

Nationhood and the national question in the Soviet Union and post-Soviet Eurasia: An institutionalist account

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The vast reconfiguration of the East European and Eurasian political landscape, marked by the emergence of some twenty nationally defined successor states in place of the multinational Soviet and Yugoslav states and binational Czechoslovakia, has radically transformed, yet signally failed to solve, the region's long-refractory "national question." In some areas – notably Transcaucasia, Moldova, and most of the former Yugoslavia – national struggles have dramatically intensified with the collapse of supranational political authority. Elsewhere, even in the absence of militarized national conflict, the national question remains at the center of politics, albeit in a new form.

In this article, I explore this new phase and form of the national question. Its geographic focus is on the Soviet Union and its successor states; its analytical focus is on institutionalized definitions of nationhood and their political consequences. The institutional crystallizations of nationhood and nationality in the Soviet Union were by no means empty forms or legal fictions, although this was how they were viewed by most Sovietologists. Institutionalized definitions of nationhood, I argue, not only played a major role in the disintegration of the Soviet state, but continue to shape and structure the national question in the incipient successor states.

The article is in two parts. The first part discusses the dual legacy inherited by the successor states from the Soviet encounter with the national question. It focuses on the two very different modes in which nationhood and nationality were institutionalized in the Soviet Union – territorial and political on the one hand, ethnocultural and personal on the other hand. The second part discusses the way in which this dual legacy has begun to shape the national question in the successor states.

The argument shares the broad analytic orientations of the “new institutionalism” in sociology. All social-science institutionalisms, old and new, oppose decontextualized, atomistic accounts of action; all theorize about “how social choices are shaped, mediated, and channeled by institutional arrangements.”¹ But by moving beyond a concern with the *institutional contexts of and constraints on interested action* to emphasize the *institutional constitution of both interests and actors*, the new institutionalism in sociology diverges from the older sociological institutionalism as well as from the new rational-choice institutionalisms of economics and political science.²

It is this emphasis on the constitutive rather than merely constraining role of institutions that informs the present analysis. The Soviet institutions of territorial nationhood and personal nationality constituted a pervasive system of social classification, an organizing “principle of vision and division” of the social world,³ a standardized scheme of social accounting, an interpretative grid for public discussion, a set of boundary-markers, a legitimate form for public and private identities, and, when political space expanded under Gorbachev, a ready-made template for claims to sovereignty. Institutional definitions of nationhood did not so much constrain action as constitute basic categories of political understanding, central parameters of political rhetoric, specific types of political interest, and fundamental forms of political identity. As political space expanded, they made specific types of political action conceivable, plausible, even compelling, transforming the collapse of a regime into the disintegration of a state. And they continue to constitute elementary forms of political understanding and political action in the successor states.

Two caveats may be added here to forestall misunderstanding. First, my argument is about nationhood and nationality as institutionalized cultural and political forms, not about nations as concrete collectivities. To assert, and to explore, the centrality of institutionalized definitions of nationhood to Soviet collapse and successor state politics is not to treat “nations” – taken as “real,” solidary, internally homogeneous, externally sharply bounded social groups – as the chief protagonists of either. It is not to reify nations; it is not to treat them as fixed and given; it is not even to presuppose that they exist.⁴ Soviet and post-Soviet “national struggles” were and are not the struggles of nations, but the struggles of institutionally constituted national elites – that is elites institutionally defined as *national* – and aspiring counter-elites.⁵ Here I seek to show how these struggles were and remain crucially framed,

mediated, indeed constituted by institutionalized definitions of nationhood and nationality.

Second, my argument is about the enduring consequences of Soviet institutional definitions of nationhood, particularly those consequences that have survived the regime itself; it is not about the intentions that guided the architects of Soviet nationality policies. Those policies were intended to do two things: first, to harness, contain, channel, and control the potentially disruptive political expression of nationality by creating national-territorial administrative structures and by cultivating, co-opting, and (when they threatened to get out of line) repressing national elites;⁶ and second, to drain nationality of its content even while legitimating it as a form, and thereby to promote the long-term withering away of nationality as a vital component of social life.⁷ The annals of unintended consequences are rich indeed, but seldom have intention and consequence diverged as spectacularly as they did in this case.⁸

The Soviet legacy

Institutionalized multinationality

The Soviet Union has collapsed, but the contradictory legacy of its unique accommodation to ethnonational heterogeneity lives on. That accommodation pivoted on *institutionalized multinationality*. The Soviet Union was a multinational state not only in *ethnodemographic* terms – not only in terms of the extraordinary ethnic heterogeneity of its population – but, more fundamentally, in *institutional* terms. The Soviet state not only passively tolerated but actively institutionalized the existence of multiple nations and nationalities as constitutive elements of the state and its citizenry. It codified nationhood and nationality as fundamental social categories sharply distinct from statehood and citizenship.

