



Imperial parliament for a hybrid empire: Representative experiments in the early 20th-century Russian Empire

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Abstract

This article argues that the history of Russian constitutional and parliamentary reform in the early 20th century can be cast in a new light in view of the global transformation of political life under the challenge of imperial diversity and mass politics. The article points out that imperial diversity as a challenge to democratic government was not unique to the Russian Empire. The character of the Russian Empire was marked by peculiarities; it was shaped by composite and hybrid imperial space, which placed the challenge of imperial diversity at the center of political practices and imaginaries. The article traces the history of political reform in the Russian Empire in the early 20th century focusing on the reform of the Sejm of the Grand Duchy of Finland and the novel practices and political imaginaries of imperial diversity in the first and second State Duma. The exploration of the history of the constitutional reform in the Russian Empire of early 20th century demonstrates that rather than being absolute antagonists to representative government, Russian imperial politics and traditions of imperial sovereignty nested possibilities of compromise and redefinition of political solidarity in the space of diversity.

Keywords

History of the Russian Empire, history of the State Duma, global history of parliamentarism, pseudo-constitutionalism, Russian liberalism

A parliamentary crisis in a European country

In 1914, a major political crisis loomed large in one of the European countries. The crisis developed in several phases and concerned multiple issues of constitutional life: the relations between the upper and lower houses of parliament in the context of growing democratization of political life, the integrity of the liberal political program, and the parliamentary solution to the challenge of democracy in a multinational empire. The crisis started off with the liberal majority in parliament in 1905. In 1909, the liberal majority prepared a new budget containing a progressive tax and a variety of social welfare programs. The budget was blocked by the upper house of parliament for fears of creeping socialism. The budget was ultimately passed in 1910, but it took two general elections (*de facto* plebiscites), the threat

of royal prerogative to change the composition of the upper house, and the reform of the upper house. The confrontation between the lower and upper houses of parliament did not end in 1910. Tensions rose even higher because the majority formed in the general elections of 1910 hung on the representatives of a non-dominant nationality that demanded autonomy for their region in return for political alliance. The project of autonomy was prepared, passed the

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lower house of parliament, was blocked three times by the upper house of parliament, and was sent for royal assent, bypassing the upper house. In a countermove an amendment bill was introduced, a sort of backstop provision in view of the increasing prospect of implementation of autonomy in that said region of empire. The amendment bill led to a general standoff. Shortly before the breakout of the World War I, the monarchy convened a special conference on the question, but it failed to resolve the conflict due to “differences of substance, which were, for the time being at any rate, unbridgeable and irreconcilable.” Meanwhile, local armed movements were set in motion in the territory of proposed autonomy and there was even a loss of control by the imperial command over the armed forces in the said territory. This extra-parliamentary political contestation was also framed by proposals of territorial partition, on the one hand, and threats of provisional government and secession, on the other. In short, a civil war was very much on the horizon. The solution to this crisis was the adoption of the controversial bill “in the interests of the Empire” and immediate suspension of its effect in view of the outbreak of the “European war.” Such a strange compromise with no clear plan for a lasting democratic solution to the problem of empire worked out largely because of the emergency of the World War I that allowed the crippled liberal parliamentary majority to stay in power and avoid the descent of parliamentary politics into civil war.

One expects that such an acute political crisis of parliamentarism in a multinational empire in the early 20th century was likely to occur in Austro-Hungary or Russia, the countries with imperial-authoritarian political traditions, socio-economic underdevelopment, historically short experience with constitutional and parliamentary political forms, and weak forces of liberalism. Yet, this is the story of the “people’s budget” drafted by Lloyd George and the complex political dynamics that ensued and involved a standoff between the House of Commons and the House of Lords, the reform of the Parliament (1911), and the Third Irish Home Rule Bill that entered the statute books in 1914 (together with the disestablishment of the Church of England in Wales), but never took effect (Dangerfield, 1936; Hansard House of Commons [HHC], 1914, pp. 882–920; Mulvagh, 2018; Smith, 1993). The events in question actually took place in Great Britain or, more precisely, as pointed out by Prime Minister Asquith, in the British Empire (HHC, 1914, p. 889). And the empire was not “over there” in India for which discussion the benches of the lower house usually emptied, but at the heart of the modern parliamentary system and party politics.

