

---

The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism

Author(s): Yuri Slezkine

Reviewed work(s):

Source: *Slavic Review*, Vol. 53, No. 2 (Summer, 1994), pp. 414-452

Published by:

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2501300>

Accessed: 13/08/2012 14:38

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at

<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Slavic Review*.

# The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism

Yuri Slezkine

Soviet nationality policy was devised and carried out by nationalists. Lenin's acceptance of the reality of nations and "national rights" was one of the most uncompromising positions he ever took, his theory of good ("oppressed-nation") nationalism formed the conceptual foundation of the Soviet Union and his NEP-time policy of compensatory "nation-building" (*natsional'noe stroitel'stvo*) was a spectacularly successful attempt at a state-sponsored conflation of language, "culture," territory and quota-fed bureaucracy. The Lenin Guard duly brought up the rear (with Bukharin having completed his vertiginous leap from cosmopolitanism to non-Russian nationalism by 1923), but it was Stalin who became the true "father of nations" (albeit not all nations and not all the time). The "Great Transformation" of 1928–1932 turned into the most extravagant celebration of ethnic diversity that any state had ever financed; the "Great Retreat" of the mid-1930s reduced the field of "blossoming nationalities" but called for an ever more intensive cultivation of those that bore fruit; and the Great Patriotic War was followed by an ex cathedra explanation that class was secondary to ethnicity and that support of nationalism in general (and not just Russian nationalism or "national liberation" abroad) was a sacred principle of marxism-leninism.

If this story sounds strange, it is because most historical accounts of Soviet nationality policy have been produced by scholars who shared Lenin's and Stalin's assumptions about ontological nationalities endowed with special rights, praised them for the vigorous promotion of national cultures and national cadres, chastized them for not living up to their own (let alone wilsonian) promises of national self-determination, and presumed that the "bourgeois nationalism" against which the bolsheviks were inveighing was indeed equal to the belief in linguistic/cultural-therefore-political autonomy that the "bourgeois scholars" themselves understood to be nationalism. Non-Russian nationalism of all kinds appeared so natural and the Russian version of marxist universalism appeared so Russian or so universalist that most of these

The first draft of this essay was written for a seminar organized by the Program for Comparative Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism at the Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies, University of Washington. I am grateful to the Program's co-chairs, Charles Hirschman and Charles F. Keyes, for their hospitality and criticism, as well as for their permission to submit the piece to the *Slavic Review*. I also thank Peter Blitstein, Victoria Bonnell, George Breslauer, Daniel Brower, Michael Burawoy, Jane Burbank, Sheila Fitzpatrick, Bruce Grant, David Hollinger, Terry Martin, Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, Reggie Zelnik, the Berkeley Colloquium for the Study of Russia and Eastern Europe and the University of Chicago Russian History Workshop, for stimulating discussions and helpful comments.

*Slavic Review* 53, no. 2 (Summer 1994)

scholars failed to notice the chronic ethnophilia of the Soviet regime, took it for granted or explained it as a sign of deviousness, weakness or negligence. This essay is an attempt to recognize the earnestness of bolshevik efforts on behalf of ethnic particularism.<sup>1</sup> Uncompromisingly hostile to individual rights, they eagerly, deliberately and quite consistently promoted group rights that did not always coincide with those of the proletariat. "The world's first state of workers and peasants" was the world's first state to institutionalize ethnoterritorial federalism, classify all citizens according to their biological nationalities and formally prescribe preferential treatment of certain ethnically defined populations.<sup>2</sup> As I. Vareikis wrote in 1924, the USSR was a large communal apartment in which "national state units, various republics and autonomous provinces" represented "separate rooms."<sup>3</sup> Remarkably enough, the communist landlords went on to reinforce many of the partitions and never stopped celebrating separateness along with communalism.<sup>4</sup>

"A nation," wrote Stalin in his very first scholarly effort, "is a historically evolved, stable community based on a common language, territory, economic life and psychological make-up manifested in a com-

1. Not the first such attempt, of course, but sufficiently different from the previous ones to make it worth the effort, I hope. My greatest debt is to the work of Ronald Grigor Suny, most recently summarized in his *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993). On the last three decades, see also Kenneth C. Farmer, *Ukrainian Nationalism in the Post-Stalin Era* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1980); Gail Warshofsky Lapidus, "Ethnonationalism and Political Stability: The Soviet Case," *World Politics* 36, no. 4 (July 1984): 355-80; Philip G. Roeder, "Soviet Federalism and Ethnic Mobilization," *World Politics* 23, no. 2 (January 1991): 196-233; Teresa Rakowska-Harmstone, "The Dialectics of Nationalism in the USSR," *Problems of Communism* XXIII (May-June 1974), 1-22; and Victor Zaslavsky, "Nationalism and Democratic Transition in Postcommunist Societies," *Daedalus* 121, no. 2 (Spring 1992): 97-121. On the promotion of "national languages" and bilingualism, see the work of Barbara A. Anderson and Brian D. Silver, especially "Equality, Efficiency, and Politics in Soviet Bilingual Education Policy, 1934-1980," *American Political Science Review* 78, No. 4 (October 1984): 1019-39; and "Some Factors in the Linguistic and Ethnic Russification of Soviet Nationalities: Is Everyone Becoming Russian?" in Lubomyr Hajda and Mark Beissinger, eds., *The Nationalities Factor in Soviet Politics and Society* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990). For a fascinating analysis of state-sponsored nationalism in a non-federal communist state, see Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceaușescu's Romania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

2. For an excellent overview of recent debates on the ethnic boundaries of political communities, see David A. Hollinger, "How Wide the Circle of the 'We'? American Intellectuals and the Problem of Ethnos since World War Two," *American Historical Review* 98, no. 2 (April 1993): 317-37.

3. I. Vareikis and I. Zelenskii, *Natsional'no-gosudarstvennoe razmezhevanie Srednei Azii* (Tashkent: Sredne-Aziatskoe gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1924), 59.

4. For a witty elaboration of the reverse metaphor (the communal apartment as the USSR), see Svetlana Boym, "The Archeology of Banality: The Soviet Home," *Public Culture* 6, no. 2 (1994): 263-92.

munity of culture.”<sup>5</sup> On the eve of World War I this definition was not particularly controversial among socialists. There was disagreement about the origins of nations, the future fate of nationalism, the nature of pre-nation nationalities, the economic and political usefulness of nation states and the relative importance of nations’ “characteristic features,” but everyone seemed to assume that, for better or worse, humanity consisted of more or less stable *Sprachnationen* cemented by a common past.<sup>6</sup> Language and history (or *Schicksalsgemeinschaft* “community of fate,” both the precondition and consequence of linguistic unity), were generally taken for granted; but even the more debatable items on Stalin’s list were usually—if not always explicitly—considered legitimate. Otto Bauer, who attempted to detach nationality from territory, clearly assumed that the “community of fate” was ultimately the fate of a physical community. Rosa Luxemburg, who believed that the “principle of nationality” contradicted the logic of capitalism, saw large, “predatory” nation states as tools of economic expansion. And Lenin, who rejected the concept of “national culture,” routinely spoke of “Georgians,” “Ukrainians” and “Great Russians” as having national traits, interests and responsibilities. Nations might not be helpful and they might not last, but they were here and they were real.

As far as both Lenin and Stalin were concerned, this meant that nations had rights: “A nation can organize its life as it sees fit. It has the right to organize its life on the basis of autonomy. It has the right to enter into federal relations with other nations. It has the right to complete secession. Nations are sovereign and all nations are equal.”<sup>7</sup> All nations were not equal in size: there were small nations and there were large (and hence “great-power”) nations. All nations were not equal in their development: there were “backward” nations (an obvious oxymoron in Stalin’s terms) and there were “civilized” nations. All nations were not equal in their economic (hence class hence moral) personae: some were “oppressor nations” and some were “oppressed.”<sup>8</sup> But all nations—indeed all nationalities no matter how “backward”—were equal because they were equally sovereign, that is, because they all had the same rights.

5. I. V. Stalin, *Marksizm i natsional'nyi vopros* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1950), 51.

6. For early marxist debates on nationalism, see Walker Connor, *The National Question in Marxist-Leninist Theory and Strategy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); Hélène Carrère d'Encausse, *The Great Challenge: Nationalities and the Bolshevik State, 1917–1930* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1992); Helmut Konrad, “Between ‘Little International’ and Great Power Politics: Austro-Marxism and Stalinism on the National Question,” in Richard L. Rudolph and David F. Good, eds., *Nationalism and Empire: The Habsburg Empire and the Soviet Union* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1992); Richard Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union: Communism and Nationalism, 1917–1923* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964); Roman Szporluk, *Communism and Nationalism: Karl Marx versus Friedrich List* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

7. Stalin, *Marksizm i natsional'nyi vopros*, 51. See also V. I. Lenin, *Voprosy natsional'noi politiki i proletarskogo internatsionalizma* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1965), passim.

8. The “oppressor” was not always “civilized,” as in most marxist analyses of Russia vis-à-vis Poland or Finland.

What social class could demand self-determination and under what conditions it could do so were of course matters for vigorous and ultimately meaningless debate—all the more vigorous and meaningless because most of the peoples of the Russian Empire had not progressed very far along the road of capitalist development and thus were not nations in marxist terms.<sup>9</sup> Another acrimoniously fruitless affair was Lenin's insistence on the political meaning of "self-determination" and his deathbed dispute with Stalin over its practical implementation within the Soviet state. Much more significant in the long run was Lenin's and Stalin's common campaign for a strictly territorial definition of autonomy, a campaign they waged against Bund and Bauer but abandoned after 1917 because both sides won (Soviet federalism combined ethnicity with territory and—at least for the first twenty years—guaranteed the cultural rights of various leftover diasporas). The most remarkable aspect of that campaign was the assertion—rarely challenged either before or after 1917—that all territorial divisions could be described as either "medieval" or "modern," with modernity defined as democracy (borders "based on popular sympathies") and with democracy resulting in "the greatest possible homogeneity in the national composition of the population."<sup>10</sup> The borders of the socialist state would be "determined . . . according to the will and 'sympathies' of the population," and at least some of those sympathies would run along ethnic lines.<sup>11</sup> If this were to breed "national minorities," they, too, would have their equal status guaranteed.<sup>12</sup> And if equal status (and economic rationality) required the creation of countless "autonomous national districts" "of even the smallest size," then such districts would be created and probably combined "in a variety of ways with neighboring districts of various sizes."<sup>13</sup>

But why set up ethno-territorial autonomies under socialism if most socialists agreed that federalism was a "philistine ideal," that "national culture" was a bourgeois fiction and that assimilation was a progressive process that substituted a "mobile proletarian" for the "obtuse," "savage," "somnolent" peasant "glued to his pile of manure" and beloved for that very reason by conniving connoisseurs of national culture?<sup>14</sup> First of all, because Lenin's socialism did not grow on trees. To bring it about, Lenin's socialists had to "preach against [slogans of national

9. Stalin, *Marksizm*, 37. The view of a nation (as opposed to a nationality) as a "historical category belonging to a particular epoch, the epoch of rising capitalism" became something of a truism and was reconfirmed without debate at the X Party Congress.

10. Lenin, "Kriticheskie zametki po natsional'nomu voprosu" (1913), in *Voprosy*, 32–34.

11. *Ibid.*, 33; and Lenin, "Itogi diskussii o samoopredelenii" (1916), in *Voprosy*, 128.

12. Lenin, "Kriticheskie zametki," 26.

13. *Ibid.*, 33–34.

14. *Ibid.*, 15, 16; and Lenin, "O prave natsii na samoopredelenie" (1914), in *Voprosy*, 81 (footnote), and "O natsional'noi gordosti velikorossosv" (1914), in *Voprosy*, 107.

culture] in all languages, 'adapting' themselves to all local and national requirements."<sup>15</sup> They needed native languages, native subjects and native teachers ("even for a single Georgian child") in order to "polemicize with 'their own' bourgeoisie, to spread anticlerical and anti-bourgeois ideas among 'their own' peasantry and burghers" and to banish the virus of nationalism from their proletarian disciples and their own minds.<sup>16</sup> This was a missionary project analogous to the so-called "Il'minskii system" formulated in the Kazan' of Lenin's youth.<sup>17</sup> "Only the mother tongue," claimed Il'minskii, "can truly, rather than only superficially, set the people on the path of Christianity."<sup>18</sup> Only the mother tongue, wrote Stalin in 1913, can make possible "a full development of the intellectual faculties of the Tatar or of the Jewish worker."<sup>19</sup> Both theories of conversion assumed that "native language" was a totally transparent conduit for an apostle's message. Unlike more "conservative" missionaries, who saw culture as an integral system and argued that in order to defeat "an alien faith" one had to "struggle against an alien nationality—against the mores, customs and the whole of the domestic arrangement of alien life,"<sup>20</sup> the Kazan' reformers and the fathers of the Soviet ethnic policy believed that nationality had nothing to do with faith. According to Lenin, marxist schools would have the same marxist curriculum irrespective of the linguistic medium.<sup>21</sup> Insofar as national culture was a reality, it was about language and a few "domestic arrangements": nationality was "form." "National form" was acceptable because there was no such thing as national content.

Another reason for Lenin's and Stalin's early defense of nationalism (defining "nationalism" as a belief that ethnic boundaries are ontologically essential, essentially territorial and ideally political<sup>22</sup>) was the distinction that they drew between oppressor-nation nationalism and oppressed-nation nationalism. The first, sometimes glossed as

15. Lenin, "Kriticheskie zametki," 9.

16. *Ibid.*, 9, 28; and "O prave," 61, 83–84.

17. Isabelle Kreindler, "A Neglected Source of Lenin's Nationality Policy," *Slavic Review* 36, no. 1 (March 1977): 86–100.

18. Quoted in Isabelle Kreindler, "Educational Policies toward the Eastern Nationalities in Tsarist Russia: A Study of the Il'minskii System," Ph.D. Diss., Columbia University, 1969, 75–76.

