

XI Jornadas Interescuelas/Departamentos de Historia. Departamento de Historia. Facultad de Filosofía y Letras. Universidad de Tucumán, San Miguel de Tucumán, 2007.

Early political uses of the parallel Russia/USA in France: From Le Trosne to Tocqueville and Beaumont.

Adamovsky, Ezequiel (UBA / UNLu / CONICET).

Cita:

Adamovsky, Ezequiel (UBA / UNLu / CONICET). (2007). *Early political uses of the parallel Russia/USA in France: From Le Trosne to Tocqueville and Beaumont. XI Jornadas Interescuelas/Departamentos de Historia. Departamento de Historia. Facultad de Filosofía y Letras. Universidad de Tucumán, San Miguel de Tucumán.*

Dirección estable: <https://www.aacademica.org/000-108/856>

Acta Académica es un proyecto académico sin fines de lucro enmarcado en la iniciativa de acceso abierto. Acta Académica fue creado para facilitar a investigadores de todo el mundo el compartir su producción académica. Para crear un perfil gratuitamente o acceder a otros trabajos visite: <https://www.aacademica.org>.

Early Political Uses of the Parallel Russia/USA in France: From Le Trosne to Tocqueville and Beaumont

By Ezequiel Adamovsky*

One of the most important aspects of the making of ‘Western’ identity is the way in which it symbolically constructed geographical space. In other works I have presented evidence of struggles for the definition of Europe’s ‘eastern’ boundary, and for the inclusion/exclusion of Russia in/from ‘Europe’, given her paradoxical location (neither fully European, nor completely Asiatic) in the mind of eighteenth and nineteenth-century Frenchmen.¹ Other authors have analyzed how ‘Western *European*’ identity in France became simply ‘Western’ by the adoption of the model of American liberal democracy as a way out of Europe’s social crisis.² Thus, the exclusion of Russia from the symbolical space of Europe, and the inclusion of the USA as part of the same ‘Western’ world, are two of the most important shifts in the ideological construction of geographical space and in the liberal narrative of ‘civilization’. This article will examine one of the images that contributed the most to the success of those shifts: the parallel Russia/USA, that is, the comparison of the two nations as embodying opposing historical ‘principles’ for the future of humankind. The parallel Russia/USA was popularized by Tocqueville in 1835, and thereafter became part of commonsensical geographical imagination –especially during the Cold War. However, it has an older and revealing ‘prehistory’.

I The Parallel Russia/USA before Tocqueville

To my knowledge, this motive appeared for the first time in a pamphlet by the Physiocrat writer Guillaume Le Trosne, published in 1777, immediately after the American Revolution. But, curiously enough, the parallel was used in a sense quite different from that of later appearances. Thus, whilst complaining of the slower pace of civilization in Europe due to bad laws, old customs and insensible rulers, Le Trosne presents the picture of two nations rapidly heading towards “civilization”³, although along different paths. The USA, in Le Trosne’s view, is soon going to rise to “the most distinguished rank among nations”. There seems to be no limits for the advancement of this “emerging Republic” that has already taken the “Arts” to “perfection”. A great future awaits the USA, inhabited as it is by “wise”, “moderate” and “free” men who know “the rights and duties of man and the citizen”, but are also obedient, and only reclaim the “right to property and free trade”. But there is also another nation undergoing the “revolution” of “civilization”: Russia. Her way to “civilization”, however, was not prepared by the “circumstances”, as was the case for the USA. On the contrary, civilization in Russia had to face the “greatest obstacles”, and was only possible thanks to the “genius of several of her sovereigns”. Thus, Russia proves that “absolute authority” can sometimes be used to achieve

beneficial changes, provided it is “in the hands of an enlightened sovereign”. If that is the case, all the necessary power must be placed in the hands of such a Prince.⁴ Thus, unhappy with European stagnation, Le Trosne perceived two acceptable roads to progress; like most of his fellow Physiocrats, he was ready to embrace enlightened despotism.

A shift in the sense of this parallel can already be perceived in the next appearance I am aware of, in François-Louis comte d'Escherny's “Sur la Russie et la révolution de Pologne”, written at some point between 1791 and 1796. Escherny –a *philosophe* now forgotten, who was very close to the encyclopedists and to Diderot and Rousseau in particular– was in those days re-examining the issue of the limits to equality, undoubtedly under the influence of the events of the French revolution. The main concern of his works is the danger of “equality” or “absolute democracy” and how to overcome it, a theme that the “Ancients” overlooked but which the French revolution “brought to the forefront”.⁵ Thus, comparing Russia and revolutionary France, he noted that “the extremes of democracy and despotism meet”, for one is the “despotism of one person” and the other that of “everyone”, and ended by drawing his parallel between Russia and the USA, which strongly resembles that of Tocqueville:

Notre globe présente aujourd'hui à nos regards deux états situés à ses deux extrémités opposées, dont l'un despotique, est le pendant de l'autre qui se gouverne en république. Tous deux se trouvent dans une position unique sur la terre. Pour s'agrandir et conquérir, des armées leur sont très-inutiles: ils n'ont besoin l'un et l'autre que d'attendre et profiter des circonstances. Les calamités de l'Europe, ses bouleversements, doivent ajouter beaucoup à la puissance et à la grandeur de la Russie et des États-Unis, et conspirer à leur prospérité.⁶

Thus, unlike the still-optimistic liberal Le Trosne, the anxious post-revolutionary liberal Escherny perceived both Russia and the USA as the bearers of the future, but not so much by virtue of their advancement in the road of civilization, as because of a possible collapse of Europe. Russia, in Escherny's account, is depicted in much less flattering colors, which undoubtedly reflects the liberals' loss of confidence in enlightened despotism and changes from above.⁷

In a text by Stendhal written in 1818, the parallel reappears with some novelties:

* Lecturer in Russian History at the Universities of Buenos Aires and Luján. This article was written thanks to the financial support of CONICET and Fundación Antorchas.