This article argues that the history of Russian constitutional and parliamentary reform in the early 20th century can be cast in a new light in view of the global transformation of political life under the challenge of imperial diversity and mass politics. As evinced in the above mentioned case of the Third Irish Home Rule Bill, imperial diversity

as a challenge to democratic government was not a unique to the Russian Empire. The character of the Russian Empire was marked by peculiarities, it was shaped by composite and hybrid imperial space (Gerasimov et al., 2016), which placed the challenge of imperial diversity at the center of political practices and imaginaries. The exploration of the history of the constitutional reform in the Russian Empire of the early 20th century demonstrates that rather than being absolute antagonists to representative government (Hosking, 1997), Russian imperial politics and traditions of imperial sovereignty nested possibilities of compromise and redefinition of political solidarity in the space of diversity. National consolidation of the political community was not a necessary precondition for a representative government. Indeed, it was the other way around: the nationalizing politics of the Russian imperial center was a disruptive element in the attempt to marry new political forms with the political reality of imperial society. Furthermore, the article contends that late political modernization in the context of relative backwardness was not the only complicating factor for the liberal and democratic reform in Russia. The Russian story was part of the global story of the challenge of mass politics to liberal democracy in the early 20th century and the Russian political actors duly reflected this global entanglement.

The history of the emergence of Russian representative institutions was indeed belated in comparison with the parliamentary history in Western Europe and with other Central European empires, for example, the Habsburg reform of 1867 and the German Empire of 1871. The Russian bicameral parliament emerged in the long process of political reform in the context of the Russo-Japanese war and the 1905 revolution. The first phase of the reform was led by government reformers from above in the context of mobilization of political movements and popular unrest from below. The envisaged political reform initially followed the legal logic of composite imperial space, that is, representation was based on inclusion of representatives of organs of self-government (*zemstvos*) that were created in the wake of Great Reforms of the middle of the 19th century into the existing supreme law-making body of the empire—the State Council. Then, in the second phase of the reform the project was changed into a “popular” representation and a bicameral parliament (the State Council and the State Duma).

The second phase of the reform overlapped with the violence of the 1905 revolution and almost complete loss of control by the government over the country. This second phase of reform after October 1905 produced a constitutional change that included the written constitution (Fundamental Laws of 1906), the expanded suffrage for the lower house (the State Duma), the prerogative of the legislature in passing the laws, and the guarantee of certain fundamental rights to the population of the empire. What is often overlooked in the history of this period is that the

political reform in “Russia” included the reform of the Sejm of the Grand Duchy of Finland on the basis of universal active and passive suffrage and the constitutional realignment of the position of the Grand Duchy of Finland in the overall imperial political structure.

After the wave of the revolution subsided, the new electoral law of 1907 for elections to the State Duma was passed in a coup d’etat that curtailed the political representation in favor of proprietary elements of population and “more Russian in spirit” regions and population groups of the empire. National curiae were introduced in the mixed territories to protect the interests of the “Russian” population. This “Duma of lackeys” dominated by conservatives and Russian nationalists worked until the end of the Russian monarchy.

This short and turbulent history of Russian parliamentarism in the framework of a pseudo-constitutional regime (both in 1906 and 1907) so far fits the conventional narrative of liberal reforms in a backward country with strong traditions of authoritarian rule and the conception that the imperial factor prevented the consolidation of representative government on the basis of national political community. What does not fit this narrative is the reform of the Sejm of the Grand Duchy of Finland which saw the introduction of revolutionary universal suffrage and political inclusion of women, the emergence of political imaginaries and practices aimed at creating political solidarity in the context of pluralism of the first and second State Duma that provided an enduring legacy for post-imperial political visions in 1917 (Sablin, 2018; Sablin & Semyonov, 2018), and the emergence of consolidated political opposition in the form of the Progressive Block in the fourth Duma (in spite of its nickname of the “Duma of lackeys”), that played a crucial role in the fall of the monarchy and in shaping the events of the democratic February revolution of 1917 (Gerasimov, 2017). With those historical events entering the established narrative, the story of Russian parliamentarism acquires a paradoxical twist.