19. Stalin, *Marksizm*, 21.

20. Veniamin, *Arkhiiepiskop Irkutskii i Nerchinskii, Zhiznennye voprosy pravoslavnoi missii v Sibiri* (St. Petersburg: A. M. Kotomin, 1885), 7. For a discussion of the controversy, see Yuri Slezkine, "Savage Christians or Unorthodox Russians? The Missionary Dilemma in Siberia," in Galya Diment and Yuri Slezkine, eds., *Between Heaven and Hell: The Myth of Siberia in Russian Culture* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 18–27.

21. Lenin, "Kriticheskie zametki," 7.

22. Cf. Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 1; E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 9; John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 3.

"great-power chauvinism," was gratuitously malevolent; the second was legitimate, albeit transitory. The first was the result of unfair size advantage; the second was a reaction to discrimination and persecution. The first could only be eliminated as a consequence of proletarian victory and subsequent self-discipline and self-purification; the second had to be assuaged through sensitivity and tact.<sup>23</sup> Accordingly, the slogans of national self-determination and ethno-territorial autonomy were gestures of contrition. They came easily and went a long way insofar as they dealt with "form." "A minority is discontented not because there is no [extraterritorial] national union but because it does not have the right to use its native language. Allow it to use its native language and the discontent will pass by itself."<sup>24</sup> The more rights and opportunities a national minority would enjoy, the more "trust" (*doverie*) it would have in the proletarians of the former oppressor nation. Genuine equality of "form" would reveal the historically contingent nature of nationalism and the underlying unity of class content.

Having transformed capitalism into socialism, the proletariat will create an *opportunity* for the total elimination of national oppression; this opportunity will become a *reality* "only"—"only"!—after a total democratization of all spheres, including the establishment of state borders according to the "sympathies" of the population, and including complete freedom of secession. This, in turn, will lead *in practice* to a total abolition of all national tensions and all national distrust, to an accelerated drawing together and merger of nations which will result in the *withering away* of the state.<sup>25</sup>

The "practice" of the revolution and civil war did nothing to change this program. The earliest decrees of the new bolshevik government described the victorious masses as "peoples" and "nations" endowed with "rights,"<sup>26</sup> proclaimed all peoples to be equal and sovereign, guaranteed their sovereignty through an ethnoterritorial federation and a right to secession, endorsed "the free development of national minorities and ethnic groups," and pledged to respect national beliefs, customs and institutions.<sup>27</sup> By the end of the war the need for local allies and the recognition of existing (and sometimes ethnically defined) entities combined with principle to produce an assortment of legally recognized (and increasingly ethnically defined) Soviet republics, autonomous republics, autonomous regions and toilers' communes. Some autonomies appeared more autonomous than others but "nationality"

23. Lenin, "O natsional'noi programme RSDRP" (1913), in *Voprosy*, 41; *idem*, "O prave," 61–62, 102; *idem*, "Sotsialisticheskaia revoliutsiia i pravo natsii na samoopredelenie" (1916), in *Voprosy*, 113–14.

24. Stalin, *Marksizm*, 163. The same applied to national schools, freedom of religion, freedom of movement and so on.

25. Lenin, "Itogi diskussii o samoopredelenii" (1916), in *Voprosy*, 129.

26. "Peoples" and "nations" were used interchangeably.

27. *Dekrety Sovetskoi vlasti* (Moscow: Gospolitizdat, 1957), 1: 39–41, 113–15, 168–70, 195–96, 340–44, 351, 367.

reigned supreme. "Many of these peoples have nothing in common except the fact that before they were all parts of the Russian Empire and now they have all been liberated by the revolution, but there are no internal connections among them."<sup>28</sup> According to Lenin's paradox, the surest way to unity in content was diversity in form. By "fostering national cultures [*nasazhdat' natsional'nuiu kul'turu*]" and creating national autonomies, national schools, national languages and national cadres, the bolsheviks would overcome national distrust and reach national audiences. "We are going to help you develop your Buriat, Votyak, etc. language and culture, because in this way you will join the universal culture [*obshchechelovecheskaia kul'tura*], revolution and communism sooner."<sup>29</sup>

To many communists this sounded strange. Did nations not consist of different classes? Should not proletarian interests prevail over those of the national(ist) bourgeoisie? Were not the proletarians of all countries supposed to unite? And were not the toilers of the besieged Soviet state supposed to unite with all the more determination? In spring 1918 M. I. Latsis attacked the "absurdity of federalism" and warned that the endless "breeding of republics," particularly in the case of "undeveloped ethnic groups" such as the Tatars or the Belorussians, was as dangerous as it was ludicrous.<sup>30</sup> In winter 1919 A. A. Ioffe cautioned against growing nationalist appetites and appealed for the "end of separatism" on the part of the "buffer republics."<sup>31</sup> And in spring 1919, at the VIII Party Congress, N. I. Bukharin and G. L. Piatakov launched an all-out assault against the slogan of national self-determination and the resulting primacy of ethnicity over class in non-Russian areas.<sup>32</sup>

Lenin's response was as adamant as it was familiar. First, nations existed "objectively." "If we say that we do not recognize the Finnish nation but only the toiling masses, it would be a ridiculous thing to say. Not to recognize something that is out there is impossible: it will force us to recognize it."<sup>33</sup> Second, former oppressor nations needed to gain the trust of the former oppressed nations.

The Bashkirs do not trust the Great Russians because the Great Russians are more cultured and used to take advantage of their culture to rob the Bashkirs. So in those remote places the name "Great Russian" stands for "oppressor" and "cheat." We should take this into account. We should fight against this. But it is a long-term thing. It

28. S. Dimanshtein, "Narodnyi komissariat po delam natsional'nostei," *Zhizn' natsional'nostei* 41 (49) (26 October 1919).

29. S. Dimanshtein, "Sovetskaia vlast' i melkie natsional'nosti," *Zhizn' natsional'nostei* 46 (54) (7 December 1919). See also S. Pestkovskii, "Natsional'naia kul'tura," *Zhizn' natsional'nostei* 21 (29) (8 June 1919).

30. A. P. Nenarokov, *K edinstvu ravnykh: Kul'turnye faktory ob"edinitel'nogo dvizheniia sovetskikh narodov, 1917–1924* (Moscow: Nauka, 1991), 91–92.

31. *Ibid.*, 92–93.

32. *Vos'moi s"ezd RKP(b): Protokoly* (Moscow: Gospolitizdat, 1959), 46–48, 77–81.

33. *Ibid.*, 55.



cannot be abolished by decree. We should be very careful here. And a nation like the Great Russians should be particularly careful because they have provoked such bitter hatred in all the other nations.<sup>34</sup>

Finally, backward nations had not developed a "differentiation of the proletariat from bourgeois elements" and thus could not be expected to have revolutionary classes consistently hostile "to their mullahs."<sup>35</sup> Taken as a whole and compared to more "cultured" nations, however, they were legitimate proletarians by virtue of having been cheated and oppressed. Under imperialism ("as the highest and final stage of capitalism") colonial peoples had become the global equivalents of the western working class. Under the dictatorship of the (Russian) proletariat, they were entitled to special treatment until the economic and psychological wounds of colonialism had been cured. Meanwhile, nations equaled classes.

Lenin lost the argument but won the vote because, as Tomskii put it, while "not a single person in this room would say that national self-determination or national movements were either normal or desirable," most people seemed to believe that they were a "necessary evil" that had to be tolerated.<sup>36</sup> Accordingly, the scramble for national status and ethnoterritorial recognition continued unimpeded. The Kriashen were different from the Tatars in customs, alphabet and vocabulary, and thus needed a special administrative unit.<sup>37</sup> The Chuvash were poor and did not speak Russian, and thus needed a special administrative unit.<sup>38</sup> The Yakut deserved their own government because they lived compactly and were ready to "organize their lives through their own efforts."<sup>39</sup> The "primitive tribes" who lived next to the Yakut deserved a special government because they lived in widely dispersed communities and were not ready to run their own affairs.<sup>40</sup> The Estonian settlers in Siberia had a literary tradition and needed a special bureaucracy to provide them with newspapers.<sup>41</sup> The Ugrian natives

34. *Ibid.*, 106.

35. *Ibid.*, 53. In the same speech, Lenin argued that even the most "advanced" western countries were hopelessly behind Soviet Russia in terms of social differentiation (which meant that they could—and sometimes should—be regarded as integral nations rather than as temporarily isolated class battlefields). By being Soviet, Russia was more advanced than the advanced west.

36. *Ibid.*, 82.

37. Fedor Kriuchkov, "O Kriashenakh," *Zhizn' natsional'nostei* 27 (84) (2 September 1920).

38. R. El'mets, "K voprosu o vydelenii chuvash v osobuiu administrativnuiu ediniitsu," *Zhizn' natsional'nostei* 2 (59) (11 January 1920).

39. V. Vilenskii (Sibiriakov), "Samoopredelenie iakutov," *Zhizn' natsional'nostei* 3 (101) (2 February 1921).

40. V. G. Bogoraz-Tan, "O pervobytnykh plemenakh," *Zhizn' natsional'nostei* 1 (130) (10 January 1922); *idem*, "Ob izuchenii i okhrane okrainnykh narodov," *Zhizn' natsional'nostei* 3-4 (1923): 168-177; Dan. Ianovich, "Zapovedniki dlia gibnushchikh tuzemnykh plemen," *Zhizn' natsional'nostei* 4 (133) (31 January 1922); TsGAOR, f. 1377, op. 1, d. 8, ll. 126-27, d. 45, ll. 53, 77, 81.

41. "Chetyre goda raboty sredi estontsev Sovetskoi Rossii," *Zhizn' natsional'nostei* 24 (122) (5 November 1921).

of Siberia had no literary tradition and needed “an independent government” to “direct at the dark masses a ray of enlightenment and to cultivate their way of life [*kul'tivirovat' ikh byt zhizni*].”<sup>42</sup> Local intellectuals, Commissariat of Nationalities officials, “native conferences” and Petrograd ethnographers all demanded institutional autonomy, offices and funding (for themselves or their protégés). Having received autonomy, they demanded more offices and more funding.

Funding was scarce, but autonomous areas and offices were becoming ever more plentiful. In addition to ethnoterritorial units, complete with their own bureaucracies and (in theory, at least) “mother-tongue” education, there were national units within national units, national sections in party cells and local soviets, and national quotas in colleges. In 1921 Poles received 154,000 newly published books in their language while the half-recognized Kriashen received 10; the Azerbaijani Communist Party had Iranian, German, Greek and Jewish sections; the Commissariat of Enlightenment in Moscow had 14 national bureaus; and 103 local party organizations in Russia were supposed to transact their business in Estonian.<sup>43</sup>

Some doubts persisted. According to one Commissariat of Nationalities official, linguistic self-assertion might not work for those nationalities that were “weak, backward and dispersed in the sea of some advanced culture.” Therefore, “the tendency to preserve and develop one’s native language at all costs and ad infinitum, with the sole purpose of creating a symmetrical, geometrically complete system of education in a single language, does not have a future and does not take into account all the complexity and diversity of the socio-cultural composition of our age.”<sup>44</sup> Others argued that the age was primarily about economic rationality and that ethnic units should be superceded, or at least complemented, by scientifically defined economic entities based on environmental, industrial and commercial affinity. If military districts could cut across national borders, so should economic ones.<sup>45</sup>

Such arguments were not simply rejected. Starting in 1922 they became ideologically unacceptable. Lenin’s passion, Stalin’s Narkomnats bureaucracy, the tradition of party decisions and the vested interests of proliferating ethnic institutions had congealed into a “nationality question” that could no longer be questioned, so that when the X Party Congress legitimized the policy of institutionalized ethnicity, no one called it a “necessary evil,” let alone bourgeois nationalism. What the X Congress (and specifically Stalin) did was to conflate Lenin’s themes of national oppression and colonial liberation, equate the

42. TsGAOR, f. 1318, op. 1, d. 994, l. 100.

43. See *Zhizn' natsional'nostei* (1921) and TsGAOR, f. 1318.

44. L. Segal', “Vserossiiskoe soveshchanie rabotnikov po prosveshcheniiu narodov ne-russkogo iazyka,” *Zhizn' natsional'nostei* 33 (41) (31 August 1919).

45. I. Trainin, “Ekonomicheskoe raionirovanie i natsional'naia politika,” *Zhizn' natsional'nostei* 21 (119) (10 October 1921); S. K., “Ekonomicheskoe raionirovanie i problemy avtonomno-federativnogo stroitel'stva,” *Zhizn' natsional'nostei* 25 (123) (12 November 1921).

"nationality question" with the question of backwardness and present the whole issue as a neat opposition between "Great Russians" and "non-Great Russians." The Great Russians belonged to an advanced, formerly dominant nation possessed of a secure tradition of national statehood and frequently guilty of ethnic arrogance and insensitivity known as "great-power chauvinism." All the other nationalities, defined negatively and collectively as "non-Great Russians," were victims of tsarist-imposed statelessness, backwardness and "culturelessness [*nekul'turnost'*]," which made it difficult for them to take advantage of new revolutionary opportunities and sometimes tempted them to engage in "local nationalism."<sup>46</sup> In Stalin's formulation, "the essence of the nationality question in the RSFSR consists of the need to eliminate the backwardness (economic, political and cultural) that the nationalities have inherited from the past, to allow the backward peoples to catch up with central Russia."<sup>47</sup> To accomplish this goal, the Party was to help them

a) develop and strengthen their own Soviet statehood in a form that would correspond to the national physiognomy of these peoples; b) introduce their own courts and agencies of government that would function in native languages and consist of local people familiar with the life and mentality of the local population; c) develop their own press, schools, theaters, local clubs and other cultural and educational institutions in native languages.<sup>48</sup>

There were to be as many nation states with varying degrees of autonomy as there were nationalities (not nations!) in the RSFSR. Nomads would receive lands lost to the Cossacks and "national minorities" scattered among compact ethnic groups would be guaranteed "free national development" (which called for the creation of territorial units).<sup>49</sup> Perhaps most remarkably, this triumph of ethnicity was presented by Stalin as both the cause and the consequence of progress. On the one hand, "free national development" was the only way to defeat non-Russian backwardness. On the other,

You cannot go against history. Even though the Russian element still predominates in Ukrainian cities, it is clear that as time goes on these cities will inevitably become Ukrainianized. About forty years ago Riga was a German city, but as cities grow at the expense of villages, and villages are the keepers of nationality, Riga is now a purely Latvian city. About fifty years ago all cities of Hungary were German in character, but now they have been Magyarized. The same will happen to Belorussia, in whose cities non-Belorussians currently predominate.<sup>50</sup>

46. *Desiatyi s"ezd Rossiiskoi Kommunisticheskoi partii: Stenograficheskii otchet* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1921), 101.