La Russie a toujours cru, depuis Pierre le Grand, qu'elle serait, en 1819, la maîtresse de l'Europe, si elle avait le courage de vouloir, et l'Amérique est désormais la seule puissance qui puisse lui résister.⁸

Thus, in Stendhal's vision, as in Escherny's, Europe was still in danger; but Russia emerges here more clearly as a menace, whilst the USA appears, for the first time, as Europe's *savior*. Having taken part in Napoleon's failed campaign against Russia in 1812, it is not surprising that Stendhal felt that way.

A similar shift can be found in a letter by Michel Chevalier, written in 1834, and included in his *Lettres sur l'Amérique du Nord* (1836). In 1833 Chevalier –who had been a member of Saint-Simonian circles and was soon to become a prominent liberal economist and politician–⁹ was commissioned by the government of Thiers to travel to the USA to investigate some issues related to the American economy. Thinking from the USA about the uncertain future of Europe, “weakened” by her “internal struggles”, he writes:

Qui peut dire que les deux grandes figures qui aujourd'hui se dressent aux deux bouts de l'horizon, la première à l'orient, un pied sur Moscou et l'autre prêt à se poser sur Constantinople; la seconde vers le couchant, à demi cachée encore par les immenses forêts du Nouveau-Monde, [...] Qui peut dire que ces deux jeunes colosses [...] ne se partageront pas bientôt la domination de l'Univers?¹⁰

However –and this is new– Chevalier includes the parallel USA/Russia as part of a wider historical narrative. “Civilization”, he argues, “advances from Orient to Occident”; it was born in Asia, and is likely to reach its finest synthesis in the New World.¹¹ Thus, the implication of the parallel becomes evident: even while, due to her military might, Russia may dominate part of the world, civilization is moving towards the USA. Indeed, Chevalier's two-volume description of the USA, like that of Tocqueville (whom he quotes approvingly in a footnote added to the original text), is meant to offer positive alternatives to the European social and political impasse. So, the USA is not only Europe's savior in mere military terms, but as the embodiment of the Old World's finest principles.

The same year, Saint-Marc Girardin –a prominent liberal deputy and ‘proud bourgeois’, professor at the Sorbonne and prolific journalist–¹² also made use of the parallel Russia/USA in his influential *Notices politiques et littéraires sur l'Allemagne*, where he argued that Russia was likely to destroy Europe, in which case the “spirit” of “civilization” would only find shelter in

the USA. Thus, like Chevalier, Saint-Marc Girardin also suggested that European liberals should start to look West.¹³

II The Theoretical Foundations of the New French Liberalism and the Parallel Russia/USA: Tocqueville and Beaumont

This is when Tocqueville comes onto the scene, inserting the parallel Russia /USA in one of the most ambitious political treatises of the century: *De la démocratie en Amérique* (1835).¹⁴ In the famous last passage of the first volume of that book, Tocqueville argued that there were in his days two great nations –the Russians and the Anglo-Americans– which, although starting from different foundations, seemed to be progressing “towards the same goal” of expansion at a quicker pace than any other nation. However, they did so on a different basis: whilst American progress rested on the free “personal interest” and the “strength and the reason of individuals” (that is, “freedom”), Russian expansion was based on the concentration of power in the hands of one man (that is, “servitude”). And he finished by predicting:

Their point of departure is different and their paths diverse; nevertheless, each seems called by some secret design of Providence one day to hold in its hands the destinies of half the world.¹⁵

As we have seen, both the parallel and this prognosis had been stated before and there would not be anything particularly interesting in this new appearance, if there were not a curious paradox in Tocqueville’s statement. As is well known, Tocqueville was absolutely convinced that the advance of democracy in modern times was an undeniable and unstoppable fact. As he repeatedly argued, any political strategy aimed at preserving social privileges, absolutism or a deep social inequality was doomed to failure; the future belonged to democracy. That is why the future belonged also to a democratic society like the USA. But why would it also belong to Russia? Would not the advance of democracy quickly destroy the empire of the Tsars, based as it was on privilege, serfdom, despotism and inequality? Why did Tocqueville state that both the USA and Russia marched towards the *same* goal? He could not be just referring to Russia’s military power, for all his work is dedicated to show that governments are the product of their societies, and he explicitly included Russia in this rule.¹⁶

To resolve this seeming inconsistency, it will be argued that Russia inspired Tocqueville to conceive of the idea of a *new type of despotism* as the inevitable outcome of extreme democracy, which he started to outline in his work. Thus, the parallel USA/Russia allowed Tocqueville to exemplify the two possibilities that awaited modern societies: either a tempered (liberal) democracy, or a despotic egalitarianism that could present itself under different facades. Let us consider now briefly Tocqueville's ideas on the new type of despotism.