A strange birth of an ultra-modern parliamentary system

While Russian official political narrative at the time carefully suppressed the sense of political rupture instituted in October of 1905 (Tagantsev, 1919), the rupture was duly noted by multiple observers of the process. The eminent Russian legal scholar Boris Nolde (1911) pointed out that the Fundamental Laws of the Russian Empire of 1906 introduced the first modern definition of the Russian state (Semyonov, 2009, pp. 225–244). Before 1906, the title of the Russian emperor provided this definition through enumerating legal and territorial units absorbed in the course of the imperial expansion. In 1906, the Russian state was declared “one and indivisible” (Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii [PSZRI], 1906, p. 456). This novel and

generic definition of the Russian statehood stood in immediate contradiction to the autonomous status of the Grand Duchy of Finland stipulated in the next article of the same Fundamental Laws (PSZRI, 1906, p. 456). The structure of sovereignty created in the course of the development of the Russian Empire was vertically shaped and included both inclusive and differentiated treatment of territories and groups of population (more often it targeted legal entities and groups while the territorial or horizontal dimension of the imperial sovereignty came rather late in its history). Modern constitutional law was largely shaped by ideas of rational systematization of territorial government and nation-centered optics. The Fundamental Laws of the Russian Empire combined the tradition of layered imperial sovereignty and the modern nation-centered constitutional vision. The nation-centered formula of “one and indivisible” state might have smoothed Nicholas II’s acceptance of the constitutional reform (even though he remained personally opposed to this constitutional compromise in view of his mystical and nationalist conception of the Russian monarchy (Wortman, 2000, pp. 392–438)). Still the Fundamental Laws that were in force for this last period in the history of the Russian Empire were eclectic if not hybrid; the modern French revolutionary formula of “one and indivisible” political community coexisted with the historically formed and constitutionally framed definition of autonomy.

Retained and reshaped in 1906 the traditional logic of imperial sovereignty helped quite paradoxically to achieve the universal suffrage in the reformed Sejm of the Grand Duchy of Finland. It is true that the Grand Duchy of Finland preserved the constitutional autonomy up to the events of 1905 (Jussila, 1989), unlike other historic autonomies in the Russian Empire (the Polish Kingdom, the Cossack Hetmanate, Bessarabia, or the Baltic provinces). However, immediately prior to the revolution of 1905 the Grand Duchy of Finland experienced a wave of russification that aimed at thorough centralization, the legal justification for which stressed the supreme authority of the Russian emperor over the concept of the layered sovereignty of the empire. The modern practice of boycott and political terror (assassination of governor-general Bobrikov) helped stop this centralization campaign (Polvinen, 1995). The legacy of this period was the consolidation of different Finnish political parties (Finnish and Swedish) that adopted the so-called Big Petition of 1904 (Jussila, 2009). Already this petition called for universal suffrage and restoration of autonomous status of the Grand Duchy of Finland. There was an interesting local dynamics behind the universal suffrage claim. The mass political participation in the resistance to Bobrikov policies was one factor. The other factor was a suspicion directed at Swedish political parties that their political project aimed at consolidation of political power that was traditionally held in the Nobility House of the Duchy’s quad-cameral Sejm. Thus, the legacy of 1904

called for universal suffrage (i.e., a thorough inclusion of the Finnish part of the population into political life), the unicameral parliament (the parting of the ways with the nobility's dominance in the Sejm), and the proportional system of representation in a reformed parliament (in order to protect the interests of the Swedes and estates without resort to a bicameral or multicameral parliament).

The Russian government shelved the petition of 1904 and suspended the work of the Sejm. The reports by the general-governor Ivan Obolensky from before the spike of the 1905 crisis informed the emperor that the political forces of the Grand Duchy of Finland were led by the Swedish noble activists and pan-Scandinavian federalists who "hated" the Russian state and would take no measure other than the full separation of the Grand Duchy of Finland from the empire (National Archives of Finland [NAF], 1904, 1905a). This Swedish noble elite dominated through the constitutional movement the Nobility's and Burgers' Houses of the Sejm, while the situation in the Clergy and Peasant Houses was different and they could be expected to be traditionally loyal to the emperor. In the logic of a nationalizing empire, the constitutionalism and legalism of Finnish political activists were interpreted as a threat to imperial sovereignty and it was believed that the retention of supreme authority could only be achieved through naked force. In the mind of the emperor, this picture must have resembled the situation in Russia: noble activists were at the forefront of the liberal opposition that pressed for the constitutional reform, while the "people" was assumed to be traditionally loyal to the tsar.

In October of 1905, there was a very different situation: the imperial government lost control in the Duchy and the rest of the empire. The white (bourgeois) and red (workers) Finnish militia jointly carried out the police functions even in the capital of the Duchy (Bakhturina, 2006). Obolensky pleaded to send more troops to restore control. But due to the Russo-Japanese war and the general strike in Russia the troops were not forthcoming. The next report from the same governor-general advised the emperor to accept the demands of the Great Petition of 1904. How could such a turnaround happen in the matter of weeks in the head of this particular governor-general and how could the emperor not think that his governor-general had gone mad?