47. *Ibid.*

48. *Ibid.*, 371.

49. *Ibid.*, 372.

50. *Ibid.*, 115.

Once this had happened, the Party would redouble its efforts at nation building because, "in order to conduct communist work in the cities, it will be necessary to reach the new proletarian-Belorussian in his native language."<sup>51</sup>

However "dialectical" the logic of the official policy, its practice was unequivocal and, by 1921, fairly well established. In a sense, the introduction of the New Economic Policy at the X Congress was tantamount to the "lowering" of all other pursuits to the level of the already "NEP-like" nationality policy. NEP constituted a temporary but deliberate reconciliation with "backwardness"—backwardness represented by peasants, traders, women, all non-Russian peoples in general and various "primitive tribes" in particular. There was a special women's department, a Jewish section and the Committee for Assistance to the Peoples of the Northern Borderlands, among others. Backwardness endlessly multiplied itself and each remnant of the past required an individual approach based on "specific peculiarities" and characterized by sensitivity and paternal benevolence. The ultimate goal was the abolition of all backwardness and thus all difference, but the fulfillment of that goal was postponed indefinitely. Attempts to force it through would be "dangerous" and "utopian"—as was the impatience of those otherwise "mature and politically aware comrades" in central Asia who asked, "What on earth is going on? How much longer are we going to keep breeding separate autonomies?"<sup>52</sup> The Party's answer was the vague but emphatic: "For as long as it takes." For as long as it takes to overcome "economic and cultural backwardness . . . , economic differences, differences in customs (particularly important among nations that have not yet reached the capitalist stage) and linguistic differences."<sup>53</sup> Meanwhile, nation building appeared to be a praiseworthy goal in its own right. There was beauty in difference.

With one exception. One particular remnant of the past had few redeeming qualities and was to be tolerated but not celebrated, used but not welcomed. This was the Russian peasant. The NEP alliance (*smychka*) between the peasantry and the working class seemed to mirror similar arrangements with other "underdeveloped" groups but its official rationale was quite different. The "peasant element" was aggressive, contagious and menacing. No one assumed that its brand of savagery would dialectically dissolve itself through further development because the stubbornly "somnolent" Russian peasant was incapable of development *as a peasant* (his was a difference "in content"). By equating ethnicity with development and dividing the population of the country into Russians and non-Russians, the X Congress recognized and reinforced this distinction. The Russian nationality was developed,

51. "Belorusskii natsional'nyi vopros i kommunisticheskaia partiia," *Zhizn' natsional'nostei* 2 (131) (17 January 1922).

52. Vareikis and Zelenskii, *Natsional'no-gosudarstvennoe razmezhevanie*, 57.

53. *Ibid.*, 60. "Nations that have not yet reached the capitalist stage" were not nations according to Stalin's definition.

dominant and thus irrelevant. The Russian territory was "unmarked" and, in effect, consisted of those lands that had not been claimed by the non-Russians known as "nationals [*natsionaly*]." Miko-yan's objection that this was too neat, that Azerbaijan was culturally and economically "ahead of many Russian provinces" and that the Armenian bourgeoisie was as imperialistic as any was dismissed by Stalin and by the congress.<sup>54</sup>

"Lenin's last struggle" with the nationality question did not change the official line.<sup>55</sup> Upset by the alleged "Great-Russian chauvinism" of Stalin, Dzerzhinskii and Ordzhonikidze ("Russians" by behavior and profession, if not by national origin), the ailing leader recommended more of the same medicine. Internationalism on the part of the Russians "should consist not only in the formal equality of nations, but also in the kind of inequality at the expense of the big oppressor nation that would compensate for the de facto inequality that exists in life."<sup>56</sup> This called for more—much more—"caution, deference and concessions" with regard to the "'offended' nationals," more conscious (and hence non-chauvinist) proletarians in the Russian apparatus, and more emphasis on the wide and consistent use of non-Russian languages.<sup>57</sup> In April 1923 the XII Party Congress duly reaffirmed this view without questioning either the old strategy or the new urgency (the only delegate to challenge the national development orthodoxy was a self-described "rank-and-file worker" who timidly mentioned Marx's cosmopolitan proletarians and was chided by Zinov'ev<sup>58</sup>). At the two extremes of expert opinion, Stalin argued that Russian chauvinism constituted "the main danger" ("nine tenths of the problem"), while Bukharin insisted that it was the only danger.<sup>59</sup> Solutions to the problems of national representation and ethnoterritorial federation varied but the principles of the "leninist nationality policy" remained the same. (Stalin's "autonomization plan" called for greater centralization in "everything essential" but took it for granted that such nonessential matters as "language" and "culture" were to be left to the "genuine internal autonomy of the republics."<sup>60</sup>) Even the noisy discussion of the Georgian affair had little to add to the issue, with the "offended nationals" complaining of insensitivity and the "great-power chauvinists" pointing to the dominance of the Georgian language and the remarkable successes of nationality-based preferential promotion (according to

54. *Desiatyi s"ezd*, 112, 114.

55. For two different interpretations, see Moshe Lewin, *Lenin's Last Struggle* (New York: Pantheon, 1968); and Richard Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union: Communism and Nationalism, 1917–1923* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954).

56. V. I. Lenin, "K voprosu o natsional'nostiakh ili ob 'avtonomizatsii,'" in *Voprosy*, 167.

57. *Ibid.*, 168–70.

58. *Dvenadtsyi s"ezd Rossiiskoi Kommunisticheskoi partii (bol'shevikov)*. *Stenograficheskii otchet* (Moscow: Glavpolitprosvet, 1923), 462, 552.

59. *Ibid.*, 439–54, 561–65.

60. Quoted in Nenarokov, *K edinstvu*, 116–17.

Ordzhonikidze, Georgians made up 25% of the overall population of Tiflis but 43% of the city soviet, 75% of the city executive committee, 91% of the presidium of the executive committee, and 100% of both the republican *Sovnarkom* and the Central Committee of the Party).<sup>61</sup> The only truly theoretical innovation introduced at the congress was not discussed as such and proved short-lived: defending himself against Lenin's epistolary accusations, Stalin took up Mikoyan's old position and attempted to deprive the Russians of their monopoly on imperialism and to redefine "local nationalism" as great-power chauvinism writ small. Georgians oppressed Abkhazians and Ossetians, Azeris bullied Armenians, Uzbeks ignored the Turkmen and so on. In fact, Stalin's main argument against Georgia's secession from the Transcaucasian Federation was the alleged campaign by Georgian officials to deport local Armenians and "transform Tiflis into a real Georgian capital."<sup>62</sup> This meant that the Ukrainization of Kiev and the Belorussification of Minsk might not be such a good idea after all, but the majority at the congress either did not get Stalin's meaning or chose to ignore it. "Great-power chauvinism" was clearly reserved for the Russians, "local nationalism" had to be anti-Russian to be a danger (not the "main danger" perhaps but dangerous enough to the perpetrators) and national territories belonged to those nationalities whose names they bore.

But what was "nationality"? At the time of the February revolution, the only characteristic ascribed to all imperial subjects was "religious confession," with both the Russian national identity and the tsar's dynastic legitimacy largely associated with Orthodoxy. Not all of the tsar's subjects and not all Orthodox believers were Russians, but all Russians were expected to be Orthodox subjects of their Orthodox tsar. The non-Orthodox could serve the tsar in his capacity as emperor, but they had no immunity from occasional conversion campaigns and were legally handicapped in cases of mixed marriages. Some non-Orthodox were legally designated as "aliens" (*inorodtsy*), a term whose etymology ("non-kin," "non-native") suggested genetic difference but which was usually interpreted to mean "non-Christian" or "backward." These two concepts reflected the Muscovite ("premodern") and petrine ("modern") notions of otherness and were now used interchangeably. Some baptized communities were too backward to be "real Christians" and all aliens were formally classified according to their religion ("Muslim," "Lamaist") or "way of life" understood as degree of development ("settled," "nomadic," "wandering"). With the spread of state-sponsored education and the attendant effort to reach the "eastern aliens"<sup>63</sup> and to control (and Russify) the autonomous educational institutions of western non-Russians, "native language" also became a politically meaningful category. The names of languages, however, did not always

61. *Dvenadtsati s'ezd*, 543–45.

62. *Ibid.*, 449.

63. See, for example, "S'ezd po narodnomu obrazovaniiu," *Zhurnal Ministerstva narodnago prosviescheniia* L (March–April 1914): 195, 242–44.

coincide with the collective names that variously defined communities used to refer to themselves and to others. On the eve of the revolution, Russia had census nationalities, nationalist parties and national "questions," but it had no official view of what constituted nationality.

On the eve of the February revolution (exactly one day before Nicholas II left for Mogilev and the locked-out Putilov workers poured into the streets of Petrograd), President of the Russian Academy of Sciences S. F. Ol'denburg wrote to Minister of Foreign Affairs N. N. Pokrovskii that, moved by a "sense of patriotic duty," he and his colleagues would like to propose the formation of a Commission for the Study of the Tribal Composition of the Russian Borderlands.

The most thorough determination of the tribal composition of the areas lying on both sides of Russia's borders with hostile states is of extraordinary importance at the present moment because a world war is being waged to a considerable extent over the national question. The determination of the validity of various territorial claims by various nationalities will become particularly important at the time of peace negotiations because, even if new borders are drawn in accordance with certain strategic and political considerations, the national factor will still play an enormously important role.<sup>64</sup>

Under the Provisional Government the nationality question moved farther inland and the new commission was charged with the study of the whole population of Russia, not just the borderlands. Under the bolsheviks "the essence of Soviet nationality policy" came to consist in the "coincidence of ethnographic and administrative borders,"<sup>65</sup> which meant that most of the imperial territory would have to be divided into borderlands and that professional ethnographers would have to play an important role in the endeavor.

There was no time to discuss terminology. Aliens and Christians were replaced by an undifferentiated collection of *narody* (peoples), *narodnosti* (peoples sometimes understood to be small or underdeveloped), *natsional'nosti* (nationalities), *natsii* (nations) and *plemena* (tribes). There was no agreement as to how durable (and hence territorially viable) these entities were. In what seems to have been a common attitude, the head of the commission's Caucasian section, N. Ia. Marr, considered nationality to be too "transitory" and too complex to be pinned down by "primitive territorial demarcation," but worked hard (a lot harder than most, in fact) to uncover "primeval ethnicity [*etnicheskaia pervobytnost'*]" and "true tribal composition."<sup>66</sup> The most com-

64. *Ob uchrezhdenii Komissii po izucheniiu plemennogo sostava naseleniia Rossii*. *Izvestiia Komissii po izucheniiu plemennogo sostava naseleniia Rossii* (Petrograd: Rossiiskaia Akademiia Nauk, 1917), 1: 8.

65. I. Gertsenberg, "Natsional'nyi printsip v novom administrativnom delenii RSFSR," *Zhizn' natsional'nostei* 37 (94) (25 November 1920).

66. N. Ia. Marr, *Plemennoi sostav naseleniia Kavkaza: Trudy Komissii po izucheniiu plemennogo sostava naseleniia Rossii* (Petrograd: Rossiiskaia Akademiia nauk, 1920), 3: 9, 21-22. See also N. Ia. Marr, "Ob iafeticheskoi teorii," *Novyi vostok* 5 (1924): 303-9.

monly used “marker of tribal composition” was language. Party ideologues championed “native-language education” as the basis for their nationality policy; education officials proceeded from a “linguistic definition of national culture”,<sup>67</sup> and ethnographers tended to fall back on language as the most dependable, albeit not universal, indicator of ethnicity. Thus, E.F. Karskii, the author of *Ethnographic Map of the Belorussian Tribe*, adopted mother tongue as “the exclusive criterion” of national difference and claimed, in a characteristic non sequitur, that Lithuanians who spoke Belorussian should be considered Belorussians.<sup>68</sup> More controversially, the central Asian Sart (usually defined as settled Muslims) were decreed out of existence, the various Pamir communities became “Tajiks” and the Uzbeks were radically redefined to include most of the Turkic speakers of Samarkand, Tashkent and Bukhara.<sup>69</sup> Yet language was still perceived to be insufficient and the 1926 census included two unequal categories of “language” and “nationality,” revealing large numbers of people who did not speak “their own language.” Such communities were considered “denationalized” by ethnographers<sup>70</sup> and not entirely legitimate by party officials and local elites: Russian-speaking Ukrainians or Ukrainian-speaking Moldavians were expected, and sometimes forced, to learn their mother tongue irrespective of whether their mothers knew how to speak it.

What made “denationalized” Ruritanians Ruritanians? More often than not, it was the various combinations of “material life,” “customs” and “traditions” jointly known as “culture.” Thus, when dealing with areas where “Russian” and “Belorussian” dialects blend into each other, Karskii distinguished between the two nationalities by referring to differences in clothing and architecture.<sup>71</sup> Similarly, Marr classified Iranian-speaking Ossetians and Talysh as north Caucasians (Japhetids) on the basis of their “ethnic culture,” “genuine popular religion,” “way of life [*byt*]” and “emotional attachment to the Caucasus.”<sup>72</sup> Sometimes

67. “The richest associations and the strongest perceptions are those acquired through the mother tongue” (Segal, “Vserossiiskoe soveshchanie”).

68. E. F. Karskii, *Etnograficheskaia karta Bieloruskago plemeni: Trudy Komissii po izucheniiu plemennogo sostava naseleniia Rossii*, vol. 2 (Petrograd: Rossiiskaia Akademiia nauk, 1917).

