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The article focuses on the autobiographical writings of the Russian noblewoman Varvara Dukhovskaia (born Golitsyna) (1854—1931), whose memories are analysed as source material of a cultural history of the late Russian Empire. As the wife of Sergei M. Dukhovskoi, a high-rank dignitary of the Tsarist regime, who — among other offices — served as governor-general in the Amur province and in Russian Turkestan, Dukhovskaia was part of the mobile imperial elite who got in close contact with the cultural, geographical and political diversity of the Tsarist realm in the last decades of the 19th century. How, the article queries, did Dukhovskaia reflect in her memories the experience of the nomadic life, the representatives of the autocratic regime had to lead? Where did she locate Russia and the empire's peripheries on her mental maps? How did she describe her own role as female spectator and actor on the stage of Russia's "scenarios of power"? Autobiographies, like those of V. Dukhovskaia are of great value for the writing of "imperial biographies". They help analysing both self-images of the imperial elite and the emotional dimension of imperial rule. Ego-documents texts written by women stand out in particular, since its discursive boundaries differ to autobiographical texts written by men. With the help of sources of this kind, the article argues, we can better understand the spectrum of emotions of imperial rule, shared both by men and women, a reality of imperial history we have been knowing about so little, because of the restraints of male autobiographical writing.

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