Reading carefully the paper trail leading to the October manifesto (NAF, 1905b), one sees that the paradoxical acceptance by the Russian emperor of the ultra-modern parliamentary system for the Grand Duchy of Finland was made possible by a shift of perspective from the nationalizing empire to the traditional repertoire of imperial sovereignty. Seen from the perspective of imperial sovereignty, the demands of the Big Petition of 1904 were not revolutionary and from the legal viewpoint did not touch the so-called "State Form Law" that regulated relations between the empire and the Duchy. The seemingly radical demand of universal suffrage turned out to concern the elections to

the body of self-government of the Duchy and was thus considered to be an internal affair of the Grand Duchy and quite in line with the retention of institutions of self-government in the rest of the empire. The experience of other self-government organs in the Duchy showed the moderate political disposition of representatives that concerned themselves chiefly with local affairs. There was an experience with women's participation in municipal self-government and the results were positive. The renewed logic of imperial sovereignty cast the Finnish situation in a legal perspective and foregrounded the individual treatment of this part of the imperial realm in accordance with local peculiarities of the Duchy and the pluralism of the imperial space as a whole.

It is also possible to see that this decision-making also involved the political calculation of actors who wanted to preserve the monarchical regime. The extension of political rights in the Duchy to the common people, including women, that is, beyond the Swedish noble elite and "urban educated and semi-educated classes," was in line with the concurrent deliberation of the electoral law for the Russian parliament and could be seen as a Caesarist political manipulation or illiberal populism. But this move was also consistent with techniques of "management of rebellious imperial intermediaries" by the imperial sovereign (Burbank & Cooper, 2010, pp. 13–14). The result was the second October Manifesto (issued on October 22, 1905) which, like in the manifesto of October 17 covering Russia, promised civil and political rights and, unlike the earlier Manifesto, committed the crown to the reform of the Sejm on the basis of universal suffrage.

The statute of the reformed Sejm was, however, considered by the special conference in March and April of 1906 in St. Petersburg (NAF, 1906a) to which representatives of Finland were invited. The legal ground for this was the concern with the prerogatives of the Grand Duke of Finland. The Grand Duchy of Finland was represented by the senators of the Grand Duchy of Finland Leo Mechelin and N. Gripenberg and state secretary for the Grand Duchy of Finland Lanhoff. The empire was represented by senator and professor of law Nikolai Sergeevsky (known for his Russian nationalist sympathies) and senator Nikolai Garin. The chairperson of the conference was the chairman of the department of laws of the State Council Eduard Frisch.

The conference revealed a few contentious issues, including the situation with the officers from the Grand Duchy serving in the imperial army and quite emotional discussion of women's political rights. Unexpectedly, it moved from consideration of vertical relations between the Grand Duke and the political community of the Duchy to uncovering the horizontal entanglement and hybridity of the imperial space. The most controversial of the issues under discussion was the question of potential discrimination of Russian subjects vis-à-vis the citizens of Finland,

the former meaning those subjects of the Russian Emperor who did not additionally enjoy rights as subjects of the Grand Duchy. The participants in the discussion used different designations that often seemed excessive or oxymoronic: “natural subjects of the empire,” the “native population of the empire,” or “the Russian subjects” (NAF, 1906a). This linguistic uncertainty revealed ambiguous and shifting boundaries in the gradient of imperial subjecthood and belonging (Cooper, 2014; Khoury & Glebov, 2017). Prior to October 1905 there was no problem with this gradient of imperial subjecthood because there had been no universal suffrage in the Grand Duchy, nor had there been political rights granted to the rest of the subjects of the Russian Empire. After October 1905 “Russian subjects” in the rest of the empire were granted political rights, but by fact of movement and residence in the Grand Duchy they happened to be deprived of any political rights because they fell between the two reformed systems. They fell between the two reformed systems because both did not take into account the non-territorial aspects of political belonging in an empire. At the same time, Sergeevsky pointed out, that Finnish citizens could take part in the Duma elections if they “happened to be in the Empire” (this meant outside of the Grand Duchy of Finland, but within the borders of the Russian Empire) and qualify by criteria of the electoral law to the State Duma. The Finland representatives argued that the political rights were unthinkable without a bounded citizenship and the solution could be the re-registration of “imperial subjects” in the Finnish citizenship. This contention was not resolved at the conference, the emperor in the end, quite surprisingly, agreed with the Finnish proposition but also issued a directive to the Senate of the Grand Duchy of Finland “to elaborate without any delay a new statute on acquisition of the rights of citizens of the Grand Duchy of Finland by the “native-born population of empire” (NAF, 1906b). This directive played a crucial role later in the renewed attempts at Russification of the Grand Duchy when the revolution subsided and the logic of the nationalizing empire returned to the imperial center.