69. I. I. Zarubin, *Spisok narodnostei Turkestanskogo kraia: Trudy Komissii po izucheniiu plemennogo sostava naseleniia Rossii*, vol. 9 (Leningrad: Rossiiskaia Akademiia nauk, 1925); I. I. Zarubin, *Naselenie Samarkandskoi oblasti: Trudy Komissii po izucheniiu plemennogo sostava naseleniia Rossii*, vol. 10 (Leningrad: AN SSSR, 1926); Edward A. Allworth, *The Modern Uzbeks: From the Fourteenth Century to the Present* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1990), 181; Alexandre Bennigsen and Chantal Lemerrier-Quelquejay, *Islam in the Soviet Union* (New York: Praeger, 1967), 131–33; Teresa Rakowska-Harmstone, *Russia and Nationalism in Central Asia: The Case of Tadzhikistan* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970), 78.

70. *Instruktsiia k sostavleniiu plemennykh kart, izdavaemykh Komissiei po izucheniiu plemennogo sostava naseleniia Rossii: Trudy Komissii po izucheniiu plemennogo sostava naseleniia Rossii* (Petrograd: Rossiiskaia Akademiia nauk, 1917), 1: 11.

71. Karskii, *Etnograficheskaia karta*, 19.

72. N. Ia. Marr, *Plemennoi sostav naseleniia Kavkaza: Trudy Komissii po izucheniiu plemennogo sostava naseleniia Rossii* (Petrograd: Rossiiskaia Akademiia nauk, 1920),



religion-as-culture outweighed language and became a crucial ethnic marker in its own right, as when the Kriashen (Tatar-speaking Christians) received their own "department" and the Adzhar (Georgian-speaking Muslims) received their own republic (a similar appeal by Marr on behalf of Muslim, Armenian-speaking Khemshil proved unsuccessful<sup>73</sup>). Cultures, religions and indeed languages could be reinforced by topography (highland versus valley Caucasians) and chronological primacy (in the Caucasian case, a native-versus-settler distinction did not necessarily coincide with a dichotomy based on progress, as it did in Siberia<sup>74</sup>). Physical ("racial," "somatic") type was never used independently but sometimes—particularly in Siberia—was used to support other distinguishing features.<sup>75</sup> Finally, none of these features could be decisive in the case of the steppe nomads, whose "national awareness" or "tribal self-identity" were considered so strong as to make any other criteria practically useless. Linguistic, cultural and religious differences among the Kazakh, Kirgiz and Turkmen might be negligible, but their clan geneologies were so clearly drawn and so vigorously upheld that most ethnographers had no choice but to follow.<sup>76</sup>

To be sure, the actual borders of new ethnic units did not always correspond to those suggested by scholars. Kazakh authorities demanded Tashkent, Uzbek authorities wanted autonomy for the Osh district and the Central Committee in Moscow formed special arbitration commissions.

Subsequently the Kirgiz [i.e., Kazakh] abandoned their claims on Tashkent but became all the more insistent in their demand that three *volosts* ... of the Tashkent *uezd* be included in Kazakhstan. If this demand had been fully satisfied, the portions of the canals ... that feed Tashkent would have wound up on Kirgiz territory ... Besides, the adoption of the Kirgiz variant would have cut the central Asian railway line by a Kirgiz wedge 17 versts south of Tashkent.<sup>77</sup>

Such odd strategic or "national interest" considerations (as in Kazakh versus Uzbek), as well as more conventional political and economic priorities at various levels affected the final shape of ethnoterritorial units, but there is no doubt that the dominant criterion was indeed ethnic. "Nationality" meant different things in different areas but the

---

9: 24–25; N. Ia. Marr, *Talyshi: Trudy Komissii po izucheniiu plemennogo sostava naseleniia Rossii* (Petrograd: Rossiiskaia Akademiia nauk, 1922), 4: 3–5, 22.

73. Marr, *Plemennoi sostav*, 9.

74. *Ibid.*, 59–61. Cf. S. K. Patkanov, *Spisok narodnostei Sibiri: Trudy Komissii po izucheniiu plemennogo sostava naseleniia Rossii* (Petrograd: Rossiiskaia Akademiia nauk, 1923), 7: 3.

75. See, for example, Patkanov on "Paleoasiatics" in Patkanov, *Spisok*, 8.

76. Vl. Kun, "Izuchenie etnicheskogo sostava Turkestana," *Novyi vostok* 6 (1924): 351–53; Zarubin, *Spisok*, 10.

77. I. Khodorov, "Natsional'noe razmezhevanie Srednei Azii," *Novyi vostok* 8–9 (1926): 69.

borders of most areas were seen as truly “national” and were, indeed, remarkably similar to ethnographic maps drawn up by the Commission for the Study of Tribal Composition. Bolshevik officials in Moscow saw the legitimation of ethnicity as a concession to ethnic grievances and developmental constraints, not as a brilliant divide-and-rule stratagem, and confidently asserted, after Lenin and Stalin, that the more genuine the “national demarcation” the more successful the drive to internationalism.

In the short run, national demarcation resulted in a puzzling and apparently limitless collection of ethnic nesting dolls. All non-Russians were “nationals” entitled to their own territorial units and all nationally defined groups living in “somebody else’s” units were national minorities entitled to their own units. By 1928, various republics contained national *okrugs*, national *raions*, national soviets, native executive committees (*tuzriki*), native soviets (*tuzemnye sovety*), *aul* (*aul’nye*) soviets, clan (*rodovye*) soviets, nomadic (*kochevye*) soviets and encampment committees (*lagerkomy*).<sup>78</sup> Secure within their borders, all Soviet nationalities were encouraged to develop and, if necessary, create their own autonomous cultures. The key to this effort was the widest possible use of native languages—“native language as a means of social discipline, as a social unifier of nations and as a necessary and most important condition of successful economic and cultural development.”<sup>79</sup> Both the main reason for creating a national autonomy and the principal means of making that autonomy truly national, “native language” could refer to the official language of a given republic (almost always indicated by the republic’s name<sup>80</sup>), to the official language of a given minority unit or to the mother tongue of particular individuals. The proliferation of territorial units seemed to suggest that eventually there would be an official language for most individuals, even if it resulted in state-sponsored trilingualism (in 1926 Abkhaz-speaking Abkhazia, itself a part of Georgian-speaking Georgia, had 43 Armenian, 41 Greek, 27 Russian, 2 Estonian and 2 German schools<sup>81</sup>). To put it differently, all 192 languages identified during the 1920s would sooner or later become official.

78. See, for example, S. Dimanshtein, “Desiat’ let natsional’noi politiki partii i sovlasti,” *Novyi vostok* 19 (1927): vi; “Vremennoe polozenie ob upravlenii tuzemnykh narodnostei i plemen Severnykh okrain,” *Severnaia Aziia* 2 (1927): 85–91; N. I. Leonov, “Tuzemnye sovety v taige i tundrakh,” *Sovetskii Sever: Pervyi sbornik statei* (Moscow: Komitet Severa, 1929), 225–30; Zvi Y. Gitelman, *Jewish Nationality and Soviet Politics: The Jewish Sections of the CPSU, 1917–1930* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 289; Gerhard Simon, *Nationalism and Policy toward the Nationalities in the Soviet Union: From Totalitarian Dictatorship to Post-Stalinist Society* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991), 58.

79. I. Davydov, “O probleme iazykov v prosvetitel’noi rabote sredi natsional’nostei,” *Prosveshchenie natsional’nostei* 1 (1929): 18.

80. After the abolition of the “Highland” (*Gorskaia*) republic, the only autonomous republic that had no ethnic “landlord” and hence no obvious official language was Dagestan, one of the most linguistically diverse places on earth (see A. Takho-Godi, “Problema iazyka v Dagestane,” *Revoliutsiia i natsional’nosti* 2 [1930]: 68–75).

81. V. A. Gurko-Kriazhin, “Abkhaziia,” *Novyi vostok* 13–14 (1926): 115.

To become official, however, a language had to be "modernized." This involved the creation or further codification of a literary standard based on "live popular speech," rendered through a "rational" phonetic alphabet (all Arabic and some Cyrillic writing systems were abandoned in favor of Latin) and "purged of alien ballast."<sup>82</sup> A purge—or institutionalized linguistic purism—was important because if nationalities were by definition culturally different (in form) and if language was "the most important characteristic that distinguished one nationality from another," then languages had to become as different as possible.<sup>83</sup> Local intellectuals encouraged by central authorities (or, when these were unavailable, metropolitan scholars jealous for "their peoples") set out to draw linguistic borders. The inventors of literary Uzbek and Tatar declared war on "Arabisms and Farsisms," the framers of standard Ukrainian and Belorussian campaigned against "Russisms," and the protectors of the eliteless "small peoples" liberated the newly codified Chukchi language from English borrowings.<sup>84</sup> The first two of the five theses adopted by Tatar writers and journalists read as follows:

I. The principal material of the Tatar literary language should consist of elements taken from the native language. If a needed word exists in the Tatar language, it can under no circumstances be replaced by a foreign equivalent.

II. If a word does not exist in the Tatar language, it should, whenever possible, be replaced

a) by a new artificial word composed of stems (roots) that exist in our language;

b) by a borrowing from among old-Turkish words that are no longer in use or from the vocabularies of related Turkish tribes that reside on Russian territory provided they will be accepted and easily assimilated.<sup>85</sup>

Duly codified and apparently insulated from each other (not least by means of dictionaries<sup>86</sup>), the various official languages could be used to reach the "toiling nationals." By 1928, books were being published in 66 languages (as compared to 40 in 1913) and newspapers in 47

82. See, in particular, William Fierman, *Language Planning and National Development: The Uzbek Experience* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1991); and Simon Crisp, "Soviet Language Planning since 1917–53," in Michael Kirkwood, ed., *Language Planning in the Soviet Union* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), 23–45. The quote is from Agamalyogly, "K predstoiashchemu tiurkologicheskomu s" ezdu v Azerbaidzhane," *Novyi vostok* 10–11 (1925): 216.

83. Davydov, "O probleme iazykov," 18.

84. See, for example, Fierman, *Language Planning*, 149–63; James Dingley, "Ukrainian and Belorussian—A Testing Ground," in Kirkwood, ed., *Language Planning*, 180–83; V. G. Bogoraz-Tan, "Chukotskii bukvar'," *Sovetskii Sever* 10 (1931): 126.

85. I. Borozdin, "Sovremennyi Tatarstan," *Novyi vostok* 10–11 (1925): 132.

86. M. Pavlovich, "Kul'turnye dostizheniia tiurko-tatarskikh narodnostei so vremeni Oktiabr'skoi revoliutsii," *Novyi vostok* 12 (1926): viii.

(205 non-Russian titles in all<sup>87</sup>). How many people were actually reading them was not of immediate importance: as in other Soviet campaigns, supply was supposed to generate demand (or suppliers would engineer it). Much more ambitious was the requirement that all official business including education be conducted in native languages (the languages of the eponymous republics as well as the languages of local communities).<sup>88</sup> This was necessary because Lenin and Stalin kept saying it was necessary, because it was the only way to overcome national mistrust, because "speech reactions in native languages occur more quickly,"<sup>89</sup> because socialist content was only accessible to nationals in national form, because "developed" nations consisted of individuals whose native language equaled the official language equaled the nation's name, and because the adoption of rigid literary standards had created large numbers of people who either spoke non-languages or spoke their native languages "incorrectly."<sup>90</sup> By 1927, 93.7 percent of Ukrainian and 90.2 percent of Belorussian elementary-school students were taught in their "native" languages (that is, the language implied by the name of their "nationality").<sup>91</sup> High schools, vocational schools and colleges lagged behind, but everyone seemed to agree that the ultimate goal was a total coincidence of national and linguistic identity. Theoretically at least, a Jew from a shtetl was to be educated in Yiddish even if his parents preferred Ukrainian (Hebrew not being an option), while a Ukrainian from Kuban' was to be taught in Ukrainian if scholars and administrators decided that her parents' vernacular was a dialect of Ukrainian rather than a dialect of Russian (or a Kuban' language in its own right).<sup>92</sup> As one official put it, "We cannot take the desires of parents into account. We must teach the child in the language he speaks at home."<sup>93</sup> In many parts of the USSR such an approach could not be implemented or even seriously argued, but the validity of the final goal (total ethnolinguistic consistency under socialism rather than total ethnolinguistic transparency under communism) was usually taken for granted.

Finally and most dramatically, the promotion of native languages was accompanied by the promotion of the speakers of those languages.

87. Simon, *Nationalism*, 46. The number of Yiddish books and brochures, for example, rose from 76 in 1924 to 531 in 1930 (see Gitelman, *Jewish Nationality*, 332–33).

88. See, for example, Fierman, *Language Planning*, 170–76; Gitelman, *Jewish Nationality*, 351–65; James E. Mace, *Communism and the Dilemmas of National Liberation: National Communism in Soviet Ukraine, 1918–1933* (Cambridge: Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, 1983), 96; Simon, *Nationalism*, 42.

89. Davydov, "O probleme iazykov," 23.

90. The Ukrainian Commissar of Education, Mykola Skrypnyk, defined the Donbass vernacular as a "neither Russian nor Ukrainian" patois in need of proper Ukrainianization (see Mace, *Communism and the Dilemmas*, 213).

91. Simon, *Nationalism*, 49.

92. I. Bulatnikov, "Ob ukrainizatsii na Severnom Kavkaze," *Prosveshchenie natsional'nostei* 1 (1929): 94–99; Gitelman, *Jewish Nationality*, 341–44.