As is well known, Tocqueville was mainly worried about the loss of freedom that might follow the modern tendency towards social equality and political democracy. The reason for this potential outcome was the destruction of the counterweights that checked the power of the state in the *Ancien Régime*. As he argues in *De la démocratie en Amérique*, having destroyed all those "individual powers which were able singlehanded to cope with tyranny", the government "inherited all the prerogatives snatched from families, corporations and individuals". From this, it follows that "the sometimes oppressive but often conservative strength of a small number of citizens has been succeeded by the weakness of all". In times of equality, "no man is obliged to put his powers at the disposal of another, and no one has any claim of right to substantial support from his fellow man, each is both independent and weak." This weakness makes the individual "feel the need for some outside help, which he cannot expect from any of his fellows, for they are both impotent and cold. In this extremity he naturally turns his eyes toward that huge entity which alone stands out above the universal level of abasement", that is, the state. On the other hand, every central power "loves equality and favors it", and "worships uniformity", for equality and uniformity "singularly facilitates, extends and secures its influence". Therefore, government in modern times will naturally tend to be centralized, whilst "individual independence and local liberties will always be the products of art". In this respect, America offered a model of that political art which had managed to preserve freedom in the midst of democracy. However, a new type of despotism was the constant threat to all modern (egalitarian) societies, including the USA. There were no prototypes for this new phenomenon in the past, and in *De la démocratie...* Tocqueville has to accept that he cannot find a proper name for it; the ancient ideas of "despotism" and "tyranny" do not fit, "the thing is new".¹⁷ In other texts and manuscripts, Tocqueville toyed with some alternative names, such as "democratic despotism" or "administrative despotism", as different from ancient or revolutionary despotism.¹⁸ In a manuscript of 1838, Tocqueville stressed the idea that "administrative despotism" is independent from the different forms of government, and that it can exist under monarchical, representative, liberal, or revolutionary institutions. In another manuscript written two years later, Tocqueville

described democratic despotism as a new society in which “bureaucratic organization” would play a central role, and everything would happen “with as much order, detail and tyranny as in a barracks”.¹⁹ Taking this into account, it is not surprising that some scholars have considered Tocqueville as both a follower of Montesquieu and a precursor of new thought on the relationship between social equality and political power. Moreover, it has been convincingly argued that the idea of “democratic despotism” and the twentieth-century concept of “Totalitarianism” are quite similar, in that they are both based on the idea of the “loneliness” (Arendt) or atomization of the individuals in modern societies.²⁰

Tocqueville’s idea of “democratic despotism”, together with his pioneering work on American democracy, produced a crucial transformation in the liberal tradition, by moving one step away from the doctrinaire’s intellectual and political project (which was soon to collapse under the thrust of radicalism), and thus establishing the foundations of present-day liberalism. At the core of this transformation lies the idea of the importance of ‘associations’ in modern democracies, the immediate antecedent of today’s predominant sense of the concept of ‘civil society’. As some scholars have argued, Tocqueville’s liberalism recovers some themes of Montesquieu’s aristocratic liberalism, together with some aspects of classical political philosophy (Aristotle in particular), in a theoretical device that was aimed at enlightening the ruling élite against socialism and radicalism in general.²¹ In his USA, Tocqueville ‘found’ the principles of his new liberalism already functioning. Thus, in order to understand Tocqueville’s image of Russia better, it is necessary to begin by a brief description of Russia’s reflected image in Tocqueville’s mirror, the USA.

According to Tocqueville, the “social state” of a nation “may itself be considered as the prime cause of most of the laws, customs, and ideas which control the nation’s behavior”. The American “social state” was, from the very beginning, quite favorable for liberal democracy. To begin with, “[m]en there are nearer equality in wealth and in mental endowments, or, in other words, more nearly equally powerful, than in any other country of the world or in any other age of recorded history.” True, this is a somewhat ambiguous element, because, as Tocqueville states in the same paragraph and elsewhere, it can easily lead to democratic despotism: “There can even be a sort of equality in the world of politics without any political freedom. A man may be the equal of all his fellows save one, who is the master of all without distinction and chooses the agents of his power equally among all”. However, other aspects of the American “social state”, belonging to its “civil society” and “the world of politics”, helped to preclude that fate. Among the original elements, the presence of a propertied majority was a fundamental ingredient: “land

was naturally broken up into little lots which the owner himself cultivated”. That is why the colonies “from the beginning, seemed destined to let freedom grow, not the aristocratic freedom of their motherland, but a middle-class and democratic freedom of which the world’s history had not previously provided a complete example”. Secondly, there were “no rich or poor” and “no proletarians” in America, and even today “wealth circulates there with incredible rapidity”. The importance of these two characteristics lies in that, unlike Europe, “[m]en living in such a society cannot base their beliefs on the opinions of the class to which they belong, for, one may almost say, there are no more classes, and such as do still exist are composed of such changing elements that they can never, as a body, exercise real power over their members”. The third original element is the particular social background of the majority of the emigrants who moved to America: they belonged to the European “middle classes”. Departing “from the midst of the old feudal society”, it was this social class that brought democracy “full-grown and fully armed” to America. In a very Aristotelian and Guizotean way, Tocqueville argues that the “middle class”, that propertied and “innumerable crowd” between the rich and the poor, is “the natural enemy of violent commotion” and social revolution, and “assures the stability of the social body”.²²