What also remained unclear from the deliberations in 1906 was the relationship between the future Russian parliament and the Sejm of the Grand Duchy of Finland. Even though an earlier proposal in the Bulygin Duma project envisioned a peculiar mechanism of inclusion of representatives of the reformed Sejm of the Grand Duchy of Finland into the session of the State Duma for consideration of legislation regarding the affairs of the Duchy, this scheme was not adopted and the question of relationship between the Sejm and Duma was postponed. Members of the State Council openly remarked that raising a question of relations between two parliaments could bring in detrimental effects to the fragile compromise agreed upon on the status of the Finland’s autonomy within the empire and that a different and more flexible approach was required (Tagantsev, 1919). The logic of

popular sovereignty even in a pseudo-constitutional political arrangement could powerfully disrupt the composite and hybrid political space of empire. This is what happened after the revolution in the empire subsided and the Stolypin government returned to the policy of centralization with regard to the Grand Duchy of Finland. The law of June 1910 returned to the Bulygin Duma proposal of inclusion of representatives from the Sejm into the State Council and State Duma. Those representatives were envisioned as representatives of the entire population of the Grand Duchy, and therefore the State Duma (the lower house of the Russian parliament) acquired quite paradoxically a character of the upper house of parliament. This representation was used by Stolypin as a ground to legitimize the right of the Duma to pass laws with respect to the “entangled affairs of the empire and the Grand Duchy” that is to cover the big Russification program with the fig leaf of popular consent. The nationalizing and conservative policy of Stolypin fully endorsed the notion of undivided popular sovereignty (in his case for the purpose of unification of imperial subjecthood and political space), but this policy backfired later in 1917 when Finnish politics embraced the notion of undivided popular sovereignty in the form of parliamentary sovereignty of the Finnish nation (Ihalainen, 2017, pp. 173–185).

The case of Grand Duchy of Finland prompted critically minded Russian legal scholars to introduce an unconventional angle on political theories underpinning the political debates during the reform of 1905–1906. Concerned with the issue of composite political space, one such critically minded legal scholar Sergey Korf (1908), who read constitutional law at the imperial University of Helsingfors/Helsinki, made the point that both conservative and democratic political camps in Russia (otherwise bitterly opposed to one another) shared a common concept of bounded and undivided sovereignty. The conservatives and some of liberals followed the German mainstream legal theories on the supreme political value of the state and its undivided sovereignty. The radical democratic currents (other liberal and socialists) followed the logic of popular sovereignty and the homogenizing concept of the “people” in the sense of bounded political community (Korf, 1915). Drawing on the political processes in the contemporaneous British Empire (Korf wrote on autonomy in the colonies of the British empire and then followed the phenomenon of imperial conferences) and mindful of the paradoxes of the political reform in the Grand Duchy of Finland, Korf highlighted the blind spot in the current political debate: “In our days the difference between a province and a sovereign state comprises a gradient of dozens of steps, transitory and often hard-to-recognize hybrid and mixed forms, which no longer fit the old theory of state law” (Korf, 1908, 1914, 1917, p. 93). His suggestion was to reconsider the theories of sovereignty and develop a new theory of federalism, which

aimed both at internal devolution of the space of the modern state (allowing emergence of autonomous political representation) and outward universalization of sovereignty through the creation of supra-state organizations (with supra-state political representation). Written from the perspective of legal theory, this was rather a thought experiment with no lasting practical consequences, even though Korf was involved in the administration of the Grand Duchy of Finland after February of 1917. Still, his critical and unorthodox legal and political vision contributed to the expansion of political imagination at the moment of the transformation of the Russian Empire in 1917 and helped empower approaches to the post-imperial political space at the time of the Constituent Assembly of 1917–1918 that were not based on the model of territorial and undivided national sovereignty (Gerasimov, 2017).

The state дума as an imperial parliament?