93. Gitelman, *Jewish Nationality*, 342.

According to the official policy of *korenizatsiia* (literally, "taking root" or indigenization), the affairs of all ethnic groups at all levels—from union republics to clan soviets—were to be run by the representatives of those ethnic groups. This involved the preferential recruitment of "nationals" to party, government, judicial, trade union and educational institutions, as well as the preferential "proletarianization" of mostly rural non-Russian populations.<sup>94</sup> The specific goals were not clear, however. On the one hand, an ethnic group's share of the total population on a given territory was to be equal to its share in all high-status occupations, which in effect meant all occupations with the exception of traditional rural ones (precisely those that, according to ethnographers, made most nationalities "national").<sup>95</sup> On the other hand, not all territories were equal or equally self-contained, with the "republican" identity frequently dominating over all others. Indeed, most indigenization campaigns assumed republic-controlling (non-Russian) nationalities to be more indigenous than others, so that if the share of Armenian office-holders actually exceeded the share of Armenians in the total population of "their own" republic, no one seemed to allege a violation of the Soviet nationality policy (the Kurds were to control their own village soviets; their proportionate representation on the republican level was not a clearly stated priority).<sup>96</sup> No other union republic could equal Armenia's success but most of them tried (with Georgia making particularly great strides). Nationality was an asset and there were no nationally defined entities above the union republic.

Yet even though administrative hierarchy tended to interfere with the principle of national equality, the idea of a formal ranking of ethnic groups was absent from the NEP nationality policy. No one bothered with Stalin's distinction between nations and nationalities, least of all Stalin himself. The dictatorship of the proletariat consisted of countless national groups (languages, cultures, institutions) endowed with apparently limitless national—that is, "nonessential"—rights (to develop their languages, cultures, institutions). The key themes were "national diversity [*raznoobrazie*]" and "national uniqueness [*svoeobrazie*]," both useful as paradoxical prerequisites for ultimate unity but also as values in their own right. The symbolic representation of the USSR at the Agricultural Exhibit of 1923 included

The majestic ancient mosques of Samarkand . . . ; the white minarets of Azerbaijan; a colorful Armenian tower; a strikingly Oriental building from Kirghizia; a solid Tatar house covered with grillwork; some picturesque chinoiserie from the far east; and further on the yurts and *chums* from Bashkiria, Mongol-Buriatia, Kalmykia, Oiratia, Iakutia, the Khakass, the Ostiak and the Samoed; all of it surrounded

94. For a survey, see Simon, *Nationalism*, 20–70.

95. See, for instance, Borozdin, "Sovremennyi Tatarstan," 118–19; 122–23; Dimanshtein, "Desiat' let," v–vi, xvii.

96. Simon, *Nationalism*, 32–33, 37.

by the artificially created mountains and villages of Dagestan, Caucasian Highland [*Gorskaia*] Republic, and Chechnia . . . They each have *their own* flag; signs in *their own* language; maps of *their own* expanses and borders; diagrams of *their own* riches. Nationality, individuality and uniqueness are forcefully emphasized everywhere.<sup>97</sup>

If the USSR was a communal apartment, then every family that inhabited it was entitled to a room of its own. "Only through free national self-determination could we arrive in this apartment," argued Vareikis, "for only because of this self-determination can any formerly oppressed nation shed its legitimate mistrust of larger nations."<sup>98</sup>

Not all mistrust was legitimate, of course. The failure to recognize Moscow as "the citadel of the international revolutionary movement and leninism"<sup>99</sup> (and thus the only true center of democratic centralism) was a nationalist deviation, as Sultan-Galiev and Shums'kyi, among others, had a chance to find out. National rights were matters of cultural "form" as distinct from political and economic "content"; but ultimately all form was derived from content and it was up to party leaders in Moscow to decide where the line should be drawn in each case. One thing was clear, however: the distinction itself remained obligatory, albeit temporary, and the share of form remained significant, although theoretically negligible. Even as he attacked Mykola Khvyi'ovyi in 1926 for turning "away from Moscow," Stalin reiterated his support for the further development of Ukrainian culture and repeated his 1923 prediction that eventually (as opposed to right now) "the Ukrainian proletariat would be Ukrainianized in the same way in which the proletariat of, say, Latvia and Hungary, which used to be German, had been Latvianized and Magyarized."<sup>100</sup>

But what about the Russians? In the center of the Soviet apartment there was a large and amorphous space not clearly defined as a room, unmarked by national paraphernalia, unclaimed by "its own" nation and inhabited by a very large number of austere but increasingly sensitive proletarians. The Russians, indeed, remained in a special position. They could be bona fide national minorities in areas assigned to somebody else, but in Russia proper they had no national rights and no national opportunities (because they had possessed and misused them before). The war against Russian huts and Russian churches was the Party's *raison d'être*, and the heavy burden of that war was the reason it needed the support of the yurts, *chums* and minarets. In fact, ethnicity-based affirmative action in the national territories was an exact replica of class-based affirmative action in Russia. A Russian could benefit from being a proletarian; a non-Russian could benefit from being a non-Russian. "Udmurt" and "Uzbek" were meaningful con-

97. A. Skachko, "Vostochnye respubliki na S.-Kh. Vystavke SSSR v 1923 godu," *Novyi vostok* 4 (1923): 482–84. Emphasis in the original.

98. Vareikis and Zelenskii, *Natsional'no-gosudarstvennoe razmezhevanie*, 59.

99. Stalin, *Sochineniia*, 8: 153.

100. *Ibid.*, 151.

cepts because they substituted for class; "Russian" was a politically empty category unless it referred to the source of great-power chauvinism (which meant arrogant bureaucratic statism, not excessive national self-assertion) or to the history of relentless imperialist oppression (which meant that the tsarist state was a prison for non-Russian peoples). In Trotsky's March 1923 formulation of Lenin's policy,

The relationship between the Great Russian proletariat and the Great-Russian peasantry is one thing. Here the question is one of class, pure and simple, which makes the solution of the problem easier. The relationship between the Great Russian proletariat, which plays first fiddle in our federal state, and the Azerbaijani, Turkistani, Georgian and Ukrainian peasantry is something else entirely.<sup>101</sup>

The Russians were not the only non-nation in the Soviet Union. The Soviets were not a nation either (the apartment was not larger than the sum total of its rooms). This is all the more remarkable because after March 1925 the citizens of the USSR were building socialism "in one country"—a country with a central state, a centralized economy, a definite territory and a monolithic Party. Some people ("great-power chauvinists") associated that country with Russia<sup>102</sup> but as far as the party line was concerned, the USSR had no national identity, no official language and no national culture. The USSR was like Russia insofar as both represented pure "socialist content" completely devoid of "national form."

One could not criticize socialist content, of course, but the campaign to foster national forms had numerous, though mostly inarticulate, detractors. While almost none of the delegates to the XII Congress spoke out against the Lenin/Stalin indigenization (*korenizatsiia*) program, the greatest applause was reserved for the few attacks on "local nationalism," not for the Party's crusade against great-power chauvinism.<sup>103</sup> Meanwhile, in the Tatar Republic great-power chauvinism consisted in complaints "that 'all the power is in Tatar hands these days'; that 'Russians are badly off now'; that 'Russians are being oppressed'; that 'Russians are being fired from their jobs, not hired anywhere, and not admitted to colleges'; that 'all Russians should leave Tataria as soon as possible,' etc."<sup>104</sup> In Povolzh'e, Siberia and central Asia, "non-native" settlers, teachers and administrators resented official pressure to learn languages they considered useless, hire "nationals" they deemed incompetent, teach children they called "savage" and waste scarce resources on projects they regarded as unfair tokenism.<sup>105</sup>

101. Quoted in Nenarokov, *K edinstvu ravnykh*, 132.

102. See, in particular, M. Agurskii, *Ideologiia natsional-bol'shevizma* (Paris: YMCA Press, 1980).

103. *Dvenadtsati s"ezd*, 554, 556, 564.

104. N. Konoplev, "Shire front internatsional'nogo vospitaniia," *Prosveshchenie natsional'nostei* 2 (1931): 49. See also N. Konoplev, "Za vospitanie internatsional'nykh boitsov," *Prosveshchenie natsional'nostei* 4-5 (1930): 55-61.

105. TsGAOR, f. 1377, op. 1, d. 224, ll. 8, 32; N. Amyl'skii, "Kogda zatsvetaiut zharkie tsvety," *Severnaia Aziia* 3 (1928): 57-58; Fierman, *Language Planning*, 177-85; N.

Ukrainian peasants were not enthusiastic about the arrival of Jewish agricultural colonists, while the “overrepresented” Jewish officials objected to wholesale Ukrainianization.<sup>106</sup> The presumed beneficiaries were not always grateful, either. “Politically immature” parents, students and teachers exhibited an “abnormal attitude” towards native-language education and had to be forced along the path of “Yiddishization” and “Belorussification” (for technical reasons, this path rarely stretched beyond middle school and thus appeared to be an educational dead end).<sup>107</sup> “Backward” Belorussian settlers in Siberia preferred instruction in Russian, while “particularly backward” indigenous peoples of Siberia argued that insofar as literacy was of any value in the tundra, it was to get to know the Russian ways and learn the skills that could not be mastered at home.<sup>108</sup>

While NEP lasted, these arguments fell on deaf ears because the correct way out of backwardness lay through exuberant and uncompromising nation building (*natsional'noe stroitel'stvo*)—that is, in official terminology, through more backwardness. But in 1928 NEP came to an end and so did the toleration of all “survivals.” The “revolutionaries from above” restored the original bolshevik equation of “otherness” with “backwardness” and vowed to destroy it within ten years. Collectivization would take care of rural barbarians, industrialization would bring about urban progress and the cultural revolution would “liquidate illiteracy” (and thus all deviance). According to the apostles of the Great Transformation, “socialism in one country” meant that the difference between self and other would soon coincide with the borders of that country: all internal boundaries would presently disappear, schools would merge with production, writers with readers, minds with bodies. But did any of this apply to nationalities? Did this mean that national territories were a concession to backwardness that had to be withdrawn? That nations were to be eliminated like NEPmen or collectivized like peasants? Some serious signs pointed in that direction.

---

I. Leonov, “Tuzemnye shkoly na Severe,” *Sovetskii Sever: Pervyi sbornik statei* (Moscow: Komitet Severa, 1929), 200–4; Leonov, “Tuzemnye sovety,” 242, 247–48; D. F. Medvedev, “Ukrepim sovety na Krainem Severe i ozhivim ikh rabotu,” *Sovetskii Sever* 1 (1933): 6–8; P. Rysakov, “Praktika shovinizma i mestnogo natsionalizma,” *Revoliutsiia i natsional'nosti* 8–9 (1930): 28; T. Semushkin, *Chukotka* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1941), 48; I. Sergeev, “Usilit' provedenie natspolitiki v Kalmykii,” *Revoliutsiia i natsional'nosti* 7 (1930): 66; Simon, *Nationalism*, 25, 41, 73–74.

106. Gitelman, *Jewish Nationality*, 386, 398, 402–3.

107. Davydov, “O probleme iazykov,” 22; Konoplev, “Shire front,” 50; A. Valitov, “Protiv opportunisticheskogo otnosheniia k stroitel'stvu natsskhkoly,” *Prosveshchenie natsional'nostei* 5–6 (1932): 68.

108. I. Skachkov, “Prosveshchenie sredi belorusov RSFSR,” *Prosveshchenie natsional'nostei* 3 (1931): 76; P. Kovalevskii, “V shkole-iurte,” *Sovetskii Sever* 2 (1934): 105–6; I. Nesterenok, “Smotr natsional'nykh shkol na Taimyre,” *Sovetskii Sever* 6 (1932): 84; G. N. Prokof'ev, “Tri goda v samoedskoi shkole,” *Sovetskii Sever* 7–8 (1931): 144; S. Stebnitskii, “Iz opyta raboty v shkole Severa,” *Prosveshchenie natsional'nostei* 8–9 (1932): 49–51.



Just as legal scholars anticipated the withering away of law and teachers predicted the imminent obsolescence of formal education, linguists and ethnographers expected—and tried to bring about—the fusion and consequent disappearance of linguistic and ethnic communities.<sup>109</sup> According to N. Ia. Marr's allegedly marxist and hence obligatory "Japhetic theory," language belonged to a social superstructure and thus reflected the cyclical changes of the economic base. Language families were remnants of evolutionary stages united by the inexorable process of global "glottogony" and were destined to become merged under communism.<sup>110</sup> Similarly, the speakers of those languages ("nationalities") constituted historically "unstable" communities that rose and fell with socio-economic formations.<sup>111</sup> "By freeing itself from its bourgeois aspect, national culture will become fused into one human culture . . . The nation is a historic, transitional category that does not represent anything primeval or eternal. Indeed, the process of the evolution of the nation essentially repeats the history of the development of social forms."<sup>112</sup> In the meantime, the need to speed up the study of marxism-leninism and "master technology" seemed to require both the abandonment of the "preposterous" practice of linguistic indigenization among mostly "assimilated" groups and the encouragement of the widest possible use of the Russian language.<sup>113</sup>

This was not to be, however. Linguistic purism did come under attack from the marrists and later the Party,<sup>114</sup> but the issue was not officially resolved until 1933–1934 and the principle of ethnocultural autonomy was never put into question. As Stalin declared to the XVI Party Congress in July 1930,

The theory of the fusion of all nations of . . . the USSR into one common *Great Russian* nation with one common *Great Russian* language is a nationalist-chauvinist and anti-leninist theory that contradicts the main thesis of leninism, according to which national differences cannot disappear in the near future but will remain in existence

109. For professional abolitionism during the first five-year plan, see Sheila Fitzpatrick, ed., *Cultural Revolution in Russia, 1928–1931* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978). On linguistics and ethnography, see Yuri Slezkine, "The Fall of Soviet Ethnography, 1928–38," *Current Anthropology* 32, no. 4 (1991): 476–84.

110. Slezkine, "The Fall," 478.

111. N. Ia. Marr, "K zadacham nauki na sovetskom vostokey," *Prosveshchenie natsional'nostei* 2 (1930): 12; S. Asfendiarov, "Problema natsii i novoe uchenie o iazyke," *Novyi vostok* 22 (1928): 174.

112. Asfendiarov, "Problema natsii," 174.

113. I. Davydov, "Ocherednye zadachi prosveshcheniia natsional'nostei," *Prosveshchenie natsional'nostei* 4–5 (1930): 30–34; M. Vane, "Russkii iazyk v stroitel'stve natsional'nykh kul'tur," *Prosveshchenie natsional'nostei* 2 (1930): 31–40.

