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# Power, Religion and Marriage among Colonists

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Julia Malitska, *Negotiating Imperial Rule: Colonists and Marriage in the Nineteenth Century Black Sea Steppe*, Södertörn doctoral dissertations 135 (Huddinge: Södertörns högskola 2017). 392 s.

Julia Malitskas doctoral dissertation *Negotiating imperial rule* is about German colonists who voluntarily migrated to the northern Black Sea steppe in the beginning of the nineteenth century. The migration was part of the expansion and consolidation of the Russian empire. The Russian tsar promoted migration to the borderlands of the Empire. The aim of the migration was to make this area economically prosperous. Each family was reimbursed for starting up a farm and was given the status of colonists, meaning they were free from taxes the first five to ten years, and were also given some other privileges mostly connected to their civil status. But there were also restrictions on moving and marriage. The people Julia Malitska is studying came from southern and western Germany and most of them were of Lutheran Evangelists belief, but some were Roman Catholics. And there were also some of more secteristic beliefs. Julia Malitska is focussing on the *marriage regime* that developed and how this was interrelated to *imperial rule*. The main objective of the study is "in what ways the marriage of the colonists was legally constructed and defined" (p. 27) and how practices on family formation and disintegration had impact on the imperial governance.

After the introduction where the outlines of the thesis are presented, the following chapter presents an overview of the growth of the Russian empire. The politics that forced Cossacks and Tatars, and other people living in the studied area, to leave or to subordinate, and the promoted migration of people from western and central Europe is described. The tsar needed loyal farmers working the lands, being productive and in that way stabilizing the

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region. Each family was getting money, as a loan, to start up agriculture. Everybody should be farmers, no matter their competence and experience. The proceeding process of forcing people to leave the area still cast shadows on ongoing conflicts in the Crime area and Ukraine.

There are four empirical chapters that like an onion reveal layers to get a better view on what is in the core. The first empirical chapter called "Guardians of good moral" is on those who represented the empire and the power in the region. There was a strict hierarchy between the administrative clerks and their superior, but also a hierarchy within the clergy and the ecclesiastical organisation. These two blocks were supposed to work together, but they often failed, leading to more or less chaotic situations. In this chapter Julia Malitska gives a thorough overview of the normative system regulating the living of the colonists, but also in contrast to the ethnic Russians. It was established a communication chain with a strict hierarchy. As it sometimes were shortage of priests and clerks, the colonists had to wait to get permission to marry, remarry, separate or divorce, as it had to be approved.

In the next chapter called "The golden cage" the focus is on the colonists and the governmentality of their living. The colonists were privileged, but the rules put limits to both their geographical and social mobility. What Julia Malitska calls *marriage regime* evolved, meaning that marriage became more and more bureaucratized. Since marriage is part of reproduction of both human and material capital it was also included in confessional orders. In this case the marriage is a vital part of religion, though the values can differ between different religious denominations. However, Julia Malitska shows in this chapter the growth of a normative system on how to handle marriage among colonists promoting them continuing being prosperous farmers. The economic perspective dominated.

The regulations of marriage and how it worked in practice is the focus in chapter 5 called "Locking in by locking out". The marriage regime became clearly visible when the borders of the colonist status were crossed. The marriage between colonists and non-colonists is analysed, where the unbalance between coming spouses is discussed. Especially interesting is the very clear difference that is being revealed in the study of the interests of the people getting married and the interest of the empire. For the empire and its representatives, the economic aspects were prioritized. The prime focus was to keep the farm economically stable. This process was performed in many stages. Julia Malitska differs between the pre-consistorial phase and when the consistory had made a decision. In the first phase the local government was the gate-keeper for what marriages that could proceed or could be dissolute. In the second stage the consistorial verdict came back to the local government and the decision could be implemented.

Because of living conditions with a high mortality rate and the priority on agrarian economy, the remarriage of widows was an iterant type of matter. Here we can also see aspects of gender as if the widow left the colony she had to pay back her debt to the state. This was also the case when young girls had to pay their share of the family debt, if leaving the colony. Normally, the debt was paid by taxes during a life-time. The colonist status with both priorities and duties were the same, no matter sex.

In chapter six, "Conforming the norms", is focus on the dissolution of marriage through different alternatives. Here is the religious denomination of most importance, as in the Roman Catholic belief, marriage is one of the sacraments, meaning a special way the grace of God can reach the individual. Therefore can marriage only be annulled being declared not valid. In these cases that are revealed in the archives, the influence of the consistories becomes much more visible. The pre-consistorial phase is more emphasized concerning dissolution of marriage and the process became heavily bureaucratized. There were many instances a file on divorce or separation had to go through. Also the shortage of clerks, priests and pastors could have big influence on the individual in question. In this chapter there is also a manifold of narratives, showing the awareness of marriage regime but also corrected narratives to reach the best deal for the individual.

Finally in chapter seven Julia Malitska discusses her results in light of earlier research, but also in relation to her epistemological state of opinion. Her work fills a new piece in the history of the Russian Empire and its borderlands. The colonist status was abandoned in 1871.