Potential dangers of popular sovereignty were not on the mind of the most vocal political activists in the Russian oppositional movement who prepared themselves for the work in the first Russian elected parliament in spring of 1906. Seen as a secured bulwark against the autocracy, the first Russian parliament was the voice of the “*terra incognita* of the people” (in the words of the liberal activist of the Great Reforms Fyodor Rodichev) and the sign of “the maturity of the Russian nation” (in the lead article by Petr Struve from the new *fin-de-siecle* generation of Russian intellectuals; Rodichev, 1983, p. 91; Struve, 1906a, p. 1). In short, the Duma was seen as a progressive step forward taken by Russia to modern political forms based on popular sovereignty.

However, there was an alternative discourse emerging in the space of novel Russian public and electoral politics that reflected the experience of the first Dumas and electoral campaign’s alliances and which started to edge the slogan of popular sovereignty. The official and opposition’s statistics of the electoral results stressed the ethnic, religious, and territorial diversity that surfaced in the first Russian parliament (Borodin, 1907; Russian National Library, 1906). One of the radical liberals Viktor Obninskii (1916) concluded his impressions on the first physical gathering of the Duma deputies in the Winter Palace and Taurida Palace with an observation that the Duma “appeared to be an imperial parliament of the constitutional federal state” dominated by “local, regional, and national interests” (p. 213). Was this parliamentary experiment doomed because of the ethnic divisions in the political space of the Russian Empire? Were not Struve and other national liberals right in assuming that the political solidarity and stability of the majority in parliament depended on the civic nation?

The Russian State Duma in 1906 and 1907 proved both sides wrong. The first two State Dumas unveiled not just the

variety of particularisms (ethnic, estate, religious, and regional), but the alternative political language and imaginary that was not compatible with the normative nationalizing discourse. What is even more curious is that the neat differentiation of the political space of the empire along ethnic lines as was initially suggested by Obninskii did not occur in the process of constitution of parliamentary groups and their languages of self-description. What made the first Russian parliament imperial was not that there were far more representatives from the imperial peripheries (west, east, and south) than in London or Paris. It is not the numbers that mattered, but the uncertain picture of the dynamic political process that included fluid taxonomies of difference (ethnic, territorial and non-territorial, religious, estate, or class) and varying understanding and misunderstanding of key terms of the parliamentary debates: autonomy, federalism, nationality, citizenship, language, justice, and property.

Nowhere was the phenomenon of hybrid identification and self-description more evident than in the structure of political groupings of the first and second State Duma. The alignments of deputies in the first and second Duma were defined on the basis of incongruous and asymmetrical criteria. However, in the space of the Duma politics, they were taken by new political actors not as structural determinants but as a resource for different political strategies in the process of negotiating the architecture of a new political community.

The parliamentary groups based on the party electoral ticket included right-wing parties (*pravye*) and monarchists, the Union of October 17, moderate progressives, the Party of the Democratic Reform, the Constitutional-Democratic (Kadet) party, the Labor group (*Trudoviks*), the Populist-Socialists, the Socialist-Revolutionaries, and the Social-Democrats (which in the first Duma were primarily Georgian Mensheviks elected from the Caucasus). Shortly before the dissolution of the first Duma and in the second Duma the group without party affiliation (largely peasants) was formed, who refrained from taking on a distinct political platform but still deemed it important to institutionalize themselves. The structure of parliamentary groups also included the group of Muslim deputies; the group of regional representatives from Siberia; regionalist and estate group of the Cossack deputies; and nationally defined groups of the Polish *Kolo*, Ukrainian *hromada*, Estonians, Armenians, Latvians, and Lithuanians. Furthermore, deputies from North-Western and South-Western regions bonded together on a combination of linguistic and regional identification (Lednitskii, 1906; Borodin, 1907; Semyonov, 2009). The most hybrid parliamentary group was the Autonomists that comprised collective and individual membership and displayed elective affinity to the program of liberal social reformism and claims of national and territorial autonomy and even federalization of the Empire. It is important to note that the structure of politically articulated diversity manifested in the formation of parliamentary

groups did not always reflect the statistical distribution of Duma deputies according to social status, confession, religion, or nationality. While the aide of Count Witte Dmitriev-Mamonov busied himself with the task of singling out Jewish deputies in the elected corpus of the Duma (Russian National Library, 1906), thus projecting the existence of a homogeneous group united by their nationally inspired political program, the Jewish deputies themselves refrained from forming a distinct Jewish group and entered into the parliamentary groups of the Kadet party and Labor (Trudovaya), while continuing their representation of the interests of the Jewish communities (Gassenschmidt, 1995, p. 36).