114. I. Kusik'ian, "Ocherednye zadachi marksistov-iazykovedov v stroitel'stve iazykov narodov SSSR," *Prosveshchenie natsional'nostei* 11–12 (1931): 75; E. Krotevich, "Vypravit' nedochety v stroitel'stve Kazakhskoi terminologii," *Prosveshchenie natsional'nostei* 8–9 (1932): 94–96; Fierman, *Language Planning*, 126–129; Mace, *Communism*, 277–79; Roman Smal-Stocki, *The Nationality Problem of the Soviet Union and Russian Communist Imperialism* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1952), 106–41.

for a long time, even after the victory of the proletarian revolution on a world scale.<sup>115</sup>

Accordingly, for as long (very long) as “national differences, language, culture, ways of life, etc.” remained in existence, the ethno-territorial entities would have to be preserved and reinforced.<sup>116</sup> The Great Transformation in nationality policy consisted in a dramatic escalation of the NEP nation-building drive. The champions of the Russian language were forced to recant<sup>117</sup> and all of Soviet life was to become as “national” as possible as quickly as possible. If there were no fortresses that the bolsheviks could not storm, no plan that they could not overfulfill and no fairy tale that they could not turn into reality, then surely it would not take more than a few months to master Uzbek, let alone the “mere 600 to 700 everyday words” that made up the Nenets language.<sup>118</sup> On 1 March 1928 the Central Asian Bureau of the Party, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan and the Uzbek Executive Committee formally decided to become fully “Uzbekified” by 1 September 1930.<sup>119</sup> On 28 December 1929 the Uzbek government required that all officials of the Central Committee, Supreme Court and commissariats of labor, enlightenment, justice and social welfare learn the Uzbek language within two months (the other commissariats were given nine months and “everyone else” a year).<sup>120</sup> On 6 April 1931 the Central Executive Committee of the Crimean Autonomous Republic decreed that the share of indigenous government officials be raised from 29 to 50 percent by the end of the year.<sup>121</sup> And on 31 August 1929 the predominantly Russian-speaking residents of Odessa woke up to discover that their daily *Izvestiia* had been transformed into the Ukrainian-language *Chornomors'ka komuna*.<sup>122</sup>

Only cities, however, were expected to become fully Ukrainianized or Kazakhified. The most spectacular aspect of the Stalin revolution among nationalities was the vastly increased support for the cultural autonomy of all “national minorities” (non-titular nationalities), however small. “The essence of indigenization does not fully coincide with such concepts as Ukrainianization, Kazakhization, Tatarization, etc. . . . Indigenization cannot be limited to issues relating only to the indig-

115. I. V. Stalin, *Sochineniia* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1952), 13: 4. Emphasis in the original.

116. *Ibid.*, 12: 365–66.

117. See, for example, *Prosveshchenie natsional'nostei* 11–12 (1931): 102–6.

118. Fierman, *Language Planning*, 177; Evgen'ev and Bergavinov, “Nachal'niku Obdorskogo politotdela Glavsevmorputi t. Mikhailovu,” *Sovetskaia Arktika* 4 (1936): 65–67.

119. P. Rysakov, “Praktika shovinizma i mestnogo natsionalizma,” *Revoliutsiia i natsional'nosti* 8–9 (1930): 29.

120. S. Akopov, “K voprosu ob uzbekizatsii apparata i sozdanii mestnykh rabochikh kadrov promyshlennosti Uzbekistana,” *Revoliutsiia i natsional'nosti* 12 (1931): 22–23.

121. B. Rodnevich, “Korenizatsiia apparata v avtonomiiakh i raionakh natsmen'shinstv RSFSR,” *Revoliutsiia i natsional'nosti* 12 (1931): 19–20.

122. Mace, *Communism*, 212. See also Simon, *Nationalism*, 39–40.

enous nationality of a given republic or province.”<sup>123</sup> By 1932 Ukraine could boast of Russian, German, Polish, Jewish, Moldavian, Chechen, Bulgarian, Greek, Belorussian and Albanian village soviets, while Kazakhstan hosted Russian, Ukrainian, “Russo-Cossack,” Uzbek, Uigur, German, Tajik, Dungan, Tatar, Chuvash, Bulgarian, Moldavian and Mordvinian rural soviets, not counting 140 that were “mixed.”<sup>124</sup> It was a feast of ethnic fertility, an exuberant national carnival sponsored by the Party and apparently reaffirmed by Stalin’s attack on Rosa Luxemburg in his letter to *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia*.<sup>125</sup> It turned out that the Chechen and Ingush were different nationalities (and not all Vainakh speakers), that Mingrelians were different from Georgians, that Karels were different from Finns, that the “Pontus Greeks” were different from the “Ellas Greeks,” that the Jews and Gypsies were different (but not *that* different) from everybody else and that therefore all of them urgently needed their own literary languages, presses and education systems.<sup>126</sup> Between 1928 and 1938 the number of non-Russian newspapers increased from 205 titles in 47 languages to 2,188 titles in 66 languages.<sup>127</sup> It was considered a scandal if north Caucasians of Ukrainian origin did not have their own theaters, libraries and literary organizations, if the peoples of Dagestan had a Turkic lingua franca (as opposed to several dozen separate standards), or if the cultural needs of the Donbass workers were being served “only in the Russian, Ukrainian and Tatar languages.”<sup>128</sup> Most official positions and school admissions in the Soviet Union were subject to complex ethnic quotas that aimed at a precise correspondence between demography and promotion—an almost impossibly confusing task given the number of administrative levels at which demography and promotion could be measured.<sup>129</sup> The dictatorship of the proletariat was a Tower of Babel

123. A. Oshirov, “Korenizatsiia v sovetskoi strane,” *Revoliutsiia i natsional'nosti* 4–5 (1930): 111.

124. A. Gitlianskii, “Leninskaia natsional'naia politika v deistvii (natsional'nye men'shinstva na Ukraine),” *Revoliutsiia i natsional'nosti* 9 (1931): 37; A. Zuev, “Natsmeny Kazakhstana,” *Revoliutsiia i natsional'nosti* 4 (1932): 48.

125. Or so most people thought. Cf. Stalin, *Sochineniia* 13: 91–92 and *Revoliutsiia i natsional'nosti* 1 (1932); and Iiul'skii, “Pis'mo t. Stalina—orudie vospitaniia Bol'shevistskikh kadrov,” *Prosveshchenie natsional'noiei* 2–3 (1932): 9.

126. See for example I. K., “Indoevropeskii v deistvii,” *Prosveshchenie natsional'noiei* 11–12 (1931): 97–102; I. Kusik'ian, “Protiv burzhuznogo kavkazovedeniia,” *Prosveshchenie natsional'noiei* 1 (1932): 45–47; I. Zhvaniia, “Zadachi sovetskogo i natsional'nogo stroitel'stva v Mingrelii,” *Revoliutsiia i natsional'nosti* 7 (1930): 66–72; D. Savvov, “Za podlinno rodnoi iazyk grekov Sovetskogo Soiuz,” *Prosveshchenie natsional'noiei* 4 (1932): 64–74; M. Bril', “Trudiashchiesia tsygane v riady stroitelei sotsializma,” *Revoliutsiia i natsional'nosti* 7 (1932): 60–66; S. D., “Evreiskaia avtonomnaia oblast'—detishche Oktiabr'skoi revoliutsii,” *Revoliutsiia i natsional'nosti* 6 (1934): 13–25.

127. Simon, *Nationalism*, 46.

128. *Revoliutsiia i natsional'nosti* 1 (1930): 117; A. Takho-Godi, “Problema iazyka v Dagestane,” *Revoliutsiia i natsional'nosti* 2 (1930): 68–75; Gitlianskii, “Leninskaia natsional'naia politika,” 77.

129. See, for example, G. Akopov, “Podgotovka natsional'nykh kadrov,” *Revoliutsiia i natsional'nosti* 4 (1934): 54–60; A. Polianskaia, “Natsional'nye kadry Belorussii,”

in which all tongues on all floors would have a proportionate share of all jobs. Even shock-worker detachments at individual factories and construction sites were to be organized along ethnic lines if at all possible (the famous female Stakhanovite, Pasha Angelina, was a proud member of the "Greek brigade").<sup>130</sup>

The Great Transformation was not just NEP gone berserk, however. In nationalities policies as much as any other, it represented the last war against backwardness-as-exploitation, a permanent escape from social (and hence all?) difference, and the final leap into timelessness conceived as classlessness. Great Transformation goals and identities were valid only if they were obstructed by villains. Starting in 1928, real or imaginary non-Russian elites could no longer claim nationwide backwardness or nationwide rights. Collectivization presupposed the existence of classes and that meant that all nationalities without exception had to produce their own exploiters, heretics, and anti-Soviet conspirators.<sup>131</sup> (If classes could not be found, gender and age sufficed.<sup>132</sup>) Life consisted of "fronts" and fronts—including the national one—separated warring classes. "If in the case of the Russian nationality the internal class struggle has been extremely acute from the very first days of October . . . , the various nationalities are only now beginning to engage in [it]. . . ." <sup>133</sup> Indeed, sometimes the social corrective to the ethnic principle seemed to dissolve that principle altogether, as when a prominent party spokesman declared that "the intensification of class conflicts reveal[ed] the class essence of many national pecu-

---

*Revoliutsiia i natsional'nosti* 8–9 (1930): 79–88; Rodnevich, "Korenizatsiia apparata"; Zuev, "Natsmeny"; E. Popova, "Korenizatsiia apparata—na vysshuiu stupen'," *Revoliutsiia i natsional'nosti* 7 (1932): 50–55; I. Iuabov, "Natsmeny Uzbekskoi SSR," *Revoliutsiia i natsional'nosti* 9 (1932): 74–78; P. S.-ch, "Partorganizatsii natsional'nykh raionov," *Revoliutsiia i natsional'nosti* 10–11 (1932): 143–48; I. Karneev, "Nekotorye tsifry po podgotovke inzhenerno-tekhnikeskikh kadrov iz korennykh natsional'nostei," *Revoliutsiia i natsional'nosti* 3 (1933): 86–92.

130. Kh. Khazanskii, I. Gazeliridi, "Kul'tmassovaia rabota sredi natsional'nykh men'shinstv na novostroikakh," *Revoliutsiia i natsional'nosti* 9 (1931): 86–91; A. Kachanov, "Kul'turnoe obsluzhivanie rabochikh-natsmen Moskovskoi oblasti," *Revoliutsiia i natsional'nosti* 6 (1932): 54–58; I. Sabirzianov, "Natsmenrabota profsoiuzov Moskv," *Revoliutsiia i natsional'nosti* 9 (1932): 69–74.

131. A. Mitrofanov, "K itogam partchistki v natsrespublikakh i oblastiakh," *Revoliutsiia i natsional'nosti* 1 (1930): 29–36; Martha Brill Olcott, *The Kazakhs* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1987), 216–20; Mace, *Communism*, 264–80; Rakowska-Harmstone, *Russia and Nationalism*, 39–41; Azade-Ayse Rorlich, *The Volga Tatars: A Profile in National Resilience* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1986), 155–56.

132. In other words, women and children could become default proletarians. See Gregory Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919–1929* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974); Yuri Slezkine, "From Savages to Citizens: The Cultural Revolution in the Soviet Far North, 1928–1938," *Slavic Review* 51, no. 1 (Spring 1992): 52–76.

133. "Vskrytie klassovoi rozni." See N. Krupskaiia, "O zadachakh natsional'no-kul'turnogo stroitel'stva v sviazi s obostreniem klassovoi bor'by," *Prosveshchenie natsional'nostei* 4–5 (1930): 19.

liarities,"<sup>134</sup> or when a young ethnographer/collectivizer concluded that the whole "system that impress[ed] the superficial and usually naive observer as a national peculiarity . . . turn[ed] out to be a system of ideological defense of private property."<sup>135</sup>

Not all national peculiarities could be dissolved by class analysis, however. The rhetoric of ethnic diversity and the practice of ethnic quotas remained obligatory, and most local officials purged during the first five-year plan were replaced by their social betters from the same nationality.<sup>136</sup> What did change was the amount of room allowed for "national form." The ethnic identity of the Great Transformation was the ethnic identity of NEP minus "backwardness" as represented and defended by the exploiting classes. The members of the so-called Union for the Liberation of Ukraine were accused of nationalism not because they insisted on Ukraine's separate identity, administrative autonomy or ethnolinguistic rights—that was the official Soviet policy. They were accused of nationalism because the Ukraine they allegedly defined and celebrated was a rural Utopia from the remote but recoverable past, not an urban Utopia from the near but ethnically fragmented future.

They remained emotionally attached to the old Ukraine dotted with farmsteads and manor houses, a predominantly agrarian country with a solid base for the private ownership of land. . . . They were hostile to the industrialization of Ukraine and to the Soviet five-year plan, which was transforming the republic and endowing it with an independent industrial base. They sneered [*glumilis'*] at the Dnieper Hydroelectric Dam and at Soviet Ukrainianization. They did not trust its sincerity and seriousness. They were convinced that without them, without the old Ukrainian intelligentsia, no genuine Ukrainianization was possible. But more than anything else they were afraid that their monopoly on culture, literature, science, art and the theater would be wrested from them.<sup>137</sup>

The continued existence of nationally defined communities and the legitimacy of their claims to particular cultural, territorial, economic and political identities (which Stalin regarded as the principle of national rights and which I call "nationalism") was never in doubt. The crime of "bourgeois nationalism" consisted in attempts by some "bourgeois intellectuals" to lead such communities away from the party line—in the same way as the crime of wrecking consisted in the attempts by some "bourgeois specialists" to derail Soviet industry. To engage in "bourgeois nationalism" was to sabotage a nation, not to "build" it.

134. S. Dimanshtein, "Za klassovuiu chetkost' v prosveshchenii natsional'nostei," *Prosveshchenie natsional'nostei* 1 (1929): 9.