Together with these original characteristics of the USA, Tocqueville pays particular attention to the customs, laws, and political institutions that sprang from that peculiar social state, and this because not every kind of equality leads to despotism, but only that of isolated men. “Equality” –Tocqueville argues– “puts men side by side without a common link to hold them firm. Despotism raises barriers to keep them apart.” On the contrary, liberty can be used “to combat the individualism born of equality”, as the Americans did (and Tocqueville recommends).²³ This is when Tocqueville introduces what for him is the most remarkable feature of American society, namely, the presence of all kinds of voluntary “associations” that defend all sorts of particular interests, and a strong tradition of local self-government. This peculiar product of American freedom serves to correct the excesses of freedom and equality, by counterbalancing the effects of the excess of individualism.²⁴

After Tocqueville, the idea of the importance of voluntary associations –what we would now call ‘a strong civil society’– for the good health of democracy became a central part of liberal political doctrine and even of commonsensical knowledge. For our purposes, it is important to underline now that this idea of civil society derives directly from the old Montesquieuan idea of “intermediate bodies” as the guardians of freedom against absolutism, that is, an *aristocratic* idea of freedom. Tocqueville’s contempt for popular sovereignty and his preference for the rule of “aristocratic bodies” is well known.²⁵ But he also knew that a simple

return to the past was impossible. Therefore, Tocqueville devised the subtle re-establishment of a sort of aristocracy disguised under the new name of “associations”. As he openly recognized:

I am firmly convinced that one cannot found an aristocracy anew in this world, but I think that associations of plain citizens can compose very rich, influential and powerful bodies, in other words, aristocratic bodies. By this means many of the greatest political advantages of an aristocracy could be obtained without its injustices and dangers. An association, be it political, industrial, commercial, or even literary or scientific, is an educated and powerful body of citizens which cannot be twisted to any man’s will or quietly trodden down, and by defending its private interests against the encroachments of power, it saves the common liberties.²⁶

Besides associations, Tocqueville analyzed the importance of other American social, religious, educational, juridical, and constitutional institutions. All this is well known, and we shall only stress here the fact that Tocqueville’s liberalism brought back the doctrinaire idea of political ‘capacity’ (that is, the idea that sovereignty belongs to the people, but it must only be exercised by those who are ‘capable’) under a new form, by attaching a great role to the education of the citizens. One of the American features that Tocqueville praised the most was the extension of public education, combined with the moralizing effects of religion.²⁷

By means of this theoretical construct, Tocqueville laid the foundations of contemporary liberalism, providing that tradition with the necessary tools to face the challenge of universal suffrage. By offering a distinction between political (liberal) democracy and social democracy, Tocqueville reconciled liberalism and elitist rule with republicanism and political democracy, thus permitting, in the long run, a successful result in the struggle against socialism. In terms of historical imagination, in *De la démocratie...* Tocqueville drew the image of the society of the future, the heir of European ‘civilization’: it would be to some extent egalitarian and democratic, but also have a certain extension of private ownership and social mobility, a large ‘middle class’, a strong ‘civil society’, and an educational system able to normalize public morals.

Let us go back to Tocqueville’s image of Russia. By the time *De la démocratie...* was published, it was a commonplace to say that Russia lacked intermediate bodies and an independent nobility; similarly, in the years to come it became an almost automatic assumption that Russia lacked a strong ‘civil society’ or the proper kind of ‘associations’. The lack of a ‘middle class’ was also a commonplace, and the same can be said of the Russian’s alleged brutality and lack of education. Tocqueville’s ideas, however, brought into focus yet another characteristic of that country, namely, its *despotically egalitarian* or even ‘socialist’ nature under

the throne of the Tsar. Tocqueville's ideas allowed the public to consider the despotism of the Tsars as the natural outcome of a socially democratic society. That is why the future might also belong to Russia, and not just to the USA. Following Tocqueville's train of thoughts, Russia could be considered the image of a future threat, and not just a remnant of the past. It is worth remembering here that Tocqueville wrote the first volume of *De la démocratie...* well before the German Romantic conservative baron August von Haxthausen 'discovered' the Russian egalitarian peasant commune, and well before that discovery was 'adopted' by the socialists to prove their points and became widely known in France.²⁸

In this respect, Tocqueville's later remarks on Haxthausen in his private correspondence are revealing. In a letter of 1853 Tocqueville recommends his intellectual partner, the liberal politician Gustave de Beaumont –with whom he had traveled through the USA– to read the baron's book. The importance of that work lies (he said) in that Haxthausen presents the picture of a nation “still in the infancy [*langes*] of serfdom and communal property”, and therefore living under “institutions” that resemble, to some extent, “the spirit of the democratic and civilized times we live in”. And Tocqueville ends by saying that in Russian lower society

tout est si parfaitement uniforme dans les idées, les lois, les usages, et jusqu'aux moindres détails de l'aspect extérieur des objets. Cela me fait l'effet d'une Amérique moins les lumières et la liberté, une société démocratique à faire peur...²⁹

Interestingly enough, Beaumont read Haxthausen's book, and did explicitly what his friend had done implicitly –if our interpretation is correct– in *De la démocratie...*, that is, he wrote an article comparing Russia and the USA, which he published in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* in 1854. All the argumentation recalls Tocqueville's ideas, and the very beginning of Beaumont's article resembles the last paragraph of *De la démocratie...* Thus, Russia and the USA “seem to march side by side” in progress, the former based on the principle of “absolute power”, the latter on the “principle of liberty”. Beaumont goes on by arguing, against Haxthausen's statements, that the “struggle of material interests” in America, far from being a problem, is the source of progress. On the contrary, the real problem for progress in Russia is the excess of rules for every aspect of life and her “terrible bureaucracy”. Beaumont goes on to criticize the “uniformity” of Russian society, out of which nothing raises itself up and the “individual disappears in a confusing mass”, like weak and impotent “atoms without a name”. In Russia “official life”

replaces “the natural existence of the people”, and “equality rules” in a sad “symmetry of order”. Far from lacking the phenomenon of the proletariat, as Haxthausen had argued, in Russia *everybody* is a proletarian, and the egalitarian peasant commune, “the principle of communism on which property rests in Russia”, the dream of “our revolutionaries”, is a backward institution that obstructs progress and civilization. The possibility that this “strange democracy” may dominate “Western civilization” terrifies Beaumont.

