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Contents

Summary

1. Nationality Policy and Communist Internationalism 1
2. Nations and States 18
4. Navitization 25
5. Economic and Social Transformation 30
6. Territorialization 35
7. Imperialism 38
8. Traditionalism 40
9. Unevenness 43
10. Localism 45
11. National Mobilization 50
STATE-BUILDING AND NATION-MAKING:
THE EVOLUTION OF ETHNO-NATIONALISM UNDER SOVIET RULE

Summary:

In its initial formulation Leninist nationality policy was a compromise between the radical view of the Soviet polity as more than a state, the embryo of the future socialist political order, and recognition of the power of existing nationalisms. The form of the newly-established Soviet state -- federative with political units based on ethnicity and national cultural autonomy -- along with the policy of encouraging ethno-national development within strict guidelines, led to the consolidation of nationalities within the Soviet republics, but also to an anxiety about the loss of nationhood. The political forms and contradictory policies of the Soviet government led to the powerful emergence of political nationalisms once the Stalinist lid was lifted.
I. NATIONALITY POLICY AND COMMUNIST INTERNATIONALISM

In an illuminating chapter, "Revolution Over Asia," E. H. Carr notes the assimilation of the "national question" to the "colonial" issue in the discourse of the Bolsheviks. Colonial policy was "a logical corollary and a natural extension of national policy; the theoretical foundations of both were the same.... Soviet policy appealed in one broad sweep to the peoples of Asia as a whole, to the former subjects of the Tsar, to the subjects of other empires and to the nominally independent dependencies of the capitalist world-market."

Already in the appeal "To All Muslims Toilers of Russia and the East," issued just one month after the Bolsheviks came to power, the powerful rhetoric of self-determination, liberation, independence, and anti-imperialism established a unity of the struggle against colonial and national oppression. Since the Red Army was engaged for much of the period of the Russian Civil War in a simultaneous battle against "bourgeois nationalists" and "foreign interventionists," anti-imperialism was not distinguished from the drive to "liberate"

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the former subject peoples of the Russian Empire.

Soviet Russia was conceived not as an ordinary national state but as the first stone in a future multinational socialist edifice. The reach of the Russian revolution was to be limitless. What its enemies would later construct into a potent ideological image of a drive toward world domination was in its incarnation directed primarily against British imperialism and brought Lenin and his comrades into a series of peculiar alliances with the fallen Turkish leader Enver Pasha, King Amanullah of Afghanistan, the rebel Kuchuk Khan in northern Persia, Kemal Pasha in Anatolia, and other non-socialist nationalists. The empires of the Europeans in Asia, the semi-colonial periphery of Persia, China, and Turkey (in Lenin's conceptualization), and the newly-independent national states established after the October Revolution, dependent as they were on the presence and support of European power, all were linked in a single understanding as the last props of a moribund capitalism. With a confidence born of recent victories and faith in a Marxist eschatology, and with an opportunism rooted in the limited resources at hand, the Bolsheviks used all the means available to realize their dream of international revolution. For Communists of the Civil War period internationalism was not so much the servant of the Soviet state as that state was the servant of internationalism.

From the very beginning the pull between nationalism and socialism was at one and the same time an arena of contest between supporters of the Soviet government and foreign interventionists who hoped to gain allies in the war against the Reds. A pristine nationalism able to establish a firm base of support in the ethnic population and to hold on to political independence without foreign help was difficult
to find in the peripheries of the Russian Empire. Two fiercely antagonistic discourses contended with one another in a battle of rhetoric and violence: nationalists appealed to the West to defend their right to national self-determination against a renewed Russian threat, while Communists portrayed the nationalists and their foreign backers as part of an imperialist endeavor to contain or destroy Bolshevism and the coming international revolution.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, when Social Democrats agonized over the emerging "national question," Russian Marxists sought at one and the same time to win over allies among the non-Russian nationalities and to combat the project of the nationalists to splinter the unitary state. Secure in their faith that "national differences and antagonisms between peoples are vanishing gradually from day to day" and that "the supremacy of the proletariat will cause them to vanish still faster," Bolshevik theorists were opposed to political solutions that would divert what they understood to be the flow of history and promote ethnic identity. Lenin, Stalin, the Armenian Bolshevik Stepan Shahumian, and others were adamant in their opposition to federalism and to both the Austromarxist principle of "extraterritorial national cultural autonomy" (each nationality represented in parliament no matter where its members live) and the moderate nationalist principle of "territorial national cultural autonomy" (ethnicity defining autonomous territorial political units). Leninists preferred "regional autonomy," in which political units would not have ethnic designations. The "proletarian solution" to the nationality question would preserve the unitary state while allowing for local self-government and guaranteeing complete cultural and linguistic freedom within the socialist state. While national self-determi-
nation for Lenin meant that a nationality could choose to become fully independent, in his pre-1917 formulation those nationalities that stayed within the socialist state would have neither the right to an autonomous political territory nor to a federative relationship to the center.

The Bolsheviks’ prerevolutionary thinking on the national question did not survive the revolution intact. The new Soviet state was both federative, at least in name and theory, and based on ethnic political units. Indeed for more than a decade following the Civil War nationalities like the Jews and Armenians, Ukrainians in Russia, enjoyed extraterritorial privileges, with their own schools and soviets operating in republics of other nationalities. Soviet practice was a compromise with maximal ideological desiderata. And the very expectation that such concessions to the national principle would lead to the consolidation of ethnicity, rather than its disappearance, proved to be correct for the larger nationalities. Rather than a melting pot, the Soviet Union became the incubator of new nations.

Though many of his comrades consistently favored subordinating nationalism strictly to class considerations, Lenin was both aware of the power of nationalism, even as he hoped to harness it to the proletarian revolution, and ready to concede the need to ally with "bourgeois nationalists." For Lenin nationalism and separatism were neither natural nor inevitable but contingent on the sense of oppression that nationalities experienced from imperialism. He remained convinced that nationalism reflected only the interests of the bourgeoisie, that the proletariat’s true interests were supranational, and that the end of colonialism would diminish the power of nationalist
sentiments. In contrast to his party comrades on the Left, he refused to oppose the independence of Finland, Poland, and Ukraine. Though he hoped against hope that such separations could be avoided and reserved the option to oppose specific moves toward independence on principle, he abjured the use of force to keep the empire whole. He was unequivocal in his public commitment to "the full right of separation from Russia of all nations and nationalities, oppressed by tsarism, joined by force or held by force within the borders of the state, i.e., annexed." At the same time he argued that the goal of the proletarian party was the creation of the largest state possible and the rapprochement (sblizheniie) and eventual merging (sliianie) of nations. Such a goal was to be reached, not through force, but voluntarily by the will of the workers. Already in early 1917 he moderated his earlier position and proposed that full regional (and national) autonomy was to be guaranteed in the new state. 

Like his concessions on the "agrarian question," so his views on the "national question," were connected both to Lenin's understanding of the need for alliances with the peasants and the non-Russians and to his conviction that the approaching international socialist revolution would make the movements for land and statehood largely irrelevant. Acutely aware that the weakness of the central state gave new

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2. "We say to the Ukrainians: as Ukrainians, you can run your own lives as you wish. But we extend a fraternal hand to the Ukrainian workers and say to them: together with you we will fight against your and our bourgeoisie. Only a socialist alliance of laborers of all countries eliminates any ground for national persecution and fighting." [V. I. Lenin, PSS, XXXV, p. 116]

3. From the brochure Zadachi proletariata v nashei revoliutsii (Proekt platformy proletarskoi partii), written in April 1917, first published in September. [V. I. Lenin, Polnoe sobranie sochinenii (Moscow, 1959-19??) [henceforth PSS], XXXI, pp. 167-168.]

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potency to movements for autonomy and separation from the empire, as well as the spontaneous resolution of the land question by peasants. Lenin staked out a clear position supporting both processes. In contrast neither the Provisional Government nor the successive White leaderships were sympathetic to the nationalists.