The evolution of the parliamentary group of Autonomists demonstrates a peculiar process of redefining the mobilized imperial diversity. The group of autonomists reflected the rise of national movements in the 1905 revolution and partially originated in the 1905 congresses of non-Russian professionals and civic activists in St. Petersburg that represented non-Russian national movements (Azerbaijani, Armenian, Byelorussian, Georgian, Jewish, Kazakh, Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish, Tatar, Ukrainian, and Estonian) from different regions: the Baltic region, western borderlands, the Kingdom of Poland, South Caucasus, and Central Asia (the steppe region; Shrag, 1906). There was an understanding among activists of those national movements that the nationality question ought to be brought to the Duma, especially with regard to the preceding policies of Russification, and that the common principle of constitution of a political alliance between those groups will be the principle of nationality. But more often than not the most vocal representatives of the national movements were not elected to the first Russian parliament.

The group of Autonomists was formed when the first Duma was in session. This emergence of the group as well as other groups reflected the pragmatic need to forge alliances on the Duma floor and structure the work on the agenda of the parliamentary session. Also important was that the first days of the Duma debates revealed the impossibility to contain the discussion of the “nationality questions” in a separate item of the agenda. The discussion of approaches to the agrarian question, which was a burning element of the revolution of 1905, showed the entanglement of the agrarian question to dimensions of imperial subjecthood, different regional legal traditions, and conceptions about local and particular groups of population (Russian State Historical Archive [RSHA], 1906a, 1906b). Earlier assumptions of advocates of neatly disentangled “nationality questions” gave way to a loose program of autonomism that parted with the concept of exclusive and dominant idioms of nationality and aimed “to transform the collapsing centralist Russian Empire into a strong and united empire of peoples” (Slavinskii, 1906, p. 38). In other words, the hybridity and asymmetric identities of political actors of the first Russian parliament led to a political

vision that was both inclusive and pluralist. The pluralism of this vision could accommodate advocacy of linguistic and cultural group rights as well as territorial and non-territorial rights. The vision of autonomism sought political solidarity rather than fracturing it into national compartments. The latter aspect is evident in the debates on the program of federalization of the empire in the autonomist group. The reason why federalism remained part of the language of autonomism was not because it promised symmetric federal rearrangement of the space of the empire. Rather, the meaning of federalism conveyed the sense that not only the most developed national movements in the empire could be recognized and their claim of autonomy honored. This anti-hierarchical rhetorical gesture was directed against the exclusivity of the representatives of the Polish national democracy, their advocacy of exclusive autonomy for the Polish lands in the Duma and meant political inclusion of other parts of the empire into a decentralized political future of the post-imperial space without uniformity or symmetry (de Courtenay & Ignacy Courtenay, 1906).

The peculiar combination of inclusion and recognition of difference, universalism and particularism in the work of the democratic State Dumas prevented the emergence of the language of national minority in the post-imperial visions of the political space. The language of national minority could have reinforced the discourse of popular and territorial sovereignty and would have shaped differently the outcome of the 1917 imperial crisis in Russia, may be more in the direction of the breakup of the Habsburg Empire and the collapse of the Ottoman empire. The inclusive and hybrid political space of empire as it emerged in the first State Dumas of the Russian Empire precluded this political scenario.

A puzzle of Moisey Ostrogorsky

Preparing to become an MP in the first Russian parliament, Moisey Ostrogorsky opposed the proposal of forming an exclusive Jewish parliamentary group in the first State Duma (Krol', 2008, pp. 34–35). The question was discussed at the meeting of the Union for the Attainment of the Full Rights for Jewish People of Russia in May 1906, the union played an important role in political mobilization of the Jewish voters, but it was not a party-based association. The union was a civic-political movement and its ranks included different ideological-party visions, such as the constitutional-democratic, Zionist, and autonomist. It is possible to view the choice by Ostrogorsky as a reflection of political culture of the populist intelligentsia, which, as Max Weber and Russian liberal-conservative critics of the 1905 revolution suggested, lacked appreciation of political forms and discipline needed for modernization of Russia (Struve, 1906b; Weber et al., 1995). But Moisey Ostrogorsky's opposition to the Jewish