135. N. Bilibin, "U zapadnykh koriakov," *Sovetskii Sever* 1–2 (1932): 207.

136. See, for example, Olcott, *The Kazakhs*, 219; Rakowska-Harmstone, *Russia and Nationalism*, 100–1.

137. D. Zaslavskii, "Na protsesse 'vyzvolentsev,'" *Prosveshchenie natsional'nostei* 6 (1930): 13.

In 1931 the “socialist offensive” began to wane and in 1934 it was effectively halted for lack of an adversary. Addressing the “Congress of Victors,” Stalin declared that the USSR had finally “divested itself of everything backward and medieval” and become an industrialized society based on a solid socialist foundation.<sup>138</sup> For purposes of official representation, time had been conquered and the future had become present. All essential differences had been overcome, all scholarly pursuits had become marxist and all non-marxist pursuits had disappeared. In the absence of backwardness, there was no need for the institutions that had been created to deal with its various manifestations: the Women’s Department, the Jewish Section, and the Committee for the Assistance to the Peoples of the Northern Borderlands had all been closed down. The science of pedology had been banned because it claimed that women, minorities and the socially disadvantaged might need special assistance along the path to modernity. The science of ethnology had been banned because it assumed that some contemporary cultures might still be primitive or traditional. And all non-socialist-realist art had been banned because all art reflected reality and all Soviet reality was socialist.

According to the X Congress’s equation of nationality with backwardness, nationality would have had to be banned, too. Once again, however, it weathered the storm and re-emerged chastened but vigorous. “High stalinism” did not reverse the policy of nation building, as most authors on the subject would have us believe.<sup>139</sup> It changed the shape of ethnicity but it never abandoned the “leninist principle” of unity through diversity. It drastically cut down on the number of national units but it never questioned the national essence of those units. The abolition of the Central Asian Bureau was no more a call for ethnic assimilation than the abolition of the Women’s Department was a prelude to an attack on gender differences. In fact, just as the newly emancipated Soviet women were expected to become more “feminine,” the fully modernized Soviet nationalities were supposed to become more national. Class was the only legitimate kind of “content” and by the late 1930s class-based quotas, polls and identity cards had been discontinued.<sup>140</sup> Differences “in form” remained acceptable, however, and nationality (the most venerable and certifiably hollow form of “form”) was allowed to develop, regroup and perhaps even acquire a little content.

The most striking innovation of the early 1930s was the emergence

138. Stalin, *Sochineniia*, 13: 306, 309.

139. For two remarkable exceptions, see Barbara A. Anderson and Brian D. Silver, “Equality, Efficiency, and Politics in Soviet Bilingual Education Policy, 1934–1980,” *American Political Science Review* 78, no. 4 (October 1984): 1019–39; and Ronald Grigor Suny, “The Soviet South: Nationalism and the Outside World,” in Michael Mandelbaum, ed., *The Rise of Nations in the Soviet Union* (New York: Council of Foreign Relations Press, 1991): 69.

140. Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Education and Social Mobility in the Soviet Union, 1921–1934* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 235.

of the Russians as an ethnic group in their own right. As class criteria became irrelevant, the former default nationality became almost as saturated with ethnicity as all others. The noun “national” was criticized and later killed because there were no “non-nationals” left.<sup>141</sup> First cautiously but then more and more forcefully as the decade progressed, the Party began to endow Russians with a national past, national language and an increasingly familiar national iconography, headed principally by Alexander Pushkin—progressive and “freedom-loving” to be sure, but clearly celebrated as a great Russian, not a great revolutionary. By 1934, “derussifying” Russian proletarians and deliberately pulling away from Moscow in the course of “cultural construction” had become a serious crime, not a “mistake” born of well intentioned impatience.<sup>142</sup> And yet, the Russians never became a nationality like any other. On the one hand, they did not have a clearly defined national territory (RSFSR remained an amorphous “everything else” republic and was never identified with an ethnic or historic “Russia”), they did not have their own Party and they never acquired a national Academy. On the other hand—and this, of course, explains the lacunae—the Russians were increasingly identified with the Soviet Union as a whole. Between 1937 and 1939 Cyrillic replaced Latin in all the literary standards created in the 1920s, and in 1938, after a three-year campaign, Russian became an obligatory second language in all non-Russian schools. The Soviet past was becoming progressively more Russian and so were the upper echelons of the Party and state.<sup>143</sup> “Internationalism,” defined as close ties among Soviet nationalities, and later “friendship of the peoples,” defined as even closer ties among Soviet nationalities, became official dogmas<sup>144</sup> and both could only be expressed in Russian, the Soviet lingua franca. Still, no one ever suggested that there existed a “Soviet nation” (*natsiia*, that is, as opposed to the ethnically non-specific *narod*) or that Russian should become the *first* language in all national areas or institutions. Even in Karelia, where in 1938 the local Finnish standard was discovered to be “fascist,” the orphaned Finnic-speakers were forced to switch to the newly-codified “Karelian” rather than Russian, which had already become “the language of interethnic communication.”<sup>145</sup> The Russians began to bully their neighbors and decorate their part of the communal apartment

141. *Pervyi vsesoiuznyi s"ezd sovetskikh pisatelei. Stenograficheskii otchet* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1934), 625.

142. Compare, for example, Stalin, *Sochineniia*, 8: 149–54; and S. Dimanshtein, “Bol'shevistskii otpor natsionalizmu,” *Revoliutsiia i natsional'nosti* 4 (1933): 1–13; S. D., “Bor'ba s natsionalizmom i uroki Ukrainy,” *Revoliutsiia i natsional'nosti* 1 (1934): 15–22.

143. Simon, *Nationalism*, 148–55.

144. After Stalin's speeches at the XVII party Congress and at the Conference of the Leading Collective Farmers of Tajikistan and Turkmenistan (see Stalin, *Sochineniia*, 13: 361; 14 [1]: 114–115).

145. Paul M. Austin, “Soviet Karelian: The Language That Failed,” *Slavic Review* 51, no. 1 (Spring 1992), esp. 22–23.

(which included the enormous hall, corridor and the kitchen where all the major decisions were made), but they did not claim that the whole apartment was theirs or that the other (large) families were not entitled to their own rooms. The tenants were increasingly unequal but reassuringly separate.

The culture of the Great Transformation had been, by definition, rootless, fluid and carnivalesque. Old people acted like adolescents, children acted up, women dressed like men (although not vice versa), classes changed places and words lost meaning. People, buildings, languages and nationalities endlessly multiplied, migrated and spread evenly and thinly over a leveled, decentered landscape. But this proletarian postmodernism proved premature. The Great Retreat of the 1930s was the revenge of the literal—the triumph of real *korenizatsiia*, as in “taking root” or “radicalization.” The forces of gravity (in both senses) pinned buildings to the ground, peasants to the land, workers to factories, women to men and Soviets to the USSR.<sup>146</sup> At the same time and in the same basic way, each individual got stuck with a nationality and most nationalities got stuck with their borders. In the early 1930s, at the time of the reappearance of college admissions tests and shortly before the introduction of student files (*lichnye dela*), employee cards (*trudovye knizhki*) and the death penalty for attempted flight abroad, all Soviet citizens received internal passports that formally defined them in terms of name, time and place of birth, authorized domicile (*propiska*) and nationality. One’s name and *propiska* could be changed, nationality could not. By the end of the decade every Soviet child inherited his nationality at birth: individual ethnicity had become a biological category impervious to cultural, linguistic or geographical change.<sup>147</sup> Meanwhile, collective ethnicity was becoming more and more territorial. The administrative units created just a few years before in order to accommodate pre-existing nationalities were now the most important defining feature of those nationalities. To cite a typical and perfectly circular argument, “The fact that an ethnic group has its own national territory—a republic, province, district or village soviet—is proof that the ethnic group in question is an officially recognized nationality. . . . For example, the existence, in Cheliabinsk province, of a Nagaibak national district makes it imperative that a special nationality, the Nagaibak, be distinguished from the Tatars.”<sup>148</sup>

In the same way, the Jews became a true nation after the creation of the Jewish Autonomous district in Birobidzhan.

By acquiring their own territory, their own statehood, the toiling Jews of the USSR received a crucial element that they had lacked before

146. This is, in effect, a crude summary of Vladimir Papernyi’s delightful *Kul'tura Dva* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1985).

147. On the “passport system,” see Victor Zaslavsky, *The Neo-Stalinist State* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1982), 92ff.

148. L. Krasovskii, “Chem nado rukovodstvovat'sia pri sostavlenii spiska narodnostei SSSR,” *Revoliutsiia i natsional'nost'* 4 (1936): 70–71.



and that had made it impossible for them to be considered a nation in the scientific sense of the term. And so it happened that, like many other Soviet nationalities completing the process of national consolidation, the Jewish national minority became a nation as a result of receiving its own national administrative entity in the Soviet Union.<sup>149</sup>

This view refers to two important innovations. First, the formal ethnic hierarchy was back for the first time since 1913. Different ethno-territorial units (republics, provinces, districts) had always had different statuses, but no serious attempt had been made to relate this bureaucratic arrangement to an objective and rigidly evolutionary hierarchy of ethnicity. After the mid-1930s students, writers and shock-workers could be formally ranked—and so could nationalities. Second, if the legitimacy of an ethnic community depended on the government's grant of territory, then the withdrawal of that grant would automatically "denationalize" that community (though not necessarily its individual passport-carrying members!). This was crucial because by the second half of the decade the government had obviously decided that presiding over 192 languages and potentially 192 bureaucracies was not a very good idea after all. The production of textbooks, teachers and indeed students could not keep up with formal "nationalization," the fully bureaucratized command economy and the newly centralized education system required manageable and streamlined communication channels, and the self-consciously Russian "promotees" who filled the top jobs in Moscow after the Great Terror were probably sympathetic to complaints of anti-Russian discrimination (they themselves were beneficiaries of *class*-based quotas). By the end of the decade most ethnically defined soviets, villages, districts and other small units had been disbanded, some autonomous republics forgotten and most "national minority" schools and institutions closed down.<sup>150</sup>

However—and this is the most important "however" of this essay—the ethnic groups that already had their own republics and their own extensive bureaucracies were actually told to redouble their efforts at building distinct national cultures. Just as the "reconstruction of Moscow" was changing from grandiose visions of refashioning the whole cityscape to a focused attempt to create several perfect artifacts,<sup>151</sup> so the nationality policy had abandoned the pursuit of countless rootless nationalities in order to concentrate on a few full-fledged, fully equipped "nations." While the curtailment of ethnic quotas and the new emphasis on Soviet meritocracy ("quality of cadres") slowed down and sometimes reversed the indigenization process in party and

149. S. Dimanshtein, "Otvét na vopros, sostavliaiut li soboi evrei v nauchnom smysle natsiui," *Revoliutsiia i natsional'nost'* 10 (1935): 77.

150. Simon, *Nationalism*, 61.

151. Greg Castillo, "Gorki Street and the Design of the Stalin Revolution," in Zeynep Celik, Diane G. Favro and Richard Ingersoll, eds. *Streets: Critical Perspectives on Public Space* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

managerial bureaucracies, the celebration of national cultures and the production of native intelligentsias intensified dramatically. Uzbek communities outside Uzbekistan were left to their own devices but Uzbekistan as a quasi-nation-state remained in place, got rid of most alien enclaves on its territory and concentrated on its history and literature. The Soviet apartment as a whole was to have fewer rooms but the ones that remained were to be lavishly decorated with hometown memorabilia, grandfather clocks and lovingly preserved family portraits.

Indeed, the 1934 Congress of Soviet Writers, which in many ways inaugurated high stalinism as a cultural paradigm, was a curiously solemn parade of old-fashioned romantic nationalisms. Pushkin, Tolstoy and other officially restored Russian icons were not the only national giants of international stature—all Soviet peoples possessed, or would shortly acquire, their own classics, their own founding fathers and their own folkloric riches. The Ukrainian delegate said that Taras Shevchenko was a “genius” and a “colossus” “whose role in the creation of the Ukrainian literary language was no less important than Pushkin’s role in the creation of the Russian literary language, and perhaps even greater.”<sup>152</sup> The Armenian delegate pointed out that his nation’s culture was “one of the most ancient cultures of the orient,” that the Armenian national alphabet predated Christianity and that the Armenian national epic was “one of the best examples of world epic literature” because of “the lifelike realism of its imagery, its elegance, the profundity and simplicity of its popular wisdom and the democratic nature of its plot.”<sup>153</sup> The Azerbaijani delegate insisted that the Persian poet Nizami was actually a classic of Azerbaijani literature because he was a “Turk from Giandzha,” and that Mirza Fath Ali Akhundov was not a gentry writer, as some proletarian critics had charged, but a “great philosopher-playwright” whose “characters [were] as colorful, diverse and realistic as the characters of Griboedov, Gogol’ and Ostrovskii.”<sup>154</sup> The Turkmen delegate told the Congress about the eighteenth century “coryphaeus of Turkmen poetry,” Makhtum-Kuli; the Tajik delegate explained that Tajik literature had descended from Rudaki, Firdousi, Omar Khayyam and “other brilliant craftsmen of the word”; while the Georgian delegate delivered an extraordinarily lengthy address in which he claimed that Shot’ha Rust’haveli’s *The Man in the Panther’s Skin* was “centuries ahead of west European intellectual movements,” infinitely superior to Dante and generally “the greatest literary monument of the whole ... so-called medieval Christian world.”<sup>155</sup>

According to the new party line, all officially recognized Soviet nationalities were supposed to have their own nationally defined “Great

152. *Pervyi vsesoiuznyi s"ezd*, 43, 49.

153. *Ibid.*, 104.

154. *Ibid.*, 116–17.

155. *Ibid.*, 136, 142, 77.