Immediately after taking power the Bolsheviks set up the People's Commissariat of Nationalities under Stalin and issued a series of declarations on "the rights of the toiling and exploited peoples, "to all Muslim toilers of Russia and the East," and on the disposition of Turkish Armenia. Most importantly, with little real ability to effect its will in the peripheries, the Soviet government made a strategic shift in response to the growing number of autonomies and accepted by January 1918 the principle of federalism. As they launched an attack into Ukraine, the Bolsheviks announced that they recognized the Central Executive Committee of Soviets of Ukraine as "the supreme authority in Ukraine" and accepted "a federal union with Russia and complete unity in matters of internal and external policy." By the end of the month the Third Congress of Soviets resolved: "The Soviet Russian Republic is established on the basis of a free union of free nations, as a federation of Soviet national republics." Both federalism and national-territorial autonomy were written into the first Soviet constitution adopted in July 1918. As Richard Pipes has noted, "Soviet Russia...became the first modern state to place the national principle at the base of its federal structure." 4

In the ferocity of the Civil War many Communists, particularly in the periph-

eries or of non-Russian origin, opposed Lenin's principled stand in favor of national self-determination, fearing the dissolution of the unitary state. As early as December 1917 Stalin argued that the freedom of self-determination should be given only to the laboring classes, not to the bourgeoisie. "The principle of self-determination should be a means of fighting for socialism." At the Eighth Party Congress in March 1919, Bukharin supported Stalin's position and tried to divide the national from the colonial question. Only in those nations where the proletariat had not defined its interests as separate from the bourgeoisie, should the slogan of "self-determination of nations" be employed. Lenin's formula, he claimed, was appropriate only "for Hottentots, Bushmen, Negroes, Indians," while Stalin's notion of "self-determination for the laboring classes" corresponded to the period in which the dictatorship of the proletariat was being established.\(^5\) Lenin answered Bukharin sharply. "There are no Bushmen in Russia; as for the Hottentots, I also have not heard that they have pretensions to an autonomous republic, but we have the Bashkirs, the Kyrgyz, a whole series of other peoples, and in relation to them we cannot refuse recognition." All nations, he reasserted, have the right to self-determination, and Bolshevik support for this principle will aid the self-determination of the laboring classes. The stage of a given nation as it moves from "medieval forms to bourgeois democracy and on to proletarian democracy" should be considered, but it is difficult to differentiate the interests between the proletariat and bourgeoisie, which have been sharply defined only in

The final resolution of the Congress was a compromise between Lenin's tolerance of nationalism and the more militant opposition to it. Maintaining the principle of national self-determination, the resolution went on to say: "as to the question who is the carrier of the nation's will to separation, the RKP stands on the historico-class point-of-view, taking into consideration the level of historical development on which a given nation stands." The Bolsheviks reached no consensus on nationality policy, and the conflict between those like Lenin who considered the national agenda of non-Russians and those like Stalin who subordinated the national to the "proletarian" continued until the former's death and the latter's consolidation of power within the party. On the ground Communists decided themselves who was the carrier of the nation's will, and after the initial recognition of independence for Finland, Poland, the Baltic republics, and (for a time) Georgia, few other gestures were made toward "separatists."

Toward the end of 1919, while reflecting on the factors that had led to Bolshevik victory in 1917, Lenin turned to Ukraine to underscore the importance of tolerance in nationality policy. Reviewing the Constituent Assembly election results in which Ukrainian SRs and socialists outpolled the Russian, he noted: "The division between the Russian and Ukrainian Socialist Revolutionaries as early as 1917 could not have been accidental." Without holding that national sentiments are fixed or

6. Ibid., pp. 52-56.

7. Ibid., pp. 397-398.
permanent, he suggested once again that internationalists must be tolerant of the changing national consciousness of non-Russians, which, he was confident, was part of the petty bourgeois vacillation that had been characteristic of the peasantry throughout the Civil War.

The question whether the Ukraine will be a separate state is far less important [than the fundamental interests of the proletarian dictatorship, the unity of the Red Army, or the leading role of the proletariat in relation to the peasantry]. We must not be in the least surprised, or frightened, even by the prospect of the Ukrainian workers and peasants trying out different systems, and in the course of, say, several years, testing by practice union with the RSFSR, or seceding from the latter and forming an independent Ukrainian SSR, or various forms of their close alliance.... ...the vacillation of non-proletarian working people on such a question is quite natural, even inevitable, but not in the least frightful for the proletariat. It is the duty of the proletarian who is really capable of being an internationalist...to leave it to the non-proletarian masses themselves to get rid of this vacillation as a result of their own experience.\(^8\)

As the strategic situation improved for the Bolsheviks and their allies by the summer of 1920, the “national-colonial question” was put squarely on the agenda. The British were leaving the Russian periphery, and Communism had achieved its first foothold south of the Caucasus with the relatively easy Sovietization of Azerbaijan in April. The balance of forces both in Transcaucasia, where Georgia and Armenia remained independent, and Central Asia were clearly in favor of the Soviets, and direct links were established between the Soviets and the Kemalist nationalists in

\(^8\) Lenin, *PSS*, XL, p. 20; *Collected Works*, XXX, p. 271.
Anatolia. On April 26, Kemal sent an official communication to Moscow expressing his appreciation of Moscow's fight against imperialism and his readiness to take upon himself "military operations against the imperialist Armenian government" and to encourage Azerbaijan "to enter the Bolshevik state union."9 In May Soviet troops and the Persian revolutionary Kuchuk Khan established the Soviet republic of Gilan on the southern coast of the Caspian Sea, and though the situation in Persia remained extraordinarily fluid, the government at Tehran appeared prepared to distance itself from the British and open negotiations with the Soviets. With Denikin defeated, Kolchak dead, and the Red Army marching against Pilsudski's Poland, the latter half of 1920, it turned out, was a high point of revolutionary enthusiasm and direct Bolshevik promotion of the revolution in the East.

Several themes repeatedly reasserted themselves in the discussions around the national-colonial question in 1920, both at the Second Congress of the Communist International and the Baku Congress of the Peoples of the East. First, Lenin's leitmotif that had haunted his writings since 1914 -- the relationship of capitalist imperialism and the revolutionary crisis both in the advanced and the colonial world. Besides the one billion people living in colonial and semi-colonial states, another quarter billion living in Russia, since the war Germany, Austria, and Bulgaria, he argued, have been relegated to "what amounts to colonial status." The "super-profits of thousands of millions form the economic basis on which opportunism in the labour

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movement is built."¹⁰ This dependency of the capitalist metropole on the colonial and semi-colonial world was recognized by all communists, but some non-European Communists, like the Indian M. N. Roy and "many comrades in Turkestan" (referred to by the Iranian delegate Sultan Zade at the Second World Congress) went further and argued that the revolution in Europe required a revolution in the East.

A second theme was the failure of the Second International to address the colonial issue in a revolutionary manner. Lenin, Roy, Sultan Zade, and others portrayed the Social Democrats as Eurocentric reformers, willing only to support movements toward self-government in the colonies but reluctant to back revolutionary efforts. Communists, on the other hand, recognized the need for collaboration between revolutionaries in Europe, America, and Asia, and took pride in the multiracial representation in the Comintern meetings.

A third dominant theme was the historic difference between bourgeois democracy, supported by the Social Democrats of Europe, and soviet democracy, and the strong sense that a new historical epoch had opened that had rendered parliamentarism obsolete.¹¹ In his "Preliminary Theses on the National-Colonial Question," Lenin began with the distinction between formal bourgeois democracy that places all under juridical equality and "the real meaning of the demand of equality" that requires

¹⁰. Ibid., pp. 15, 27.
the abolition of classes. Bourgeois democracy also disguised the exploitation of weaker nations by the stronger, though the imperialist war of 1914-1918 had exposed this hypocrisy. Only a common struggle of all proletarians and laboring people of all nations could overthrow the rule of the landlords and bourgeoisie.

Yet another theme was the nature of the future socialist state, a grand multinational federation not unlike the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic (RSFSR). Federation, Lenin maintained, was the advanced form for the full unity of the toilers of different countries. Federation already in practice had shown its utility both in the relations of the RSFSR with other soviet republics (Hungarian, Finnish, Latvian in the past; Azerbaijani, Ukrainian in the present), and within the RSFSR in relations with the nationalities that earlier had not had either state existence or autonomy (for example, the Bashkir and Tatar autonomous republics in the RSFSR, created in 1919 and 1920). It was essential to work for a tighter federative union, both politically and economically, but, he cautioned, at the same time full recognition of the rights of nations and minorities, including the right to separate states, had to be supported.

Differences in tone and direction arose when the appropriate strategies to win over the masses of the East were discussed. In his original theses delivered to the Second Comintern Congress, Lenin had argued that in backward countries with feudal or patriarchal relations, "all communist parties must aid the bourgeois-democratic liberation movement in these countries." While fighting against clerical reaction and

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medieval elements, against Pan-Islam and other movements that attempt to unite the
liberation movement while strengthening the khans, landlords, mullahs, etc. Communists must support the peasant movement against landlords to form a "provisional alliance" with bourgeois democracy of the colonies and backward countries.

When Lenin submitted his Theses to his comrades, he met resistance to his provisional alliance with the national bourgeoisie. Lenin assured the doubters that "the alliance with the peasantry is more strongly underlined for me (and this is not completely equal to the bourgeoisie)."  