Finally, Beaumont refutes Haxthausen’s idea that modern industry had harmed Russia. On the contrary, it is industrial development, private property, and the emergence of a “middle class” that would remedy Russia’s maladies. Catherine II and other Tsars had understood this, and tried to create such a class by decree. But the bourgeoisie only springs from natural economic development, and not from above. With the establishment of private property, Russia will foster the bourgeoisie, and with it “the enlightenment”, “rights”, “laws”, and “freedom” will come to stay in Russia.³⁰

In conclusion, Beaumont’s description of Russia can be considered as the negative image of Tocqueville’s USA, a description that the latter would surely have agreed with, and that was tacitly outlined in his own *De la démocratie...* Both Tocqueville and Beaumont agreed that Russia was a form of democratic despotism comparable to the communist and socialist utopia, whilst the USA was an example of ‘good democracy’. Both share a certain conception of civil society, according to which there must be something that “rises itself above” equality. Both agree that private property is one of the main differences between a society of free individuals and a “confusing mass of atoms”, and that industrial development and the “middle class” are two of the main engines of progress and the guardians of freedom. America or Russia, liberalism or communism: that was the crossroad of modern times that the liberals Tocqueville and Beaumont wanted to present to Europe in the age of democracy.

III The Fate of the Parallel Russia/USA after Tocqueville

Before Tocqueville’s vigorous intervention, the liberals –who were mostly in favor of restrictive monarchical systems– were not particularly prone to appreciate the American democratic republic. In the mid nineteenth century, the USA was more likely to be taken as a positive example by radical republicans or even socialists.³¹ But following Tocqueville, the parallel Russia/USA became more and more a liberal cliché (one in which liberals and moderate

republicans would, at last, agree). It reappears in many places, including Ernest Charrière's "Considérations sur l'avenir de l'Europe" (1836) and *La Politique de l'Histoire* (1841-1842)³² and in Thiers' *Histoire du Consulat et de l'Empire*.³³ Even more remarkable was a debate in 1835 between two of the main French newspapers, Carrel's *National de 1834* and the *Journal des débats*. In the exchange of opinions, Tocqueville's parallel and his prediction were widely quoted and debated.³⁴ Later on, the parallel Russia/USA became explicitly or implicitly part of 'academic' accounts of Russia. For example, the economist Louis Wolowski argued in 1858 that the Russian communal forms of self-government should be reformed following the more individualistic American model,³⁵ whilst his colleague Gustave de Molinari recommended that Russia should apply the principles of economic freedom "and *self-government*" (in English and italics in the original),³⁶ and Anatole Leroy-Beaulieu –the prominent French specialist on Russia, who in 1904 also wrote an article entitled "The United States: a Lesson to Europe"³⁷– consciously or unconsciously used Tocqueville's America as a standard or model of comparison to analyze Russia's progress in his path-breaking three-volume *L'empire des Tsars et les russes* (1881-1889). Thus, Russia's 'civilization' was understood and qualified according to its distance from that norm.³⁸

After the Second World War, the intellectual climate of the Cold War strongly reinforced the parallel Russia/USA. The division of the planet in two 'sides' (communism vs. the 'Free World'), the extraordinary intensification of a discourse of 'Eastern Europe', and the powerful metaphor of the Iron Curtain contributed to this.³⁹ The parallel, however, survived the collapse of the Soviet Union: it hardly needs to be argued that the USA remains the implicit standard of comparison in much of contemporary thinking and scholarship about Russia. Indeed, the old parallel Russia/USA may still appear explicitly, as in Hélène Carrère d'Encausse's *Le malheur russe* (1988) or in Martin Malia's *The Soviet Tragedy: A History of Socialism in Russia 1917-1991* (1994), where Tocqueville's old prognosis appears in the Introduction and on the back cover or becomes the epigraph to the second chapter respectively.⁴⁰

In conclusion, the evolution in the meaning, and the remarkable success, of the parallel Russia/USA constitutes an important chapter in the story of the emergence of a liberal narrative of 'the West'. As despotism and social egalitarianism (and therefore socialism) were expelled from European identity as something alien, characteristic of 'uncivilized' countries like Russia, the USA emerged as the model for the successful (liberal) transformation of turbulent Europe. In the mid-nineteenth century, as Jacques Portes has argued, the example of the republican and

democratic USA could still be attractive to the radical left; but the “myth of Arcadia” had already lost all credibility by the decade of 1870. The evidence of America’s industrial development, increasing social conflicts and gross inequality deprived it of any sense of exceptionalism in the eyes of left-wing radicals. As this happened, the example of the USA started to be exalted by the liberal economists and advocates of rapid industrialization in general. In the last quarter of the century, there was a perceptible group of “Americanists”, specially recruited from “the ranks of moderate Republicans and liberals of all stripes”. But even some of the moderate socialists could find good examples of inter-class co-operation and “social balance” in the USA.⁴¹ Thus, by finding in American society a model able to articulate wider consensus, European (liberal) identity went ‘Western’.