Traditions" that needed to be protected, perfected and, if need be, invented by specially trained professionals in specially designated institutions. A culture's "greatness" depended on its administrative status (from the Union republics at the top to the non-territorial nationalities who had but a tenuous hold on "culture"), but within a given category all national traditions except for the Russian were supposed to be of equal value. Rhetorically this was not always the case (Ukraine was sometimes mentioned as second-in-command while central Asia was often described as backward), but institutionally all national territories were supposed to be perfectly symmetrical—from the party apparatus to the school system. This was an old Soviet policy but the contribution of the 1930s consisted in the vigorous leveling of remaining uneven surfaces and the equally vigorous manufacturing of special—and also identical—culture-producing institutions. By the end of the decade all Union republics had their own writers' unions, theaters, opera companies and national academies that specialized primarily in national history, literature and language.<sup>156</sup> Republican plans approved by Moscow called for the production of ever larger numbers of textbooks, plays, novels, ballets and short stories, all of them national in form (which, in the case of dictionaries, folklore editions and the "classics" series came dangerously close to being in content as well).

If some republics had a hard time keeping up with others, Moscow tried to oblige. In 1935 and 1936, for example, the new State Institute of Theater Art was in the process of training or had already released eleven national theater companies complete with all actors and full repertoires.<sup>157</sup> If a national repertoire was still incomplete, translations from mostly nineteenth century Russian and west European literatures were actively encouraged or provided (the first productions of the new Bashkir Opera in 1936 were *Prince Igor* and *The Marriage of Figaro*<sup>158</sup>). In fact, in the late 1930s translation became one of the major Soviet industries as well as the main source of sustenance for hundreds of professional writers. The "friendship of the peoples" thesis required that all Soviet nationalities be deeply moved by the art of other Soviet nationalities. As Gorky put it, "We need to share our knowledge of the past. It is important for all Union republics that a Belorussian know what a Georgian or a Turk is like, etc."<sup>159</sup> This resulted not only in frenzied translation activity but also in histories of the USSR that were supposed to include all the Soviet peoples, radio shows that introduced Soviet listeners to "Georgian polyphony and Belorussian folk songs," tours by hundreds of regulation "song and dance ensembles," decades

156. Zaslavsky, "Nationalism and Democratic Transition," 102.

157. North Ossetian, Iakut, Kazakh, Kirghiz, Kara-Kalpak, Kabarda, Balkar, Turkmen, Tajik, Adyge and Kalmyk (see A. Furmanova, "Podgotovka natsional'nykh kadrov dlia teatra," *Revoliutsiia i natsional'nost* 5 [1936]: 29–30).

158. A. Chanyshvili, "V bor'bu za izuchenie i sozдание natsional'noi kul'tury," *Revoliutsiia i natsional'nost* 9 (1935): 61.

159. *Pervyi vsesoiuznyi s"ezd*, 43. "Turk" stands for "Azerbaijani."

of Azerbaijani art in Ukraine, evenings of Armenian poetry in Moscow, exhibits of Turkmen carpets in Kazan' and festivals of national choirs, athletes and Young Pioneers all over the country. From the mid-1930s through the 1980s, this activity was one of the most visible (and apparently least popular) aspects of Soviet official culture.

The pursuit and propagation of national cultures were far from uneventful, of course. Within ten years of the First Writers' Congress most of the founding fathers of the new cultural institutions had perished; large areas had been annexed, lost and reannexed; numerous small ethnic units had been abolished as "unpromising"; and several nations and former "national minorities" had been forcibly deported from their territories. At the same time, the Russians had been transformed from a revolutionary people recovering a national past into "the most outstanding of all nations comprising the Soviet Union"<sup>160</sup> and the focus of world history. Once again, however, the legitimacy of non-Russian "Great Traditions" was not questioned. The main enemies of Russia-as-progress were "bourgeois nationalism," which now referred to insufficient admiration for Russia, and "rootless cosmopolitanism," which represented the opposite of *korenizatsiia*-as-rootedness. Even in 1936–1939, when hundreds of alleged nationalists were being sentenced to death, "the whole Soviet country" was noisily celebrating the 1000th anniversary of Firdousi, claimed by the Tajiks as one of the founders of their (and not Persian) literature; the 500th anniversary of Mir Ali Shir Nava'i (Alisher Navoi), appropriated by the Uzbeks as the great classic of their (and not Chaghatay) culture; and the 125th anniversary of Taras Shevchenko, described by *Pravda* as "a great son of the Ukrainian people" who "carried Ukrainian literature to a height worthy of a people with a rich historical past."<sup>161</sup> The few national icons that suffered during this period were attacked for being anti-Russian, not for being national icons.<sup>162</sup> Similarly, when the Ukrainian poet Volodymyr Sosiura was castigated by *Pravda* in 1951 for his poem "Love Ukraine," the alleged sin consisted not in loving Ukraine too much but in not thanking the elder brother enough.<sup>163</sup> A major reason for gratitude was the recent Soviet annexation of west Ukraine and the subsequent "reunification" of the Ukrainian nation state, a Soviet/Russian achievement widely advertised as a fulfillment of Ukrainian national aspirations.

In fact, it was in this period of Russian delusions of grandeur that the theoretical justification for non-Russian national aspirations was

160. Stalin, *Sochineniia* 2 (XV): 204.

161. "Khronika," *Revoliutsiia i natsional'nost'* 8 (1936): 80; Rakowska-Harmstone, *Russia and Nationalism*, 250–59; Allworth, *The Modern Uzbeks*, 229–30; Yaroslav Bilinsky, *The Second Soviet Republic: The Ukraine after World War II* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1964), 191.

162. Lowell Tillelt, *The Great Friendship: Soviet Historians on the Non-Russian Nationalities* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969), *passim*.

163. Bilinsky, *The Second Soviet Republic*, 15–16; Robert Conquest, *Soviet Nationalities Policy in Practice* (New York: Praeger, 1967), 65–66.

clearly formulated. On 7 April 1948 Stalin said something that closely resembled his 1913 statement on national rights:

Every nation, whether large or small, has its own specific qualities and its own peculiarities, which are unique to it and which other nations do not have. These peculiarities form a contribution that each nation makes to the common treasury of world culture, adding to it and enriching it. In this sense all nations, both small and large, are in the same position and each nation is equal to any other nation.<sup>164</sup>

This seemed to suggest that ethnicity was universal, irreducible and inherently moral. But this was only an overture. In summer 1950 Stalin put his pen to paper in order to exorcize the spirit of N. Ia. Marr, one of the last saints of the Great Transformation whose theories and students had somehow escaped the fate of the other “simplifiers and vulgarizers of marxism.”<sup>165</sup> According to Stalin, language was not part of the superstructure—or, indeed, of the base. It “belonged to the whole nation” and was “common to the whole society” across social classes and throughout history. “Societies” represented ethnic communities and ethnic communities had “essences” that existed “incomparably longer than any base or any superstructure.”<sup>166</sup> In short, it was official: classes and their “ideologies” came and went, but nationalities remained. In a country free from social conflict, ethnicity was the only meaningful identity.

This was the legacy that Stalin bequeathed to *his* successors and that survived 1984 to haunt Gorbachev and *his* successors. Khrushchev balked, of course: in his struggle for local initiative he strengthened the position of the entrenched national elites, while in his struggle against the entrenched national elites he tried to promote an ethnicity-blind personnel policy and even scared some people by resurrecting the “fusion of nations” doctrine. The fusion was to occur under communism, however, and communism was to occur too soon to be taken seriously. The only practical step in this direction was the 1959 school reform that allowed parents the freedom to choose between Russian and non-Russian schools and made “another” language optional. Theoretically, a Kazakh could now forego Russian; practically, a Russian was no longer forced to take Kazakh.<sup>167</sup> The self-confidently homogeneous establishments of Armenia and Lithuania expressed relatively little concern, the “numerically small” ethnic bureaucracies within the RSFSR prepared for the inevitable and the linguistically threatened but politically vigorous elites in Latvia, Ukraine and Azerbaijan put up a desperate fight. Their argument was summed up by Oles’ Honchar thirty years later: “To learn or not to learn a native language in school—

164. Stalin, *Sochineniia* 3 (XVI): 100.

165. *Ibid.*, 146.

166. *Ibid.*, 117, 119, 138.

167. See Yaroslav Bilinsky, “The Soviet Education Laws of 1958–9 and Soviet Nationality Policy,” *Soviet Studies* 14, no. 2 (October 1962): 138–57.

this question cannot arise in any civilized country.”<sup>168</sup> A civilized country, in other words, was an ethno-national state in which the official language was by definition “native.” The stalinist nationality policy had obviously borne fruit.

Civilized stalinism (“developed socialism”) was the credo of the “collective leadership” that presided over the twilight years of the Soviet Union. Deriving its legitimacy from the “really existing” ethno-territorial welfare state rather than future communism and past revolution, the new official discourse retained the language of class as window dressing and relied on nationality to prop up the system.<sup>169</sup> Every Soviet citizen was born into a certain nationality, took it to day care and through high school, had it officially confirmed at the age of sixteen and then carried it to the grave through thousands of application forms, certificates, questionnaires and reception desks. It made a difference in school admissions and it could be crucial in employment, promotions and draft assignments.<sup>170</sup> Soviet anthropologists, brought back to life in the late 1930s and provided with a *raison d'être* after the banishment of marrism, were not supposed to study “culture”: their job was to define, dissect and delight in the primordial “ethnos.” Even abroad, in a world dominated by capitalism, the most visible virtue was “national liberation.”

All nationalities were ranked—theoretically along the evolutionary scale from tribe to nation, and practically by territorial or social status. The status of a given nationality could vary a great deal but the continuing use of ethnic quotas made sure that most practical advantages accrued to the members of titular nationalities residing in “their own” republics. Sixty years of remarkable consistency on this score had resulted in almost total “native” control over most Union republics: large ethnic elites owed their initial promotions and their current legitimacy (such as it was) to the fact of being ethnic.<sup>171</sup> Dependent on Moscow for funds, the political and cultural entrepreneurs owed their allegiance to “their own people” and their own national symbols. But if the politicians were structurally constrained within the apparatus, the intellectuals were specifically trained and employed to produce national cultures. Limits were set by the censor but the goal was seen as legitimate both by party sponsors and by national consumers. A very large proportion of national intellectuals were professional historians, philologists and novelists, and most of them wrote for and about their

168. Quoted in Isabelle T. Kreindler, “Soviet Language Planning since 1953,” in Kirkwood, ed., *Language Planning*, 49. See also Bilinsky, *The Second Soviet Republic*, 20–35; Farmer, *Ukrainian Nationalism*, 134–43; Grey Hodnett, “The Debate over Soviet Federalism,” *Soviet Studies* 28, no. 4 (April 1967): 458–81; Simon, *Nationalism*, 233–64.

169. See, in particular, Lapidus, “Ethnonationalism and Political Stability,” 355–80; Zaslavsky, “Nationalism and Democratic Transition”; Farmer, *Ukrainian Nationalism*, 61–73.

170. Rasma Karklins, *Ethnic Relations in the USSR: The Perspective from Below* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1986).

171. See Roeder, “Soviet Federalism,” 196–233.

own ethnic group.<sup>172</sup> They produced multi-volume national histories, invented national genealogies, purified national languages, preserved national treasures and bemoaned the loss of a national past.<sup>173</sup> In other words, they acted like good patriots—when they were not acting like bad nationalists. As time went on, however, it became increasingly difficult to distinguish between the two because the national form seemed to have become the content and because nationalism did not seem to have any content other than the cult of form. More ominously, the country's leaders found it harder and harder to explain what their "socialist content" stood for and, when Gorbachev finally discarded the worn-out marxist verbiage, the only language that remained was the well honed and long practiced language of nationalism.

The Soviet regime's contribution to the nationalist cause was not limited to "constructive measures," of course. It forced the high priests of national cultures to be part-time worshipers of other national cultures, it instituted an administrative hierarchy that privileged some ethnic groups over others, it interfered in the selection and maintenance of national pantheons, it isolated ethnic communities from their relatives and sympathizers abroad; and it encouraged massive migrations that resulted in competition for scarce resources, diluted the consumer base of the national elites and provoked friction over ethnic quotas. Finally and most fatefully, it deprived the various nations of the right to political independence—a right that was the culmination of all nationalist doctrines, including the one that lay at the foundation of the Soviet Union.

This points to another great tension in Soviet nationality policy: the coexistence of republican statehood and passport nationality.<sup>174</sup> The former assumed that territorial states made nations, the latter suggested that primordial nations might be entitled to their own states. The former presupposed that all residents of Belorussia would (and should) some day become Belorussian, the latter provided the non-Belorussian residents with arguments against it. The Soviet government endorsed both definitions without ever attempting to construct an ethnically meaningful Soviet nation or turn the USSR into a Russian nation state, so that when the non-national Soviet state had lost its Soviet meaning, the national non-states were the only possible heirs. Except for the Russian Republic, that is. Its borders were blurred, its identity was not clearly ethnic and its "titular" residents had trouble distinguishing between the RSFSR and the USSR.<sup>175</sup> Seventy years after

172. Rakowska-Harmstone, "The Dialectics," 10–15. Cf. Miroslav Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

173. See, in particular, Farmer, *Ukrainian Nationalism*, 85–121. Also Allworth, *The Modern Uzbeks*, 258–59; Simon, *Nationalism*, 281–82.

174. For a remarkably elegant interpretation of this tension, see Rogers Brubaker, "Nationhood and the National Question in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Eurasia: An Institutionalist Account," forthcoming in *Theory and Society*.

175. Victor Zaslavsky, "The Evolution of Separatism in Soviet Society under Gorbachev," in Gail W. Lapidus and Victor Zaslavsky, with Philip Goldman, eds., *From*

the X Party Congress the policy of indigenization reached its logical conclusion: the tenants of various rooms barricaded their doors and started using the windows, while the befuddled residents of the enormous hall and kitchen stood in the center scratching the backs of their heads. Should they try to recover their belongings? Should they knock down the walls? Should they cut off the gas? Should they convert their “living area” into a proper apartment?

---

*Union to Commonwealth: Nationalism and Separatism in the Soviet Republics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 83; Leokadiia Drobizheva, “Perestroika and the Ethnic Consciousness of the Russians,” in *ibid.*, 98–111.