course, a new phase in the history of peoples is always paid for with sacrifices. But world justice and individual justice are quite different from one another. Murder always remains murder for us, whatever goal it may accomplish, and it is especially immoral in relation to these peaceful, industrious people who never did harm to us, whose land we now take away by force, using superiority of our weapons.

Bulatovich's emphatic self-reflections found in his journal entries eloquently depict the anguish, and the tension he felt as the man of science and soldier of the empire, with a certain level of ambivalence in the colonial frontier. These stylistic self-reflections often reveal Bulatovich's being at odds with his humanistic values, and his duty as soldier, scientist and explorer on the other. Such philosophical reflections, however, are questionable, injuring his veracity considerably when they are juxtaposed with his self-reflections in other journal entries.

VI

It is clear that Bulatovich's strategic attempt in his first book to compare the Abyssinian people with the Europeans in order to justify why the Ethiopian state should—and could—become a black power, is not because of his belief in the Abyssinian peoples' intrinsic qualities, but on his belief in some Semitic influence, giving them qualities which Russians

ed “Kelemis,” an “Idenich woman” who refused to tell Giyorgis where they could find grain. Bulatovich became impatient with this woman’s refusal to give information and threatened her with death, saying: “You lie, . . . [h]ere, for this lie, I am now going to give you medicine from which you will quickly die as soon as you tell another lie.” Bulatovich ordered the soldiers “to open Kelmisa’s [*sic*] mouth, and staring fixedly at her eyes” he squeezed “a doze of quinine in between her teeth. Kelemisa [*sic*]” looks at Bulatovich “with horror” (Seltzer 2000:337).

Bulatovich became breathless when he finally reached the shores of Lake Rudolf and he helped the soldiers to erect Ethiopian flags, mapping mountain ranges and naming them after powerful and influential Russian leaders. With anxious enthusiasm and aspirations, he charted and mapped the wild landscape all at once, at whatever human cost. Trying to become the first explorer of the mountains and hills, he frantically and recklessly traversed from one end of the landscape to the other, mapping, naming, and claiming as many places as possible. Bulatovich’s violent and forceful character surfaced, as he captured local people, forcing them at gun point to guide him to the hills and mountains that he wanted to explore.

One morning, for example, as Bulatovich traveled on his mule with two of his soldiers in an attempt to explore a mountain, he stumbled on a group of local people who had just slaughtered a ram. From the group he captured a man and his wife with their infant and forced them to show the way to the mountains. In the words of Bulatovich (349-50):

The sun was particularly scorching that day. The ascent seemed difficult and very steep, strewn with small stones. Its inclines were overgrown with dense thorny bushes. We clambered up with difficulty; all the same, stumbling and falling . . . Half-way, the prisoners refused to go farther and lay down, hugging one another. No kind of threat helped. They, probably, decided that it was better to die than to go farther. The captive man was very necessary to me because only he could tell me the names of the surrounding mountains. Therefore, I decided to force him to go at any cost. I shot my revolver right above his ear and, making use of his fear, I picked him up by the hair. I lifted his burden onto my shoulders and went forward. He followed me mechanically. The woman continued to lie, and we left her. The father took the baby in his arms. At 11:15, completely worn out, we reached the summit of the mountain.

Bulatovich’s journal entries after the above-mentioned episodes, sensationalize the “drama of contact zone” (Pratt 1992), in which he is the

could recognize and value. Once the Russians recognized the Semitic influence on the Abyssinians, they would be in a position to use the Ethiopian state to hinder the colonial expansion of England. Therefore, the first book represents in many ways the necessary pretext for Russian involvement in Ethiopia, in order to serve their own national interests at the expense of the Ethiopians.

In his second book Bulatovich had an opportunity to take advantage of Menelik's plan to expand Abyssinian territory in southern Ethiopia that serves Russia's nationalistic goals and seemingly becomes "the natural and main enemy of England in Central Africa" by pre-empting any possible attempt by England to conquer lands in this region. This expedition also gave Bulatovich an opportunity to explore the Lake Rudolf region and make a name for himself at no expense on his part. "An expedition which would have cost any European power millions, was carried out by the Abyssinians almost for free, if you don't count several hundred men killed and several thousand cartridges shot" (Seltzer 2000:381).

It is incredible that someone like Bulatovich, who considered himself a member of a civilized nation as opposed to uncivilized southern Ethiopians with a low level of culture, would commit such cruel and indignant atrocities towards innocent victims in order to achieve his national and personal goals. It is no less incredible that Bulatovich was comfortable writing details about these atrocities without fear of evoking moral indignation in his readers. Perhaps it is because he was perceived by his readers as having integrity and honesty since the atrocities involve expending Africans with low level of cultures (Seltzer 2000:176), and therefore he is not accountable to anyone.

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