¹ See my article “Muros de ladrillo, muros imaginarios: el Muro de Berlín y otras imágenes en el discurso de subordinación de ‘Europa Oriental’”, *Revista del Centro de Estudios Internacionales para el Desarrollo*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1999, pp. 32-47; *ibid.*, “Civilizar un Pueblo Bárbaro: Las imágenes de Rusia en el debate de la Ilustración francesa acerca del concepto de ‘civilización’”, *Anales de Historia Antigua, Medieval y Moderna* (University of Buenos Aires), vol. 34, 2001, pp.163-90; *ibid.*, “Russia as a Space of Hope: Nineteenth-Century French Challenges to the Liberal Image of Russia”, *European History Quarterly* ([forthcoming](#)); *ibid.*, “The Making of the Idea and the Concept of Eastern Europe in France, c. 1810-1880, and Some Hypotheses on Euro-Orientalism”, [paper](#) presented at the 2003 Annual Conference of the British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies, Cambridge, March 2003; see also W. H. Parker, “Europe: How Far?”, *The Geographical Journal*, vol. CXXVI, part. 3, Sept. 1960, pp. 278-97; Oscar Hammen, “Free Europe versus Russia 1830-1854”, *The American Slavic and East European Studies*, vol. XI (1), February 1952, pp. 27-41; Mark Bassin, “Russia between Europe and Asia: The ideological construction of geographical space”, *Slavic Review*, 50 (1), Spring 1991, pp. 1-17; Hans Lemberg, “Zur Entstehung des Osteuropabegriffs im 19. Jahrhundert. Vom ‘Norden’ zu ‘Osten’ Europas”, *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 33, 1985, pp. 48-91; Vladimir Berelowitch, “Europe ou Asie? Saint-Pétersbourg dans les relations de voyage occidentaux”, in *Le mirage russe au XVIIIe siècle*, edited by Sergei Karp and Larry Wolff (Ferne-Voltaire: Centre International d’Étude du XVIIIe Siècle, 2001), pp. 57-74; Gerard Delanty, “The Frontier and Identities of Exclusion in European History”, *History of European Ideas*, vol. 22 (2), 1996, pp. 93-103; Iver Neumann, *Uses of the Other: ‘The East’ in European Identity Formation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999); Robin Okey, “Central Europe/Eastern Europe: behind the definitions”, *Past and Present*, 137, Nov. 1992, pp. 102-33; Gianluigi Goggi, “The Philosophes and the Debate over Russian Civilisation”, in *A Window on Russia*, edited by Maria di Salvo and Lindsey Hughes (Rome: La Fenice, 1996), pp. 299-305; Dieter Groh, *Russland und das Selbstverständnis Europas: Ein Beitrag zur europäischen Geistesgeschichte*, (Neuwied: Hermann Luchterhand Verlag GmbH, 1961). Two major works on the subject were published recently; however, the information and

interpretations they provide are not reliable: see Martin Malia, *Russia under Western Eyes: From the Bronze Horseman to the Lenin Mausoleum*, (Cambridge [Mass.]: Belknap Press, 1999); Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

² See René Rémond, *Les États-Unis devant l'opinion française 1815-1852*, (Paris: Armand Collin, 1962) and Jacques Portes, *Fascination and Misgivings: The United States in French Opinion, 1870-1914*, (Cambridge: CUP, 2000).

³ I generally use single quotation marks for my own text, whilst double quotation marks always denote a literal excerpt from other works.

⁴ Guillaume La Trosne, *Réflexions politiques sur la guerre actuelle de l'Angleterre avec ses colonies et sur l'état de la Russie*, 1777, 1-13.

⁵ See François-Louis comte d'Escherny, *La philosophie de la politique, ou principes généraux sur les institutions civiles, politiques et religieuses*, (2 vols, Paris, 1796), I, pp. 31-32, 24-25, 54-58.

⁶ Escherny, "Sur la Russie et la révolution de Pologne", in idem, *Mélanges de littérature, d'histoire, de morale et de philosophie*, (3 vols, Paris: Bossange et Masson/Schoell, 1811), I, pp. 69-73.

⁷ In 1802, Victor Delpuech de Comeiras seems to have plagiarised Escherny, by including that same paragraph (with minor variations) in his own *Tableau général de la Russie moderne* (2 vols, Paris: Treuttel et Wurtz, 1802), pp. 404-5. The abbé Dufour de Pradt also sketches a comparison between Russia and the USA in his *Des colonies et de la révolution actuelle de l'Amérique* (1815), without drawing the threatening conclusions that Escherny seems to have drawn. See Pradt, *The Colonies and the Present American Revolutions* (London: Baldwin, Cradock & Joy, 1917), p. 481.

⁸ Stendhal [Henri Beyle], *Napoléon*, (2 vols, Paris: Honoré Champion, 1970), I, p. 233.

⁹ See Jean Walch, *Michel Chevalier, économiste saint-simonien 1806-1879*, (Paris: Vrin, 1975) and Yves Breton, "Michel Chevalier, entre le Saint-simonisme et le libéralisme", in *L'économie politique en France au XIXe siècle*, edited by Yves Breton and Michel Lutfalla, (Paris: Economica, 1991), pp. 247-76.

¹⁰ Michel Chevalier, *Lettres sur l'Amérique du Nord*, (2 vols, Bruxelles: Société Belge de Librairie, 2nd edition, 1837), I, p. 165.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 3.