Most vociferously, Roy disputed Lenin's support of the national bourgeoisie and argued that Lenin was mistaken to believe that the national liberation movement had the significance of the bourgeois democratic revolution. Though as yet an unproven revolutionary, Roy (as he tells us in his memoirs)

pointed out that the bourgeoisie even in the most advanced colonial countries, like India, as a class, was not economically and culturally differentiated from the feudal social order; therefore, the nationalist movement was ideologically reactionary in the sense that the triumph would not necessarily mean a bourgeois democratic revolution. The role of Gandhi was the crucial point of difference. Lenin believed that, as the

13 Stalin in a letter of June 12, 1920 wrote to Lenin that he ought to include the idea of confederation as the transition step bringing different nations into a single political unit. The Soviet federation (RSFSR) was appropriate for the nationalities that had been part of the old Russia, but not for those that had been independent. He noted that differences between the federative relations within the RSFSR and between the RSFSR and other soviet republics did not exist or were so few that they mean nothing [net, ili ona tak mala, chto ravniaetsia nuliu] [Lenin, PPS, XLI, p. 513] This idea was later brought up in Stalin’s notion of autonomization. [Stalin’s letter is available in an English translation in Xenia Joukoff Eudin and Robert C. North, Soviet Russia and the East, 1920-1927: A Documentary Survey (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957), pp. 67-68.]
inspirer and leader of a mass movement, he was a revolutionary. I maintained that, a religious and cultural revivalist, he was bound to be a reactionary socially, however revolutionary he might appear politically.\footnote{M. N. Roy's Memoirs (Bombay: Allied Publishers, 1964), p. 379.}

After several private discussions with Roy and a general debate in the Commission on the National-Colonial Question, Lenin admitted that his views had been changed by Roy's challenge.\footnote{Ibid, p. 380.} Roy argued that "foreign domination constantly obstructs the free development of social life; therefore the revolution's first step must be the removal of this foreign domination. The struggle to overthrow foreign domination in the colonies does not therefore mean underwriting the national aims of the national bourgeoisie but much rather smoothing the path to liberation for the proletariat of the colonies." Roy distinguished more clearly than Lenin the two opposing movements in the colonial world: "the bourgeois-democratic nationalist movement, which pursues the program of political liberation with the conservation of the capitalist order; [and] the struggle of the propertyless peasants for their liberation from every kind of exploitation."\footnote{Second Congress of the Communist International, p. 117.} Communists must not allow the domination of the former movement over the latter and must ally with and support the latter. Lenin agreed that Communists should support "national-revolutionary" movements but withhold support from reformist movements based on collaboration of the colonial and the metropolitan bourgeoisies. In the absence of a proletariat, as in Turkestan, the
Communist Party must take over the leading role "in order to awaken independent political thinking and political action." 17

Though he held on to his principle of national self-determination, Lenin’s adjustment to Roy’s formulation had a political effect similar to the move by Stalin and Bukharin to consider the stage that nations had reached. Both undermined the authenticity of the claims of nationalism and removed the restraints that Lenin proposed before such movements. These more revolutionary positions pushed the Communists to a leadership in the peripheral and colonial struggles that hardly corresponded to their real weight in these regions. In the absence of a significant proletariat, in situations where the only viable revolutionary movement was one that Communists could not bring themselves to support wholly, the party became a surrogate proletariat. Instead of being engaged in the actual revolution, which was anti-colonial and led by nationalists or ethnosocialists, the party constructed a reading of the political moment that

17. Ibid., pp. 110-112. Though Roy himself later underlined the shift of Lenin toward his position, a comparison of his original draft and his theses as presented at the Congress show a significant adjustment on Roy’s part as well. Before the Congress Roy had taken a more forthright position on the primacy of the extra-European revolution, writing: "The fountainhead from which capitalism draws its main strength is no longer to be found in the industrial countries, but in the colonial possessions and dependencies." The European bourgeoisie, he argued, could sacrifice “the entire surplus value in the home country so long as it continues in the position to gain its huge superprofits in the colonies." Thus, the fate of the West was being determined in the East. In his Supplementary Theses at the Congress he softened this assertion: "European capitalism draws its strength in the main not so much from the industrial countries of Europe as from its colonial possessions." [Selected Works of M. N. Roy, Volume I, 1917-1922, p. 165-166; Second Congress of the Communist International, I, p. 116] Italics added for emphasis. Or in another translation: “One of the main sources from which European capitalism draws its chief strength is to be found in the colonial possessions and dependencies.” [Selected Works of M. N. Roy, Volume I, 1917-1922, p. 174]
allowed them an extraordinary freedom of movement and left them open to precisely the charges of Russian expansionism of which Lenin had warned.

Within a few months the Armenian republic, facing an invasion by the Kemalist Turks, capitulated to the Bolshevik forces stationed on its border as the lesser evil. In February 1921 the Red Army drove the Mensheviks out of Georgia. Both Transcaucasian "revolutions" were far more artificial and external than had been the collapse of Azerbaijan where Bolsheviks enjoyed considerable support from Baku workers. Though at first the Armenian Communists agreed to work with the Dashnaks and Lenin preferred some accommodation with the Georgian Mensheviks, in both cases the moderates were quickly eliminated and purely Communist political orders were established. In Transcaucasia, at least, no real attempt was made to implement the more cautious aspect of Comintern strategy, i.e., limited cooperation with non-Communist nationalists. Rather the more militant reading of that strategy, advancing as soon as possible to Communist direction of the movement, was adopted. But in Armenia and Georgia, where there was no significant support for Bolshevism, the party remained an isolated political force until time, inertia, and coercion brought grudging acquiescence from the population.

The first phase of the Comintern's involvement with the peoples of the East was over by late 1921. The revolutionary wave had receded, and the Soviet government began to see itself as one state among many, albeit with a different historical role. The link between the national question within the USSR and the anti-imperialist struggle abroad became more tenuous. And, perhaps most ominously, in the light of a resistant reality in which the inevitable movement toward Communism appeared
stalled, a yawning gap widened ever more between the actual practice of Bolsheviks and the inflated rhetoric that disguised it.

Bolsheviks were a minority party representing a social class that had nearly disappeared in the Civil War. With no political or cultural hegemony over the vast peasant masses and exceptionally vulnerable in the non-Russian regions, the Communist parties moderated their own leap into socialism. The years of the New Economic Policy (1921-1928) were a period of strategic compromise with the peasantry both in Russia and the national republics, a time of retreat and patience awaiting the delayed international revolution. Lenin continued to advocate caution and sensitivity toward non-Russians, while many of his comrades, most notably Stalin and Orjonikidze, were less willing to accommodate even moderate nationalists. In several republics many leaders of the defeated parties were quickly removed from power and driven into exile, but other former members of the nationalist or moderate socialist movements were integrated into the Communist parties and state apparatus. The Bolshevik project now involved the building of a new federated state, which at the same time would nurture the nations within it and forge new loyalties to the ideals of the socialists.
2. NATIONS AND STATES

Though in popular understanding and the ideologies of nationalists, the nation is usually thought of as existing prior to the state and as the principal basis on which the state has been formed, historians have long recognized the importance of states in the creation of nations. A quarter century ago Victor Kiernan wrote: "Of the two elements (nation-state) included here, it was the state that came first and fashioned the mould for the nation." The process by which the new state created the conditions for turning "a vague sense of nationality... into conscious nationalism" was intimately linked with the new [Renaissance] monarchies' relationship to the constituent social classes and their struggles.18 Ernest Gellner places the state at the center of his theory of nationalism, along with industrial society, and declares bluntly that "the problem of nationalism does not arise for stateless societies."19 Likewise, in a recent critique of John Breuilly's work on Nationalism and the State, Henry Patterson agrees that "[i]n the transition from some sense of cultural or ethnic identity to full-blown nationalism the development of the state is crucial."20 He faults Breuilly for neglecting the ways nationalisms build on class coalitions and argues that the very success of nationalist movements, which are always class coalitions with ostensibly


classless ideologies, requires an "approach that allows for the crucial role of the framework of state institutions in providing a point for the constitution and focusing of nationalist objectives."\(^{21}\)

On the empirical level, the centrality of the state in nation-formation has been exhaustively elaborated in the influential book by Eugene Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen*, where he shows how for a great number of French peasants a sense of being French overcame more localistic and particularistic identities only a century after the French Revolution. Here the state was fundamental in establishing a unified school system with a homogeneous French language, mobilizing men into an army that socialized them to new norms, and breaking down the cultural and social isolation of thousands of villages. On the other hand, while it is evident that state policies and inter-state warfare create opportunities for consolidating nationality and nation, it is equally clear that the original exemplars of nation-states, England and France, however they may have been formed, through dynastic marriages and military victories, were, as Anthony D. Smith notes, centered on a relatively homogeneous ethnic core around which other ethnic groups then consolidated. The ideal for nationalists, which then was read back into the past as if it were "real history," was the coincidence of state with pre-existing nationality. With the emergence of the democratic discourse of national self-determination, it was only a small step to conclude that the only (or at least, the most) legitimate states were those that were based on the natural affinities offered by ethnicity.

\(^{21}\) Ibid., p. 346.
3. "MAKING OF NATIONS," SOVIET-STYLE

As I emphasized in the previous chapters, the revolutionary and Civil War experience demonstrated how social identities long remained ambiguous or at least not fully articulated until they were solidified, however briefly, in political confrontations. The making of nationality and the spread of nationalism involved particular political conjunctures when people were forced to make less ambiguous choices about their friends and enemies than they had in the past. However artificial the generation of the independent republics that mushroomed in the turned-up soil of the revolution, the very experience of a brief statehood had a profound influence on future developments. The years of independence, the ascendancy of a more nationalist discourse among their intelligentsias, and the involuntary Sovietization all contributed to the growth of secular nationalist sentiments. But in the turbulence and widespread destruction of the Civil War, the effect on the broader population of the displacement of populations, the forced migration of much of the old nationalist intelligentsia and bourgeoisie, and vast devastation of the economy, particularly in cities, provided a political opportunity for the Bolsheviks, who proposed a program of recovery and limited self-determination.

