

**REVIEW**

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***Imperija prostranstwa. Chrestomatija po geopolitike i geokulturie  
Rossii.* Ed. D.N. Zamyatin i A.N. Zamyatin**

The Russian geographer, Dimitri Zamyatin, is one of the most intriguing representatives of the contemporary Russian geopolitical thought. He represents the critical approach to geopolitical research and focuses his scientific interests on spatial visions that dominate in the Russian public opinion. In his publications he attempts to focus his attention on presenting geographical images that are present in the Russian society, myths that are connected with Russian space and their influence on perceiving the world. By assuming that the world that surrounds the people is a social construct (created by society), his main area of interest is shaping of geographic images and their influence on social life, as well as political decisions.

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The Russian geographer points at the fact that the system of geographic images that is dominant in a particular society creates a specific space for geographical representations (the meta-geographical space). This space is the basis for forming geopolitical and politico-geographic beliefs of particular social groups. Therefore, what is needed to fully grasp the ideas of the Russian foreign policy is understanding of how the Russians perceive themselves and the world that surrounds them. It is also important to be aware of the geopolitical map that functions in the minds of Russian elites and society and how the Russian „geopolitical imagination” is shaping. Zamyatin also notes that the projections of the outside world, myths, stereotypes, fears and frustrations are substantially important in studying particular communities as they, to some extent, „mirror” the problems of the particular community.

An important work by Zamyatin is *Imperia prostranstwa. Chrestomatija po geopolitike i geokulturie Rossii*, published in 2003 by ROSSPEN, a Moscow publishing house. It's a broad author's choice of publications on Russian space. Zamyatin has chosen from the

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abundance of works on Russian cultural legacy, excerpts from those that came to him as exerting the strongest influence on Russian spatial reflection, on the image of Russia itself in its citizens's eyes, as well as the perception of foreign countries. The chosen pieces of texts present the most popular Russian spatial myths and show in what way the Russians perceive their geopolitical space.

Among the authors found in this study are such names as: Philotheus, Alexander Pushkin, Nikolai Fedotov, Nikolai Gogol, Fyodor Tyutchev, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Mikhail Lermontov, Nikolai Danilevsky, Alexy Chomakov, Konstantin Leontiev, Nikolai Berdyaev, Vladimir Nabokov, Anton Chekov, Vasyl Rozanov, Pawel Milikuov, Nikolai Trubetzkoy, Vladimir Solovyov, and many others. Zamyatin's aim is to describe the diversity and specific character of Russian territory. The description and characteristic of Russian space can be found not only in geographical works but, most of all, in the works of writers, poets, philosophers and historians. It is these works that, according to the Russian geographer, were the most crucial in shaping of geographical and geopolitical images of Russia.

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The author assumes that the identity of a particular country encompasses particular images and reflections on basis of which the „us – them” dichotomy is shaped. While searching for an answer to the questions of how the Russians perceive themselves and the world that surrounds them, their vision of geopolitics and the Russian geopolitical map of the world, Zamyatin reaches to works of poets, writers, historians, philosophers and politicians, but also geographers.

Political relations are determined not only by the current balance of power, but also by vision of the world, values and patterns of behavior that have been passed from generation to generation within particular cultures. The importance of the arts, including literary works, lies in the fact that values that are shaped in time do not perish with passing of the era that they had been formed in, but linger and add up to the „stock” of the available, overall human experience. Culture, therefore, is a factor that determines the identity of subjects that are active in the international space and it should not be excluded in the attempts to understand their actions. The work of various authors is the foundation for national culture, which also

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includes the dominating geopolitical visions. That is why this unique review of Russian culture, along with a commentary from Dimitri Zamyatin, provides an opportunity to understand what elements of culture and traditions influenced Russian perception of the world. It also enables to understand how the Russian image of themselves and the surrounding world shaped and evolved. By referring to the literature, traditions and culture, Zamyatin presents us with such elements that are the bounds of Russian geopolitical thinking and at the same time being the basis for interpretation of the world and political choices.

By showing the Russian geopolitical visions present in the works of Russian philosophers, writers, historians, poets and geographers, Zamyatin draws from the tradition of a French geographer, Yves Lacoste. When in the 70s he founded *Herodote*, one of the most influential magazines on political geography and geopolitics, he focused his interests on the category of „geopolitical visions” , which according to him may be the key to understanding territorial conflicts among communities. „Geopolitical visions” are an element of our

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knowledge about the world that surrounds us, supply us with a specific „world map” and therefore strongly influence our decisions and actions. Lacoste thought that in order to understand the nature of geopolitical conflicts, the key ideas and concepts underlying them have to be identified. The work of Dimitri Zamyatin provides knowledge that is necessary for understanding the very often mythologized vision of the surrounding space.

Zamyatin's work is worth special attention, as among Russian geopoliticians he is one of the few with a universal and original approach to geopolitical analyses. He goes beyond the traditional scientific schemes that were developed at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, in the time of evolution of „classical” geopolitics”. His work is not only an attempt to conceptualize the geopolitical position of Russia in the world. Nor is it merely an attempt to work out a firm development strategy. Most of all, it is an attempt to present Russian spatial visions being at the base of their political activity. This approach refers to Wilhelm Dilthey's concept of „empathizing” (einfühlung), Max Weber's „understanding” (verstehen) and Stanislaw

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Ossowski's „empathy”. It is a strong reference to the sociological tradition of Max Weber. He pointed at the fact that when taking action, subjects ascribe a particular sense to what they are doing. This is why when conducting research it is so important to put oneself in the place of the examined subject and include this fact in the analysis.

Zamyatin's work provides an opportunity for „understanding” the Russian way of perceiving the world by showing the spatial visions that function within the culture. It provides information about Russian fears and aspirations towards the „outside” world and can be recommended to anyone interested in Russian, as well as geopolitical, studies.

***Imperija prostranstwa. Chrestomatija po geopolitike i geokulturie Rossii***, ed. D.N. Zamyatin i A.N. Zamyatin, ROSSPEN, Moscow 2003, p. 717.