parliamentary group and his general anxiety about replicating western forms of parliamentary life was coming from somewhere else. His critical attitude to western models of parliamentarism was based on his groundbreaking political sociological research into the transformation of parliamentary life under the challenge of mass politics in Britain and the United States (Ostrogorsky, 1902; Weber, 2007, p. 340; Pombeni, 1994). Inspired by James Bryce and British debate on the Americanization of British politics, Ostrogorsky studied the “political forces” behind the democratic government, rather than “political forms.” His pioneering study of political parties in the United States and Britain resulted in a grim picture of bureaucratization, mechanization, and closure of political life that was brought about by political party organizations as chief and unregulated by constitution instruments of representative government. Ostrogorsky discovered that modern political parties were produced by emergence of mass politics that evolved with the process of democratization of modern representative government. These modern political machines diminished the space of freedom of discussion and reflection of changing social forces in a representative government. Ostrogorsky’s pathbreaking political sociology informed his choices as a political figure elected to the first Russian parliament.

In 1905, Ostrogorsky was offered a chair in political science at Cleveland University in the United States, but instead remained in the Russian Empire and ran the electoral campaign as a “democrat” and “Jew” in ethnically mixed Grodno province. Ostrogorsky was elected to the State Duma by the clear majority of mixed Jewish and non-Jewish votes (46 electors out of 60). In the Duma, he was chosen to be the speaker of the committee on Rules and Regulations of the first State Duma and made a crucial contribution to pre-empting the emergence of majoritarian political culture and impact of party machines (among his contributions are the multiple membership in the parliamentary groups and low threshold required for a legislative initiative and constitution of parliamentary group; Ostrogorsky, 1906; RSHA, 1906c). Looking at his choice to remain in Russia, one can see that the grim intellectual prognosis for modern parliamentary political life under the challenge of mass society did not turn Ostrogorsky into a pessimist. In the Russian context of belated political reform, Ostrogorsky thought that a different modality of representative system could be shaped, the one that did not depend on political party machines and majoritarian rule. In fact, his intellectual opposition to political party machines coincided with the pragmatics of the first elections to the Russian parliament which were held in mixed and hybrid imperial society and were ran on the basis of coalitions and multiple and non-exclusive political affiliations. His own successful bid for an elected office proved that there was a room for practicing democratic politics without an exclusive party or ethnic affiliation.

Conclusion

This article advanced an argument against narrating the history of Russian constitutional and parliamentary reform in the normative canon of modern political history of representative government and symbolic geography of divergent historical trajectories of the “west” and “east.” It shows the importance of contextual and entangled analysis of the global transformation of political life under the challenge of imperial diversity and mass politics for parliamentary history. The entangled analysis should be differentiated from a comparative historical analysis. The entangled analysis allows to capture the circuits of ideas and comparisons drawn by historical actors in the synchronous space of politics of the early 20th century. As John Redmond, the leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party stressed the positive example of the “Csar’s promise of home rule to Poland” in the Russian Empire (HHC, 1914, p. 911), so did Sergey Korf and Moisey Ostrogorsky drew in their political critique and practice on contemporaneous trends in the “west” that were “coming home” in the Grand Duchy of Finland, Grodno, and St. Petersburg.

The contextual analysis requires situating modern political dynamics in the reality of imperial formations or imperial states, and this reality was equally true in the west and east of Europe (Burbank & Cooper, 2010, 2019). Even though the challenge of imperial diversity prior to World War I was not uniform in the British empire and the Russian Empire, this challenge was a universal factor underlying the tensions in the working of political representation both with long history and relatively new, as in the case of Russia.

The idea that western European countries by the early 20th century had a working democratic government thanks to the formation of nation-state in the metropole of the colonial empire needs to be reconsidered together with the idea of symbiotic relations between nation and democracy. Compared with the crisis over the Third Irish Home Rule Bill, the Russian imperial center managed rather successfully the ultra-modern reform of representative government in the Grand Duchy of Finland. The condition for this success was a shift from the logic of nationalizing empire to the traditional habit of practicing layered and divided sovereignty. But even in the case of territorially separated Grand Duchy, questions of overlapping citizenship-subjecthood undermined the settlement that was premised on compartmentalization of imperial space and ran against mainstream legal and political discourses on bounded and undivided sovereignty. Similarly, in the State Duma, the shifting and asymmetric identifications of the corpus of MPs proved wrong both the idea of unifying national representation and the discourse of representation of bounded national groups. The development of the language of autonomism and federalism in the Duma was an attempt to both democratize the political imaginary and to eschew the dangers of homogenization and bounded groupness.

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