The experience of independence and intervention differed greatly from nationality to nationality. Among the most successful, and relatively long-lived, the Georgian Republic, often cited as a model of a Social-Democratic peasant republic by Western enthusiasts, managed to defend itself against threats from the White forces under Denikin, rebellious local minorities, and Armenian incursions before succumbing to the invading Red Army. Both in Georgia and in Armenia parliamentary
systems with representation of oppositional parties were implemented, and in both republics desperate revolts by the Mensheviks and Dashnaks after the initial establishment of Soviet power testified to continuing support for the anti-Soviet leaderships.

The picture is far less clear elsewhere in the non-Russian peripheries. In Ukraine the destructiveness of the Civil War in which an estimated one million Ukrainians died, the fragility of each of the established governments, and the ferocity of the terror on both sides left a society devastated and desperate for peaceful recovery. The dearth of social historical research on the revolution in Ukraine prevents firm conclusions about the level of success of nationalist mobilization. The years of civil war were marked by a high degree of political fragmentation and localism. Villagers turned inward in both psychological and physical self-defense. Though it is difficult to follow the extreme conclusion that the "raising of national consciousness of the peasantry, which began in 1917, was completed by the peasants' experience of the various Soviet regimes, foreign intervention as well as Denikin's occupation of Ukraine," Ukrainian nationalism was far stronger and more widespread at the end of the Civil War than at the beginning.\(^{22}\) Identification with a territorial nation would grow even more impressively in the 1920s under Soviet rule.\(^{23}\)

In the lands inhabited by the Kazakhs a fierce triangular struggle pitted urban-based Bolsheviks against local White forces and the Kazakh Alash Orda autonomous


\(^{23}\) Ibid., pp. 46-47.
movement. As they fought alongside the Whites through 1918-1919, Alash Orda grew discontent with Kolchak's resistance to their autonomy and attempted to negotiate with Moscow. With the defeat of the Whites late in 1919, the Bolsheviks tried to win over the Kazakhs through a broad amnesty and concessions to local autonomy. In the absence of alternatives, Kazakhs acquiesced to Bolshevik rule. They returned to their seminomadic mode of existence and regenerated their traditional social structures in the new guise of local soviet power.24

For those people who ended up outside the Soviet federation, like the Baltic peoples, the even longer independence period and the brutality with which it was brought to an end became defining moments in their representation of nation. The political and economic power of the Baltic German elites was eliminated in the early years of independence, and, though minority cultures were permitted free expression, the dominant nationalities now promoted their own ethnic cultural and educational institutions. Demographically the Baltic republics were securely national. In the 1922 census Estonians made up 87.6% of the republic's population; according to 1935 figures Latvians were 75.5% of their state's population; and in 1937 Lithuanians were 84.2% in their republic.25 The parliamentary systems established in all three republics in the revolutionary period succumbed to more dictatorial forms in the late 1920s

24. "Clan, village, and aul authorities simply reconstituted themselves as soviets and governed their population much as before." (Olcott, The Kazakhs, p. 162)

and 1930s, and hostility between the Baltic republics and its Soviet neighbor increased in the years before World War II. Yet for all their political and economic difficulties, the Baltic states demonstrated viability as independent political actors, and the memory of that experience remained for the half century of Soviet rule after 1940 and served to mobilize the Baltic peoples in the Gorbachev years.

In the nationalist discourses of the present movements for self-determination in the Soviet Union the brief period of independence has been transformed into a moment of light to contrast with the long, dark experience with Soviet rule, which in turn is depicted as the destruction of the nation. Repression and forced Russification, imposed modernization and the suppression of national traditions, the destruction of the village, even an assault on nature are combined into a powerful series of images that show Soviet power as the enemy of the nation. Lost in this powerful nationalist rhetoric is any sense of the degree to which the long and difficult years of Communist party rule actually continued the "making of nations" of the prerevolutionary period. As the present generation watches the self-destruction of the Soviet Union, the irony is lost that the USSR was the victim not only of its negative effects on the non-Russian peoples but of its own "progressive" contribution to the process of nation-building.

The first state in history to be formed of ethnic political units, the USSR was a pseudo-federal state that both eliminated political sovereignty for the nationalities and guaranteed them territorial identity, educational and cultural institutions in their own language, and the promotion of native cadres into positions of power. Though the powerful appeal of nationalism has been a global phenomenon in the twentieth
century, its potency in the Soviet Union requires analysis of the peculiar historic formation of coherent, conscious nations in a unique political system that consciously set out to thwart nationalism. At least eight fundamental trends over the seven decades of Soviet power can be explored to provide the background and context in which mass ethnic nationalisms exploded in the 1980s. We shall look in turn at: nativization, economic and social transformation, territorialization, the practice of imperialism, the preservation of traditionalism, the fostering of unevenness, the development of localism, and national mobilization.

4. NATIVIZATION

The policy of "nativization" (korenizatsiia), encouraged by Lenin and supported by Stalin until the early 1930s, contributed to the consolidation of nationality in three important ways: in support of the native language, in the creation of a national intelligentsia and political elite, and the formal institutionalization of ethnicity in the state apparatus. On the language front the Soviet governments, already in the years of Civil War, adopted laws establishing the equality of languages in courts and administration, free choice of language in schooling, and protection of minority languages. The short-lived Latvian Soviet government adopted such a law as early as January 1918, as did the Ukrainian Soviet authorities in December 1919. In Belarus four different languages -- Belorussian, Russian, Polish, and Yiddish -- were used in signs, in local governments, and in schools. The central state promoted alphabets for peoples who had no writing, opened schools for those who had none under tsarism, and set up hundreds of national soviets for peoples living outside their
national region. In ways strikingly similar to what had been accomplished for some
nationalities in the nineteenth century by patriotic intellectuals, Soviet activists set out
to create educational systems and literary languages for their peoples by selecting the
dialect to be promoted and by systematizing, refining, "purifying" the lexicon. By
1927 82% of schools in Ukraine had been Ukrainized, and more than three-quarters
of the pupils were attending Ukrainian-language schools.

Steadily Russian officials were replaced by national leaders, and since many of
the new Bolshevik cadres in the national republics were former members of other
parties, like the Ukrainian Left S-Rs known as "Borotbisti" (Fighters), the nativization
campaigns created a broad base of support for the common enterprise of ethnic
liberation and socialist construction. The formation of new political classes in the
national republics, Communist but made up of the local nationality, can be observed
from figures for membership in the Communist parties. In 1922 72% of all Commu-
nists were Russians; only 15,000 were from traditionally Muslim peoples (6534
Tatars, 4964 Kazakhs). Five years later Russians made up only 65% of the RKP (b),
and the various national regions of the USSR -- union republics, autonomous repub-
lies and regions, and national territories -- had achieved a level of 46.6% native
membership (about 180,000 Communists). This trend continued until about 1932,
when the native CP membership in the national regions reached 53.8% (582,000

26. Al'bert Pavlovich Nenarokov, "Iz opyta natsional'noiazykovoi politiki pervykh

27. Krawchenko, Social Change and National Consciousness, p. 89.
Communists). In the Ukrainian party Ukrainians increased from 24% to 59% in the decade 1922-1932; Belorussians in the Belorussian party grew from 21% to 60%; while in Transcaucasia the already high native percentages grew at a less spectacular rate: in Georgia from 62% to 66%; in Armenia from 89% to 90%; in Azerbaijan from 39% to 44%. The figures for Central Asia were particularly noteworthy: Kazakh membership in the republican Communist Party grew from 8% to 53% (1924-1933); and every party in the region (that reported figures) had a majority of native members.

A similar trend can be observed in the state apparatuses of the Union republics, though here the representation of the local nationalities was far greater at the raion level than at the republic level. In Ukraine in 1929, for example, Ukrainians made up 36% of the apparatus at the republic level and 76% at the raion level. The corresponding figures for Belorussians were 49.5% and 73%; for Azerbaijanis, 36% and 69%; for Georgians, 74% and 81%; for Armenians, 93.5% and 94.6%; for Turkmen, 8.4% and 24%; for Uzbeks, 11.5% and 41.6%; and for Tajiks, 14% and 45%.

But the policy of nativization was contested by party members suspicious of concessions to nationality and the inclusion in the party and state of peoples less


29. Ibid., p. 48.

30. Ibid., p. 51.
committed to the rigidifying vision of the dominant faction in the Communist Party.

Stalin and his closest comrades were particularly hostile to the growth of "national
communisms" in Georgia and Ukraine, and a bitter confrontation over the extent of
autonomy in the non-Russian republics cooled relations between Stalin and the ailing
Lenin. Once Lenin was incapacitated by a series of strokes, Stalin used his power to
exile to diplomatic posts both the Georgian Bolshevik Budu Mdivani and one of the
early leaders of Ukraine, the Bulgarian Khristian Rakovskii.\textsuperscript{31} To Stalin, local
nationalism appeared to be a greater danger than the Great Russian Chauvinism of
which Lenin repeatedly warned.