¹² See Laurence Wylie, *Saint-Marc Girardin –Bourgeois*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1947).

¹³ Saint-Marc Girardin, *Notices politiques et littéraires sur l'Allemagne*, (Paris: Prévost-Crocius, 1835), pp. X-XVI.

¹⁴ By the time Tocqueville wrote his book the parallel Russia/USA was also known outside France: see Dieter Groh, *La Russia e l'autocoscienza d'Europa, Saggio sulla storia intellettuale d'Europa*, (Torino: Einaudi, 1980), pp. 200-17; Heikki Mikkeli, *Europe as an Idea and an Identity*, (London: Macmillan Press, 1998), pp. 148-51; Krister Wahlbäck, "Tocqueville, Geijer och Supermakterna", *Historisk Tidskrift för Finland*, 72, 1, 1987, pp. 90-100; Matti Klinge, "Det olyckliga Europa och de nya makterna. Kring Tocquevilles förutsägelse", *Historisk Tidskrift för Finland*, 72, 2, 1987, pp. 304-06. It is likely that Tocqueville borrowed it from *America or a General Survey of the Political Situation of the Several Powers of the Western Continent*, by Alexander Everett. In his book, Everett, an American writer, argues that "Russian despotism" (as opposed to the American "liberal system") has the will to dominate the whole of continental Europe; but this will not happen, "because the principle of civilization and

improvement will be powerfully sustained by aid from abroad, that is, from America" (*America or a General Survey of the Political Situation of the Several Powers of the Western Continent, with Conjectures on their Future Prospects*, [Philadelphia: Carey and Lea, 1827], p. 337). Thus, the parallel was early related to the cause of liberalism and to a certain vision of the USA's destiny as its guardian.

¹⁵ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, (New York & London: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 379. A similar concern with the progress of Russia's power and the threat that that posed to "our West" appears elsewhere in Tocqueville's works and correspondence: see the seventh volume of his *Œuvres Complètes* in nine vols (Paris: Michel Lévy, 1866), pp. 326, 372, 585 and 419; also his *Souvenirs*, (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1893), p. 383.

¹⁶ In his *Souvenirs*, for example, Tocqueville argues that the power of the tsars derives not from coercion alone, but from the will and support of the Russian people, for "the principle of popular sovereignty" rules underneath any form of government, including the most oppressive (*ibid.*, p. 371).

¹⁷ *Democracy*, pp. 9, 648-49, 666.

¹⁸ See Jean-Claude Lamberti, *Tocqueville et les deux démocraties*, (Paris: PUF, 1983), p. 285; James Schleifer, *The Making of Tocqueville's Democracy in America*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), pp. 173-87.

¹⁹ Quoted in Schleifer, pp. 176-80.

²⁰ See Lamberti, pp. 293-311; Roger Boesche, "Tocqueville and Arendt on the Novelty of Modern Tyranny", in *Tocqueville's Defense of Human Liberty: Current Essays*, edited by Peter A. Lawler and Joseph Alulis, (New York: Garland, 1993), pp. 157-75; John Marini, "Centralized Administration and the 'New Despotism'", in *Interpreting Tocqueville's Democracy in America*, edited by Ken Masugi, (Savage: Rowman & Littlefield, 1991), pp. 255-86; Jean-Michel Heimonet, *Tocqueville et le devenir de la démocratie: la perversion de l'idéal*, (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1999), pp. 153-75.

²¹ See Marini; also Daniel Mahoney, "Tocqueville and Socialism", in *Tocqueville's Defense of Human Liberty: Current Essays*, edited by Peter A. Lawler and Joseph Alulis, (New York: Garland, 1993), pp. 177 and 182; Peter Lawler, *The Restless Mind: Alexis de Tocqueville on the Origine and Perpetuation of Human Liberty*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1993), pp. 11 and 102.

²² *Democracy*, pp. 43, 49-50, 473, 383, 27-28, 220, 47, 394, 33, 193-95, 611. In Tocqueville's positive appraisal of the middle class, Guizot's influence becomes apparent. Although Tocqueville disliked doctrinaire political attachment to the middle classes (and despised the French middle classes in general), the role of that social group in the theoretical constructs of Guizot and Tocqueville is quite similar. The doctrinaire historians in general deeply influenced Tocqueville, who attended Guizot's famous history courses. On this issue see Lamberti, pp. 49-52 and 193; André Jardin, *Historia del liberalismo político, de la crisis del absolutismo a la Constitución de 1875*, (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1998), p. 372; Aurelian Craiutu, "Tocqueville and the Political Thought of the French Doctrinaires (Guizot, Royer-Collard, Rémusat)", *History of Political Thought*, vol. XX, no. 3, Autumn 1999, pp. 456-93.

²³ *Democracy*, pp. 481-82.

²⁴ *Democracy*, pp. 174-79.

²⁵ See for example *Democracy*, p. 212.

²⁶ *Democracy*, pp. 671-72; see also p. 488.

²⁷ See *Democracy*, p. 38.

²⁸ See Adamovsky, “Russia as a Space of Hope”.

²⁹ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Œuvres et correspondance inédites*, (2 vols, Paris: Michel Lévy, 1861), II, p. 237; see also p. 245.

³⁰ Gustave de Beaumont, “La Russie et les États-Unis sous le rapport économique”, *Revue des Deux Mondes*, March 1854, pp. 1163, 1172-73, 1180-82, 1173-74, 1183.