A point of departure for the study is that historians need to go to regional or local archives to find out how politics was practiced and how it interfered with people. In the regional archives you can find source material concerning everyday matters and collect voices from the people. It is shown in the thesis that the content of the regional archives are much richer than the central archives. However, Malitska has mapped the upcoming bureaucratization in order to find and follow the documents concerning the colonists. Julia Malitska has vacuumed the regional archives in Odessa and Dniprotrevosk. But also read a lot of published sources. Her work as historian has almost been like a detective trying to find out what happened in the colonies.

The way Julia Malitska handle the sources have had two bases. The first one is microhistory, studying individuals, details and what was not outspoken. The second is close to a social constructivist view focussing on intersection, regimes and "situational". The main difference between microhistory and postmodernism is the position of the researcher and the opinion on how to reach knowledge. Using microhistory falls back on the sources and their information. With a social constructivist methodology it also matters

who the researcher is, what experiences he/she have had, which have impact on the way the sources are interpreted. Both methodologies fall back on materiality but they differ in the view how knowledge can be claimed. This means that there are references to both Donna Haraway and to Norman Fairclough, but it is not explicitly outspoken how Malitska relates to them. The concept "situational" is used single, not connected to knowledge.

Also the perspectives of gender and patriarchy are pronounced. One important concept is patriarchal equilibrium. Patriarchal equilibrium is an interesting concept that could have been put more emphasize on. The colonist status did not fit the patriarchal idea; especially not in the way women could reach positions. As focus was on economy and to keep the farms profitable, women were in some situations rewarded power. I think this could have been given a little bit more space in the thesis.

The results have an empirical base. The actors are given voice. But some results are won through the interpretation of meaning, power and politic. The Imperial rule is the main focus as it was implemented by representatives for different levels of power. A very conscious politic was directed towards the colonists that wanted the subjects to act in a special direction, a wanted behaviour. Sometimes, especially in questions related to religion, there were different views from the ecclesiastical authorities and the tsar. Therefore the decisions on separation, divorce and abandoned spouses were time consuming. This led to unselfish procedure among the colonists. They didn't want to wait long time for decision so spouses moved apart or married sometimes with a hidden approval from the local authorities.

In this area north of the Black Sea, there were no landlords. The colonists were given land to use and make profitable. They could transfer the land undivided to an heir, but they could not sell it. The land formally belonged to the Colony but it was only the tsar that could sell the land. These circumstances had a great influence on how the colonists married. It also explains why the bureaucratization concerning marriage regimes developed. It was through marriage a colonist could extend the farming land area. If a colonist died and there was no heir, another colonist could take over the land if the colony approved. A developing inequality took form, but the question of class is not highlighted in the thesis. In the analysis are all colonists peasants and the social relations discussed are sex and marital status.

Being a colonist was connected with rules. A colonist could not move. If he, she or the family did they had to pay back the loan they were originally given by the authorities. A colonist could also only marry another colonist. Such marriages were generally quite simple to handle. The couple should be capable and have the resources to manage the farm in a profitable way. If the conclusion was that they were not capable they were not allowed to

marry. The difficult decisions came with the cross-border marriages, when a colonist wanted to marry a non-colonist. In some of the examples of cross-border marriages, it seems like the "colonist order" is overruling the gender order. A widow of a colonist with children was allowed to remarry an outsider. However, the children were still her responsibility and only if special contracts were written became the new husband legal guardian of his wife's children. This could sometimes clash with the ecclesiastical authorities. In other circumstances it would have been rare, or impossible, that a woman that married still got the power on her children.

One aspect of the thesis is the cooperation between the representatives of the empire and representatives of the ecclesiastical authorities. Most often the representatives of the empire had the final decision, but in some cases the ecclesiastical authorities were allowed to prevail, for instance on cases with illegitimate children, but also cases on disintegration of marriage. It would have been interesting with a deeper discussion on why the ecclesiastical authorities were given this space.

In the thesis there are also interesting results that confirms spouses' behaviour to overrule the marriage regimes. Narratives were sometimes corrected by the local authorities, as the colonists tried to put themselves in a better position. As an abandoned spouse could easily get the marriage dissolved strategies were applied that one spouse moved out to some nearby city.

Julia Malitska has made a major work and used a huge amount of sources and literature for this thesis. It is an impressive work. The objective of the study is clearly formulated, but the research questions are however positioned on many places in the thesis. It is a very complex story that is told and each empirical chapter itself could have been developed into a thesis. As a reader there have been many threads to follow and recall, but Julia Malitska has managed to guide the reader through the colonies of the empire. This means however, that we can find information on research questions and state of research in different places and some information has been repeated. The thesis could either have been shortened by a hundred pages, or two or three more theses could have been written. There is so much knowledge in this thesis.

I do not fully agree how the methodological perspectives are performed, and I would have seen the research questions appear more pregnant. However this critic does not shadow that Julia Malitska has done a great work.

I do think the most interesting result is that the colonist status overruled so many other "Orders", especially the gender order. The imperial rule focussed on economy, not on individuals, and explains why it affected the patriarchal equilibrium.

The main results of this dissertation are how the *imperial situation*, as it is called, in many ways, and on many levels, had impact on the lives of the German colonists. The result also visualizes the lack of control and the cracks in the governance of the empire.