Despite opposition from strategically located opponents and countervailing
tendencies toward political centralization, the nativization policies bore a rich harvest
in the 1920s, as the works by Zvi Gitelman, Bohdan Krawchenko, James Mace, and
George Liber attest.\textsuperscript{32} In Armenia the Communists spoke of the resurrection of
Armenia from the ashes of genocide, and while they drove out or arrested the anti-
Bolshevik nationalists, they began the rebuilding of an Armenian state to which

\textsuperscript{31} The struggle between Lenin and Stalin over the nationality question has been

\textsuperscript{32} Zvi Y. Gitelman, \textit{Jewish Nationality and Soviet Politics: The Jewish Sections of
the CPSU, 1917-1930} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972); Bohdan
Krawchenko, \textit{Social Change and National Consciousness in Twentieth-Century Ukraine}
(London: Macmillan, 1985); James E. Mace, \textit{Communism and the Dilemmas of
National Liberation: National Communism in Soviet Ukraine, 1918-1933} (Cambridge,
MA: Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, 1983); George Liber, "Urban Growth and
Ethnic Change in the Ukrainian SSR, 1923-1933," \textit{Soviet Studies}, XLI, 4 (October
refugees from other parts of the Soviet Union and the world could migrate. The cosmopolitan capitals of Georgia and Azerbaijan now became the seats of power of native Communists, and the infrastructure of national states, complete with national operas, national academies of science, national film studios, were built up.

In the national republics national identity was both transformed and reinforced in new forms. In Ukraine, for example, where in prerevolutionary times Ukrainian peasants had assimilated easily into a Russified working class, the new political environment and the shifts in national awareness in the 1920s was reflected in the increase in numbers of "Ukrainians" in towns. "There were two aspects to this process," writes Bohdan Krawchenko. "The first was the re-absorption into a Ukrainian identity of assimilated Ukrainians. The second was that Russification, if not halted, was certainly reduced to a minimum. This meant that assimilation did not offset whatever gains Ukrainians made by urban immigration." 33 Ukrainians and other non-Russian peoples gained an urban presence they had never enjoyed before, and the former dominance of Russians in the cities was compromised. "We will not forcibly Ukrainise the Russian proletariat in Ukraine," said a Ukrainian Communist leader, "but we will ensure that the Ukrainian...when he goes to the city will not be Russified...and yes, we will repaint the signs in towns." 34

The Soviet policy of korenizatsiia (the promotion of national languages and national cadres in the governance of national areas), even after it was undercut by the


34. Ibid., p. 56.
Stalinist emphasis on rapid industrialization, increased the language capabilities and the politicization of the non-Russians in the national republics. The creation of national working classes, newly-urbanized populations, national intelligencias and ethnic political elites all contributed to the more complete elaboration of nationhood.

Even as ethnicity was being strengthened in many ways, however, it was simultaneously being limited and even undermined in others. Official Soviet doctrine repeated Lenin's prediction of sblizhenie (rapprochement) and sliianie (merger) of Soviet peoples and of the creation of a single Soviet culture. Mobility, acculturation of political and intellectual elites, the preference for Russian schooling, the generalized effects of industrialization and urbanization, all created anxiety about assimilation and loss of culture. A deep contradiction developed between the pressures resulting from the effects of korenizatsiia and the "renationalization" of ethnic groups in the Soviet years, on the one hand, and state policies that transformed an agrarian society into an industrial urban one and promoted assimilation into a generalized Soviet culture.

5. ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

The policy of nativization was invoked simultaneously with a Soviet program of economic development and social transformation. In the 1920s restoration of the devastated economy and the rooting of Soviet power in the Russian countryside and the non-Russian republics were both carried out in the context of korenizatsiia and the moderate mixed economy of the New Economic Policy. But in the period of the greatest acceleration of industrialization and urbanization, when the entire economy of
the Soviet Union was transformed from a mixed state and market economy into a highly centralized command economy, a deep and irreconcilable polarization occurred between the cultural and political impulses of "national communism" and the imperatives of Stalin's Revolution-from-Above. As Stalin moved to consolidate his power in the early 1930s, ethnic interests were radically subordinated to considerations of economic efficiency and productivity. Centralization and the radical decrease of republic autonomy coincided with a major shift in nationality policy. Korenizatsiia, though never officially rejected, was steadily replaced by anti-nationalistic campaigns. Most dramatically, in Ukraine the Postyshev government viciously attacked the Ukrainizers and criticized their promotion of Ukrainian education and culture. The powerful Ukrainian national Communist, Commissar of Education Mykola Skypnyk, killed himself on July 7, 1933. Half a year later Stalin himself signalled the turn against korenizatsiia when he amended Lenin's assertion that Great Russian Chauvinism was a greater danger than small nation nationalism. The greatest danger, the proletarian dictator declared, comes from the nationalism that one has forgotten to combat.\(^{35}\)

The collectivization of agriculture, resisted by hundreds of thousands of peasants, dealt a devastating blow to the traditionally patriarchal village leaderships and subjugated what had been an independent peasantry to the dictates of state officials. In Ukraine grain collections exceeded all ability of the peasantry to fulfil

\[^{35}\text{I. V. Stalin, "Ochetnyi doklad XVII s"ezdu partii o rabote TsK VKP (b), 26 Ianvaria 1934 g.," Sochinenia, XIII, pp. 361-362.}\]
the imposed targets, and once reserves and even seed grain was exhausted, a massive famine followed, which left millions dead.\textsuperscript{36} In Kazakhstan collectivization was combined with forcible settlement of nomads, and Kazakhs responded by destroying 80\% of their herds. Hundreds of thousands migrated, while millions died from violence and starvation.\textsuperscript{37} Throughout the Soviet Union collectivization and attacks on local nationalism coincided with campaigns against the Church and the Mosque. In Azerbaijan and Central Asia women were compelled to give up the veil. In Armenia the head of the national church was murdered. Thousands of churches, mosques, and synagogues were closed or destroyed.

Simultaneously, rapid, forced industrialization resulted in social and geographical mobility that further broke up traditional patterns of authority and cultural practices. A new working class drafted from the peasantry appeared in towns and new factory sites, without industrial skills, ignorant of labor traditions and organizations, and subject to a rising elite of managers and technicians, themselves vulnerable to those still higher up. By the mid-1930s cadres were chosen more for their technical abilities or loyalty to the General Line than their ethnic (or even class) background. To succeed a party official or economic manager had to be literate in

\textsuperscript{36} The famine, which was man-made, has been interpreted by some scholars as a deliberately ethnocidal policy against Ukrainians in particular, rather than a consequence of the collectivization drive. Though evidence for a policy of genocide is lacking, the argument supporting this view can be found in Robert Conquest, \textit{The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine} (Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); and in James E. Mace, "Famine and Nationalism in Soviet Ukraine," \textit{Problems of Communism} XXXIII, 3 (May-June 1984), pp. 37-50.

\textsuperscript{37} Olcott, \textit{The Kazakhs}, pp. 179-187.
the general Russian culture of the elite. By the end of the 1930s Russian language study was compulsory in all schools. Though native languages were also taught, their status was inferior to the all-state language, Russian, and they were often seen as insufficient for successful careers in politics or science.

Reflecting the Russophilia of the dictator, Stalinism promoted Russian language and culture. By 1946 the Russian membership of the all-union Communist party had risen to 67.8%, and native membership in the national regions had fallen to 45%.\(^{38}\) The extreme centralization of Stalin's autocracy made any manifestation of local autonomy a criminal act. A whole generation of national Communist leaders, many of them the founders of the parties in the non-Russian republics, were physically eliminated in the Great Terror of the late 1930s. By the outbreak of the war, Stalin's absolute power meant the absolute powerlessness of all peoples and their elites in the USSR. His own whims and suspicions led him to the most reckless and arbitrary treatment of the non-Russians, even to abolition of several autonomous republics and regions and the exiling of whole peoples from their homelands to Siberia or Central Asia.\(^{39}\)

The effects of the contradictory Soviet policies of korenizatsiya and economic and social transformation were different both within nationalities and among different

\(^{38}\) Ibid., pp. 46-47.

peoples. While many nationalities underwent internal consolidation and a growth of national consciousness, others suffered more extremely from Russification. In Belorussia, for example, there were no Belorussian schools available in cities by the 1970s. Armenians and Georgians, on the other hand, felt little effect from state-enforced Russification, though they often complained bitterly about the impositions of a bilingualist policy. Several nationalities, notably the Kazakhs, Estonians, and Latvians, were weakened demographically by the in-migration of Russians and other Slavs, often as industrial workers and technicians, though others, like the Armenians, Azerbaijanis, and Georgians, increased their percentages in the republics’ population. Estonians and Georgians vigorously resisted learning Russian and defended native language use, while hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians lost the ability to communicate with ease in the language of their grandparents.

While the industrialization, urbanization, and greater social mobility associated with Soviet programs of development acculturated many non-Russians to a homogenized Soviet way of life, they did not have the effect of obliterating ethnic identity or assimilating non-Russians totally into an ethnic Russian culture. The official policy of bringing the Soviet peoples together registered an enviable degree of success by the Brezhnev period. By 1979, 62.2% of non-Russians considered themselves fluent in Russian.40 On the other hand, despite the brutal reversals in the nativization policies

of the 1920s and the promotion of Russian language and culture under Stalin, the processes set in motion by korenizatsiia continued until, by the 1960s, most of the republics had become more national in character, not only demographically, but politically and culturally as well. What were in effect "affirmative action programs" promoted cadres from the titular nationalities, often to the detriment of the more urbanized and educated Russian (and in Azerbaijan and Georgia, Armenian) population. Education remained national though secularized and "socialist in content;" national languages were taught, but whereas Russian was compulsory for non-Russian, after 1958 learning the language of the republic in which one lived was not obligatory.