³¹ See Rémond. Interestingly enough, the parallel Russia/USA appears in a book by the socialist-anarchist Ernest Cœurderoy still in 1854. Cœurderoy expected Russia to help the European socialists by invading Europe and destroying the decadent bourgeois civilization. After the revolution Russia, in agreement with the USA, would play the leading role in the world. See Ernest Cœurderoy, *Hurrah!!! ou la révolution par les Cosaques*, (London, 1854), p. 405.

³² Ernest Charrière, *La chute de l'Empire, drame-épopée précédé d'une introduction historique, ou considérations sur l'avenir de l'Europe*, (Paris: Paulin, 1836), p. LVI; *La Politique de l'Histoire*, (2 vols, Paris: Gosselin, 1841-1842), II, p. 520.

³³ *Histoire du Consulat et de l'Empire*, (21 vols, Paris: Furne, Jouvet et Cie., 1874), VIII, p. 448; see also his *Discours Parlementaires*, (16 vols, Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1879-1889), IX, pp. 236-37.

³⁴ The debate is reproduced in Armand Carrel, *Œuvres Politiques et Littéraires*, (5 vols, Paris: Chamerot, 1857-1859), IV, pp. 275 and 278.

³⁵ Louis Wolowski, “La question du servage en Russie”, *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 15/7/1858, pp. 317-49; 1/8/1858, pp. 595-631, and 15/9/1858, pp. 393-446.

³⁶ Gustave de Molinari, *Lettres sur la Russie*, (Paris: Dentu, 2nd enlarged edition, 1877), pp. V-VI.

³⁷ Anatole Leroy-Beaulieu, “The United States: A Lesson to Europe”, *The World's Work* (New York), vol. IX, no. 2, Dec. 1904, pp. 5645-46.

³⁸ See other nineteenth-century appearances of the parallel Russia/USA in Henri Martin, *La Russie et l'Europe*, (Paris: Fourne, Jouvet et cie., 1866), p. 316; François Combes, *La Russie en face de Constantinople et de l'Europe*, (Paris: Dentu, 1854), p. 526; Émile Montégut, “De l'idée de monarchie universelle”, *Revue des Deux Mondes*, vol. VII, July-September, 1854, pp. 194-210, p. 203; Émile Barrault, *La Russie et ses chemins de fer*, (Paris: Claye, 1857), p. 7; Prévost-Paradol, *Essai sur l'histoire universelle*, (2 vols, Paris: Hachette, 2nd edition, 1865), II, pp. 433-34; Édouard Talbot, *L'Europe aux Européens*, (Paris: Librairie Internationale, 1867), pp. 310-12.

³⁹ Interestingly enough, there is also a very old tradition of similar metaphors, beginning with the medieval image of Poland as an “*Antemurale Christianitatis*”: see Jadwiga Krzyzaniakowa, “Poland and ‘Antemurale Christianitatis’: The Political and Ideological Foundations of the Idea”, *Polish Western Affairs*, 33 (2), 1992, pp. 3-24. In nineteenth-century France, images such as a “barrier”, “wall”, “defensive lines”, “stronghold”, “fortress”, or “cord” against “contagion”, which allegedly needed to be placed between Russia and Western Europe, were very common: see Anonymous [André d'Arbelles?], *De la politique et des progrès de la puissance russe*, (Paris: Giguet et Michaud, 1807), p. 106; Lesur, *Des progrès de la puissance russe depuis son origine jusqu'au commencement du XIX^{me} siècle*, (Paris: Fantin, 1812), p. 469; Napoleon I, *Correspondance*, (32 vols, Paris: Henri Plon/J. Dumaine,

1870), XXXII, p. 352; Dufour de Pradt, *Du Congrès de Vienne*, (Paris: Deterville/Delaunay, 2nd edition, 1815), p. 125; Dufour de Pradt, *Du système permanent de l'Europe à l'égard de la Russie et des affaires de l'Orient*, (Paris: Pichon et Didier, 1828), p. XV; Adrien Peladan, *La Russie au ban de l'univers et du catholicisme*, (Paris & Lyon: Blanc, 1854), p. 11; *Moniteur Universel* 29/1/1864, p. 151; etc. Similarly, the metaphor of the "Iron Curtain" was already in use in the 1920's, well before Winston Churchill made it famous: see Richard Pipes, *Russia Under the Bolshevik Regime 1919-1924*, (London: Harvill Press, 1997), p. 237; Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius, "Who Drew the Iron Curtain? Images East and West", in *Borders in Art: Revisiting Kunstgeographie*, edited by K. Murawska-Muthesius, (Warsaw: Institute of Art, 2000), pp. 241-48, p. 242.

⁴⁰ *Le malheur russe: Essai sur le meurtre politique*, (Paris: Fayard, 1988), p. 17; *The Soviet Tragedy: A History of Socialism in Russia 1917-1991*, (New York: Free Press, 1994), p. 51. Other particularly clear examples of uses of Tocqueville and explicit comparisons with the USA in contemporary scholarship can be found in Vladimir Tismaneanu (ed.), *In Search of Civil Society: Independent Peace Movements in the Soviet Bloc*, (New York & London: Routledge, 1990), p. 183; Piotr Sztompka, "Looking Back: The Year 1989 as a Cultural and Civilizational Break", *Communist and Post Communist Studies*, vol. 29, no. 2, pp. 115-29, p. 86.

⁴¹ Portes, pp. 309, 435-38.