6. TERRITORIALIZATION

Related to the process of nativization during the Soviet period was the territorialization of ethnicity. Formerly, many ethnic and religious communities had much greater loyalty to and identity with either the village or locality in which they lived, or, in the case of many Muslims, with the world Islamic community (the

41. In Georgia, for example, the Communist party was 76.1% Georgian in membership in 1970, though in that year Georgians made up only 66.8% of the republic's population. Armenians made up 9.7% of the population but only 8.0% of party membership, while Russians were 8.5% of the population and 5.5% of the party. [Kommunisticheskaia partiia Gruzii v tsifrakh (1921-1970 gg.) Sbornik statisti-cheskikh materialov (Tbilisi, 1971), p.265; J. A. Newth, "The 1970 Soviet Census," Soviet Studies, 24, no. 2 (October 1972), p. 215] At the same time ethnic Georgians accounted for 82.6% of the students in higher education in the republic, while Russians made up only 6.8% and Armenians 3.6%. [Richard B. Dobson, "Georgia and the Georgians," in Zev Katz (ed.), Handbook of Major Soviet Nationalities (New York: The Free Press, 1975), p. 177]
Supranational and subnational loyalties competed with the more specifically national.\textsuperscript{42} For certain ethnicities, most notably those of Central Asia, the establishment of territorial administrative units on the basis of nationality in the early 1920s was unprecedented in their history and provided clear political and territorial identity as alternatives to earlier religious and tribal solidarities. Following Stalin's own definition of nation, Soviet authorities promoted an idea of nation fixed to territory.

Migration strengthened the titular nationalities in many republics, consolidating the identity of ethnicity with territory. In the prerevolutionary centuries the Russian Empire had been a place of constant migration, with tribes and peoples moving from one area to another. In Transcaucasia, for example, after the Russo-Persian and Russo-Turkish wars, Muslims left for the empires to the south and Armenians migrated north into Erevan province, to Tbilisi (Tiflis) and Baku. The population of towns was mixed, with Armenians being the most urbanized of the three peoples, but in the Soviet period high rates of urbanization led to solid majorities of Azerbaijanis in Baku and Georgians in Tbilisi. Yet even as ethnic consolidation rose, anomalous enclaves of ethnic minorities remained: in Mountainous Karabagh, an autonomous region in Azerbaijan, over three-quarters of the population were Armenian; in Abkhazia, an autonomous republic in Georgia, the Abkhaz minority was threatened by

\textsuperscript{42} Alexandre Bennigsen, "Several Nations or One People," \textit{Survey}, no. 108 (1979), pp. 51 ff; Michael Rywkin, \textit{Moscow's Muslim Challenge: Soviet Central Asia} (Armonk, N. Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1982, p. 118. Bennigsen predicted, I believe wrongly, that for Soviet Muslims the national -- the allegiance to the national Soviet republics -- was the weakest loyalty, while the supranational -- allegiance to the Islamic community of Central Asia as a whole -- was the strongest.
the growing Georgian plurality. Dozens of Azerbaijani villages remained in Georgia and Armenia, while Armenian and Georgian villages could be found in Azerbaijan.

With the coming of Soviet power cosmopolitanism declined, except in parts of the RSFSR and the Baltic republics, and many formerly multinational regions and cities gradually became more ethnically homogeneous. Tbilisi, a city that had been both demographically and politically dominated by Armenians and Russians before the revolution, first achieved a Georgian majority in the 1960s. Baku steadily became Azerbaijani in the Soviet period, though Armenians and Russians remained in middle-level positions of authority. But in the aftermath of the Karabagh conflict Azerbaijanis stormed through the streets of Baku in January 1990, killing Armenians and forcing the survivors to flee from the city under Russian protection. Erevan, which as a small town in the late nineteenth century still contained a large Muslim population, grew into a nearly purely Armenian city through the in-migration of Armenians from other parts of the Soviet Union and the Armenian diaspora. The territorialization of ethnicity and the increased power of the titular nationality created new problems of national minorities and diasporas, peoples with few guarantees and means of redress for accumulating grievances. The legacies of empire were not uniform. They both left some republics more demographically compact and others less homogeneous. After seventy years of Soviet power about sixty million Soviet citizens lived outside of their (or had no) "homeland." Twenty-five million of these dispersed people were Russian.

The Soviet empire had created territorial nations, with their own state apparatuses and ruling elites. Each had the trappings of any sovereign state, from the
national opera house to a national flag and seal, but without real sovereignty or the right to full political expression. What Tom Nairn calls a "reservation culture" had been established: ethnolinguistic culture without political nationalism was the only permissible, "healthy" nationhood. 43

7. IMPERIALISM

Relations between the center and the ethnic peripheries remained basically imperial, that is, inequitable and based on a subordinate relationship to the Russian center. After the revolution these relationships were disguised and justified by reference to a supranational ideology and a compelling vision of history that sanctioned the rule of the Communist party. In a Russocentric empire, in which Russian was most closely identified with Soviet, proletarian, and progress, ethnicity conferred both relative advantage and disadvantage. As a fundamental marker of official identity, ethnicity at one and the same time made people eligible for promotion and access to privileges (if, for example, they were members of the titular nationality of a given republic) or discrimination (if they were not). In certain contexts even being Russian could be disadvantageous, and being Jewish increasingly became a liability in the years following World War II. Stalin's "anti-cosmopolitan" campaigns were virulently anti-Semitic, culminating in the frameup of the infamous "Doctors' Plot" of the early 1950s, but even in the post-Stalin period milder forms of anti-Semitism were

rampant in party circles and were manifest in promotion policies, admission quotas for higher education, and the very definition of what constituted extra-legal dissent.

While native cadres may have governed in Azerbaijan or Uzbekistan (particularly after the 1920s when native Communists were few in number), policies were largely determined in Moscow and local interests were subordinated to all-Union goals. Non-Russian republics were treated as objects of central policy rather than subjects capable of independent decision-making, and their national destiny was fundamentally altered as a result. In Kazakhstan, for example, where the imposition of collectivization of agriculture resulted in the loss of 40% of the population either through death or migration, the nomadic population was forcibly settled on the land, fundamentally changing its ancient way of life. Industrial and agricultural development, particularly Khrushchev’s Virgin Lands program of the 1950s, resulted in the settlement of non-Kazakhs in the republic, until by 1979 Kazakhs made up only 33% of the republic’s population. Moreover, Kazakhstan was used as a test area for atomic weapons and a way station for up and coming party leaders like Leonid Brezhnev who served as party chief briefly in 1955-1956.44

A fundamental contradiction grew like a cancer within the Soviet state -- between empire, on the one hand, and emerging nations, on the other. Much more than the tsarist empire the USSR had become a "prisonhouse of nations," indeed of nations that had grown up within the Soviet Union. The inherently inequitable

44. On Kazakhstan, see Martha Brill Olcott, The Kazakhs (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1987).
political relations between the center and the republics (and within republics between the capital and the autonomies) became increasingly intolerable as nationalities gained the capacity for their own self-development. By the post-Stalin period both titular nationalities in the union republics and minorities within republics expressed growing frustration at restraints on development imposed by bureaucratic centralism.

8. TRADITIONALISM

For all the transformative effects of Soviet-style economic and social development, traditional cultural practices and social structures have persisted. What Massell calls "the old unities based on kinship, custom, and belief" have managed to survive even as traditional leaderships were removed, religion was officially undermined, and the social environment was fundamentally changed. In Central Asia, for example, the patriarchal forms of female subjugation proved resistant to efforts by the party to liberate women. The lack of a native proletariat and clearly-delineated class lines led the regime in the 1920s to attempt to use women as a "surrogate proletariat," an improvised "class" wedge to force cleavages in traditional Muslim societies. Women were encouraged to take off their veils, seek work outside the household, and challenge the patriarchal authority of their fathers and brothers. The experiment, which resulted in beatings and assassinations of female activists, Communist cadres, and their supporters, was, at least in the short run, a failure, as women

who had given up the veil returned to the ancient practice. "For the most part, women may be said to have failed to function as a social class, a stratum with a sense of shared identity, with a distinct clearly perceived community of experience, interest, purpose, and action."46

As in Russia proper, so among the non-Russians of the periphery, the Bolsheviks had little effective control over the countryside in their first decade in power. Immediately after the October revolution and until the Civil War, Lenin’s reach beyond Moscow, Petrograd, and a few loyal cities like Bolshevik-dominated Baku, was quite weak, and for the first half-year of Soviet power peasants and provincials largely ran their own affairs.47 This began to change as the battlelines formed, and each side forcefully established their hold on local governmental bodies. Not only did military operations stem from political decisions but politics was an extension of military moves. With the defeat of the anti-Bolsheviks, the Communists established their hold over towns and cities but were too few in number to firmly control the countryside. In the ethnic peripheries those among the local elites who had survived the war reasserted their traditional roles. Among the Kazakhs, for example, soviet power was a facade that disguised the real structure of local power underneath. The local power structure was controlled by the traditional clanic leaders. Aul soviets were formed in every community, as legislation required, but they were dominated by

46. Ibid., p. 397.

traditional leadership, both clanic and clerical. The same was true of the aul party
cells; many communities had neither a party cell nor any aul Communists. However,
where cells did exist the membership was indistinguishable from the traditional
leadership groups. Both the general members and the local party secretaries had no
secular education and knew nothing about either party ideology or party programs.48

The local, traditional socio-cultural systems of the prerevolutionary period,
segmented and small in scale, were resistant to forced change from outside and
provided places of retreat from Soviet interventions. A Western anthropologist doing
her field work in Georgia, for example, observed that "the sense of powerlessness of
villagers towards the state encourages them to turn inwards."49 Kinship networks
and the mistrust of outsiders combined to encourage the use of unofficial, informal
means of settling conflicts. Socialization still takes place in the family, and women as
the guardians of the Georgian tradition taught their children both the values of the
culture and a wariness toward the larger Soviet world.50 Patronage networks, so
central in Transcaucasia to an individual's power and prestige, were carefully
maintained and have been adapted to the requirements of an economy of shortages.51


49. Tamara Dragadze, Rural Families in Soviet Georgia: A Case Study in Ratcha


51. Gerald Mars and Yochanan Altman, "The Cultural Bases of Soviet Georgia's
Older ways of living, traditional networks and values were sources of strength to non-Russians that empowered them to resist outside impositions or adapt alien institutions to their own purposes. Collective farms in Tajikistan were based on the traditional kinship networks, the avlod, and were seen as belonging to the kinship group. Work brigades were formed from relatives. Even industrial workers maintained traditional ways, marrying young, leaving seasonally for the village to cultivate the family plot, resisting emigration outside Central Asia. The government constantly, but futilely, fought against elaborate Georgian funerals, extended North Caucasian weddings and festivals, and those rites and rituals that it considered "remnants" of the feudal past. Without underestimating the degree to which life, even in the most isolated mountain villages, was shaped by the intervention of the Soviet state, one remains impressed by the persistence of older customs and practices. And perhaps most frustrating for the central government was the close connection between kinship, culture, and the "second economy," the illegal wheeling and dealing protected by favors and bribes, family loyalties and codes of silence.

9. UNEVENNESS

The very nature of Soviet economic development created not only sharp divisions between nationalities but also within nationalities between the more tradition-


al and the radically transformed. Soviet economic and social change was marked by extreme unevenness, and the result was the coexistence of mobile, better educated, more "modern" urban populations with less mobile, less well-educated "traditional" societies in the countryside. In part this was the result of a lack of resources, making the full transformation of all parts of Soviet society economically too costly, but in part this has also been a consequence of Soviet policies, whether consciously or unconsciously. Faced by a choice between large-scale economic change and carrying out simultaneously a cultural revolution, the Stalinist regime retreated from the more radical cultural practices of the 1920s and tolerated "distinctly uneven development in political, economic, and socio-cultural spheres -- indeed [displayed] a willingness to leave pockets of antecedent life-styles relatively undisturbed, if necessary, for an indefinite period of time. "54

In her ethnography of a Georgian village Tamara Dragadze demonstrates that even collectivization did little to change traditional settlement patterns or redistribute wealth in the villages of Ratcha. Family solidarity was actually fostered rather than undercut by Soviet practices. "Soviet law re-enforces the age-old tradition whereby a son lives next to his parents, with nearby houses belonging to his brothers, paternal uncles and first cousins.... Throughout the country, the family provides more support and demands greater loyalty than any other institution. The government has refrained from interfering in this, except for campaigning against nepotism and overspending at

family celebrations."  

10. LOCALISM

The political leadership of the Communist Party, even as it proclaimed the full resolution of the "national question" in the Soviet Union, failed to deal effectively with the problems of a multinational empire and instead allowed old tensions to fester and grow. Bolshevism had long reduced problems of nationality and ethnic culture to economics, failing to appreciate the independent power of ethnic culture. Though granting that nationality had to be accommodated before the full victory of communism, Bolshevism was consistently suspicious of national expression. Over time and even at the same moment Bolshevik policy was profoundly inconsistent, pushing for "nativization" and the "flourishing" (rastsvet) of national cultures, on the one hand, while promoting the ideological goals of stiranie (obliteration of national peculiarities), sbliizhenie (rapprochement), and slijanie (merging), on the other. The regime retained full power to decide what was permissible "patriotic" expression and what was pernicious nationalism, and the boundaries between the two shifted constantly.  

The loosening of control from the center after Stalin’s death permitted regional and ethnic communist parties a considerable degree of independence from Moscow. In the Khrushchev and Brezhnev years the arena of allowable national expression expanded significantly as republican leaderships forged their own ties with their


populations through the manipulation of ethnic symbols. Though ultimate power and effective sovereignty remained until the early 1990s with the central party authorities in Moscow, in many republics local party elites were able to thwart the will of the center, as long as economic growth continued and the worst excesses of nationalism were contained. The rise of ethnic "mafias," party and state officials who collaborated with economic profiteers, fostered corruption and threatened the overall development of the Soviet economy. The regime itself had become an obstacle to the further growth of both the economy and of society.

Once Stalinist terror was reduced -- and in the absence of effective democratic control from below -- the republics were essentially ruled by national "mafias" that were centered within the Communist parties and state apparatuses whose reach extended throughout society. With the establishment of "indirect rule" from the center under Khrushchev and the easing of the extraordinary restrictions on ethnic expression, the national political elites in Transcaucasia and Central Asia particularly promoted a corrupt system of patronage, favoritism toward the titular nationality, and the widespread practice of bribetaking and payoffs. With the rise of complex

57. From 1954 to 1973 Armenia's Communist party had both first and second secretaries who were Armenian. Of the union republics only Ukraine, Belorussia, and Estonia (to 1971) also enjoyed this privilege. All other republics had a native first secretary and a Russian or other Slav as second secretary. Georgia lost its native second secretary in 1956, Azerbaijan in 1957. "The dyarchy of native first secretary and Russian second secretary in charge of cadres is now the norm," wrote John H. Miller in 1977. "This is not the same as a strengthening of Russian control, but represents rather the strengthening of institutional procedures, in an area, where, before 1953, equivalent functions would have been performed by the security police." "Cadres Policy in Nationality Areas -- Recruitment of CPSU First and Second Secretaries in Non-Russian Republics of the USSR," Soviet Studies, 39, no. 1 (January 1977), p. 35.
networks of patrons and clients and "family circles," party leaders, like Veli Akhundov in Azerbaijan, Anton Kochinian in Armenia, and Vasilii Mzhavanadze in Georgia, men who had enjoyed Khrushchev’s favor, became enmeshed in the corruption and favoritism that characterized normal Transcaucasian political and economic practices. Their tenures were marked by extraordinary longevity. Mzhavanadze was first secretary of the Georgian Communist party for nineteen years (1953-1972). Kochinian had served as chairman of the Council of Ministers of Armenia (1952-1966) before being tapped by Brezhnev to be Armenian first secretary (1966-1974). Akhundov had succeeded Imam Mustafaev (1954-1959), who had been ousted for corruption and national "isolationism," and spent ten years as first secretary of the Azerbaijani party.

The same trend toward long tenure was evident throughout the Soviet Union. In Uzbekistan, Sharaf Rashidov, a man whose name has become a metaphor for corruption, ruled from 1959 until his death in 1983; in Tajikistan, Jabar Rasulov was party chief for twenty-one years (1961-1982); in Kyrgyzstan Turdakun Usubaliev ruled for twenty-four years (1961-1985); Dinamukhammed Kunaev headed the Kazakh party for twenty-two years (1961-1986); and Mukhamednazar Gapurov was Turkmen party chief for sixteen years (1969-1985). The situation was not much better in the Soviet west: Pyotr Masherov ruled in Belorussia from 1965 to 1983; Ivan Bodyul in Moldavia from 1961 to 1980; I. G. Kebin in Estonia from 1950 to 1978; August Voss in Latvia from 1966 to 1984), and P. P. Grishkiavichius in Lithuania from 1974 to 1987). The longevity of these national leaderships had by the early 1970s led to the consolidation of local elites that placated the local populations with moderate
concessions to national feelings and a high degree of economic permissiveness.

In the largest non-Russian republic, Ukraine, where there had never been a
Ukrainian first secretary before, O. I. Kyrychenko (A. Kirichenko), was appointed
just after Stalin's death in 1953. After his successor, M. Pidhornyi (N. Podgorny)
(1957-1963), Ukrainization of the party apparatus and the educational system acceler-
ated under P. Iu. Shelest. In 1972 Shelest was dismissed, and Ukrainization was
reined in under the loyal Brezhnevist, V. V. Shcherbyts’ki, who ruled until just
before his own death in 1989.58

By the end of the 1960s the Brezhnev regime, which in general backed the
entrenched party cadres, found it difficult to tolerate the continued frustration of its
economic plans. In order to break through the complex networks of friends, clients,
and relatives which local party bosses had erected in Transcaucasia, the central party
leaders turned to new personnel outside the dominant party apparatuses. On July 14,
1969, Heidar Aliev, a career KGB officer, was selected as first secretary of the
Azerbaijani Communist party. Three years later, in September 1972, his colleague in
the Georgian security forces, Eduard Shevardnadze, was named leader of the Geor-
gian party. That same year Russians were brought into Armenia to serve as second
secretary of the Central Committee and head of the KGB, and in November 1974,
Karen Demirchian, a young Armenian engineer educated outside of Armenia, became
party chief in Armenia. The mandate given these men was the same: to end

58. Yaroslav Bilinskyh, "Mykola Skypnyk and Petro Shelest: An Essay on the
Persistence and Limits of Ukrainian National Communism," in Jeremy Azrael (ed.),

48
economic and political corruption, to stimulate economic growth, to end ethnic favoritism and contain the more overt expressions of local nationalism, and to promote a new governing elite able to carry out the policies of the Communist party. But because of the traditional reliance on close ties with family and friends, the underground economy and corrupt political practices in Transcaucasia and Central Asia proved to be particularly invulnerable to reform. Since among the peoples of the Soviet south primary loyalty is centered on kinship groups or intimate friends, the sense of personal worth stems more from the honor or shame one brings on one's circle than from a successful career or great accumulation of wealth. Favors done or received are the operative currency of both social and political relations, and the networks built up through favors and personal ties made it possible to circumvent the official state economy and legal forms of political behavior. So powerful are the obligations to one's relatives and friends that the shame incurred by non-fulfillment was, for many in the southern tier of Soviet republics, much more serious than the penalties imposed by law. Since the political and police structures were also penetrated by such personal networks, protection from punishment was a frequent favor, and non-compliance with the law held fewer risks than breaking family codes. Even after the state came down hard on the "second economy" in the 1970s and the risks involved in circumventing the law increased, the networks persisted, an effective form of national resistance against the ways of doing business imposed by the Soviet polity.

11. NATIONAL MOBILIZATION

Ironically, the Soviet state, which had been originally conceived as a state representing the historic role of a single class, the proletariat, had over time eroded the very sense of class that had brought the Bolsheviks to power. Through the 1920s and 1930s the artificial manipulation of class categories and official restrictions on autonomous class activity undermined identification and loyalty to class. The "dictatorship of the proletariat" had been replaced by a self-proclaimed socialism and eventually a "state of the whole people." In 1974 the very designation of class, so key to identity, privilege, and advantage in the 1920s, was eliminated from Soviet passports. Yet nationality had through the same decades taken on a new importance as indicator of membership in a relevant social and cultural community. In the Union republics membership in the titular nationality conferred various advantages both through the official "affirmative action" programs that promoted the local peoples and through informal networks based on kinship, religion, and language. With the emergence of an articulated civil society in the Soviet Union in the post-Stalin decades, identification with nationality was for most non-Russians a far more palpable touchstone than the eroded loyalty to social class.

The end of terror and the first serious questioning of the seamless Stalinist version of history in 1956 required the regime to seek other forms of authority and legitimation. Despite the continued rhetorical commitment to internationalism, non-Russian leaderships attempted to ground their regimes in toothless national appeals. Republic leaders promoted their own local forms of "official nationalism," celebra-
tions of sanctioned traditions and acceptable heroes of the past. Certain figures from
the reconstructed histories of the Soviet nationalities were incorporated into the
official narrative, while others were excluded. In Georgia, for example, the leading
nationalist poet of the nineteenth century, Ilia Chavchavadze, was sanctified as part of
the canon, despite his hostility to socialism and Armenophobic chauvinism, while the
leader of the independent Menshevik republic, Noe Zhordania, himself a committed
Marxist, was anathematized. The boundaries of official nationalism were heatedly
negotiated between intellectuals and the state. While in Ukraine after the fall of
Shelest "nationalist" expression was severely limited, in Armenia monuments were
erected to unorthodox revolutionary figures, like General Antranik, and religious
heroes, like Saint Vartan.

While "official nationalism," or what is defined by Soviet authorities as
"patriotism," became a permissible form of expression in the more laissez-faire
atmosphere of the 1950s-1960s, central authorities, always wary of potential ethnic
chauvinism or political separatism, periodically reigned in the more vocal proponents
of local nationalism. Beyond the frontier of the permitted expression of ethnic pride
and historical achievement, there appeared in the 1960s a dissident or "unorthodox
nationalism" expressed by a few human rights activists and even revolutionary
separatists. As early as March 1956 students in Tbilisi took to the streets in an
essentially nationalist protest against the removal of a monument to Stalin and were
met by gunfire from the army. Dozens were killed. Almost a decade later, on April
24, 1965, thousands of Armenians marched in an unofficial demonstration to mark the
fiftieth anniversary of the Genocide. Then First Secretary Zakov Zarobian rejected
the use of force and tried to calm the crowds. As a concession to Armenian national sentiments, a monument to the victims of the massacres and deportations of 1915 was built on a hill in Erevan, Tsitsernakaberd, and each year on April 24, spontaneous processions of people file up to the eternal flame to lay flowers. But Zarobian, who had achieved considerable popularity in Armenia for his conciliatory attitude toward Armenian national feelings, was removed from power within a year after the demonstration.

As state and society struggled over the definition of national rights in the Brezhnev years, the openly defiant dissident movement risked arrest and exile to express its political discontents. More a symptom of a deep malaise within Soviet society than an effective alternative to the extant national leadership, the nationalist dissidents nevertheless were indicative of the erosion of faith in the "socialist choice" in which many party officials themselves no longer believed. The various oppositional and dissident movements, some based in campaigns for human rights, others more specifically nationalist or religious, found greater resonance in the Western press than in Soviet society at large. But of all the dissident movements those firmly located around ethnic and linguistic issues found the greatest response in the population.60

The explosive power of national identification and the reluctance of the Soviet government to push too hard against it was demonstrated vividly in the April 1978

60. One of the fullest compilations on illegal protest movements in the Brezhnev period is Ludmilla Alexeyeva, Soviet Dissent: Contemporary Movements for National, Religious, and Human Rights (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1985, trans. by Carol Pearce and John Glad.)
protest by hundreds of students and others in Tbilisi against a government plan to change the clause in the Georgian constitution which proclaimed Georgian to be the state language of the republic. With the coming to power of new national leaderships in 1969-1974 a renewed emphasis was placed on the need for Russian-language education and the curbing of what Shevardnadze called "national narrow-mindedness and isolation." Now the Georgian party chief was forced to address an angry crowd, estimated at five thousand, before the building of the Council of Ministers, and inform them that he had recommended recognition of Georgian as the state language.\(^{61}\) Not only was Georgian retained, but similar proposed changes in the constitutions of Armenia and Azerbaijan were prudently abandoned. No party leaders suffered from this open expression of anti-Russian sentiment, which may be seen as an early manifestation of the re-emergence of civil society in the Soviet Union and a harbinger of perestroika from below.

These movements were divided between a small number of revolutionary separatists, like the Armenian National Unity Party, and more moderate intellectuals who formed human rights organizations, like the short-lived Helsinki Watch Committees that attempted to awaken international public opinion to the denial of national

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\(^{61}\) The new article in the constitution was to have read: "The Georgian Republic ensures the use of the Georgian language in state and public agencies and in cultural and other institutions and..., on the basis of equality, ensures the free use in all these agencies and institutions of Russian, as well as other languages used by the population." Zaria vostoka, April 15, 1978; in CDSP, 30, no. 17 (May 24, 1978), p. 12.
rights within the Soviet Union. Dissidents in Georgia, for example, at first became interested in the seemingly anodyne pursuit of preservation of Georgia's historic and religious monuments, but some of the more daring soon took up the plight of the Meskhetians, Muslim Georgians who had been forcibly moved in 1944 from their homes along the border with Turkey to Central Asia and wanted to return. Many of these dissidents were arrested, and by the early 1980s they had either disappeared underground or been exiled abroad. Out of the "unorthodox" nationalist movements of the Brezhnev years came many of the activists who later would form the leadership of the mass nationalisms of the Gorbachev period.

While one can argue that nationalism has been a growing presence in all parts of the world in our century, that the very processes of urbanization and industrialization, the spread of mass education and greater access to print and other media aid the consolidation of ethnolinguistic groups, nation-making in the USSR created a particularly volatile set of problems. By the seventieth anniversary of Soviet power, a

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53. One of the most notable was Zviad Gamsakhurdia, an early advocate of human rights in Georgia, later the first elected chairman of the Supreme Soviet of Georgia and president of the independent Georgian republic. As leader of the nationalist movement in Georgia in the Gorbachev period, Gamsakhurdia turned against the return of the Meskhetian Turks to Georgia and promoted a Georgia for the Georgians. His chauvinistic and authoritarian policies led to a revolt against the president by many of his former sympathizers in December 1991.
number of conscious, secular, politically-mobilized nationalities existed where they had not previously existed, and with their greater coherence and consciousness, nationalist leaders were able to command mass followings that had earlier eluded them. Rather than undermining nationalism, the processes of industrialization, urbanization and state-building in the Soviet Union provided the social and cultural base for a fierce nationalist opposition to Communist party rule. When the top party leadership decided to reform radically the political system, it at one and the same time began a process of further delegitimizing the Soviet system and giving political voice to the nationalist alternative.