It is worth underscoring the unprecedented and unparalleled nature of this thoroughgoing state-sponsored institutionalization of nationality on a sub-state level. Most of the world’s states are ethnically heterogeneous.⁹ In some of these states, ethnicity is subjectively experienced and publicly articulated as *nationality*, ethnic heterogeneity as *national heterogeneity*. In such cases, at least some of the ethnic groups composing the population (besides the dominant ethnic or national group)

understand themselves, or are understood by others, as belonging to distinct nations, nationalities, or national groups.¹⁰ This was true, for example, albeit to a limited extent, of the Romanov Empire in its last half-century.

It is not this subjective understanding of ethnicity as nationality that distinguishes the Soviet case from its Romanov predecessor or from other polyethnic states. What is distinctive, rather, is the official, objectified codification¹¹ of ethnic heterogeneity as national heterogeneity. More precisely, it is the *thoroughgoing state-sponsored codification and institutionalization of nationhood and nationality exclusively on a sub-state rather than a state-wide level*.¹²

In other cases where sub-state ethnicity is subjectively experienced as nationhood, the state may refuse to acknowledge, let alone positively to institutionalize, this subjective definition, insisting that while the minority group in question may differ in language or religion, it nonetheless belongs fundamentally to the dominant nation (whether this is conceived as an ethnic nation or a state-nation embracing the entire citizenry). This was the case, for example, of the Hungarian half of the Habsburg Empire after 1867. Although Hungarian-speakers constituted only about half of the population, ruling elites insisted – against the increasingly vigorous protests of Romanians, Serbs, and (to a lesser extent) Slovaks – that Hungary contained a single nation, the Hungarian nation, with which all citizens, whatever their native language or ethnic origins, were expected to identify, and to which all were expected, eventually, to assimilate.¹³

In a second variant, the state may acknowledge the subjective claim to sub-state nationhood of a component ethnic group or groups yet at the same time seek to uphold and institutionalize a more encompassing statewide sense of nationhood, a definition of the statewide citizenry as a nation. Thus while French Canadians or Scots may be acknowledged as members of distinct sub-state nations, their respective states seek to sustain a wider sense of Canadian and British nationhood as well.

In a third variant, the state may accept, more or less grudgingly, the self-designation of a minority ethnic group as a national minority, without seeking, as in the second variant, to define that group as part of a more encompassing state-nation as well. But in this case the state is usually identified very closely with the dominant nation. It is conceived as a nation-state in the strong sense, that is, as the state of and for a par-

ticular nation – and this despite the fact that its citizenry includes, besides members of that state-bearing, state-legitimizing nation, members of national minorities as well. This was the case, for example, of Germans in interwar Poland and of Hungarians in interwar Romania. They were recognized as national minorities (as were several other minorities in the “new Europe” that emerged from the settlement of the First World War); and they were accorded certain specific and limited cultural rights in that capacity by domestic law and international treaties.¹⁴ But ruling elites of the states in which they lived defined those states as nation-states in the strong sense, as the states of and for the Polish and Romanian nations respectively.

The Soviet nationality regime was quite different. To begin with, the Soviet Union was not conceived or institutionalized as a nation-state. This was not the inevitable and automatic consequence of the *degree* of ethnic heterogeneity: many highly polyethnic states – including most post-colonial states of Asia and Africa – claim to be, or aspire to become, nation-states.¹⁵ It resulted rather from the *form* in which ethnic heterogeneity was institutionalized and the manner in which ethnic nationality was aligned with the organization of public life.

Soviet elites might have sought to organize the same territories and peoples as a nation-state – whether as a Soviet nation-state, founded on an emergent Soviet nation, or as a Russian nation-state. But they did neither. On the one hand, Soviet rulers never elaborated the idea of a *Soviet* nation. To be sure, they did seek to inculcate a state-wide Soviet identity, and in the 1960s and 1970s they developed the doctrine of the “Soviet People” (*sovetskii narod*) as a “new historical community.” But this emergent entity was explicitly conceived as supra-national, not national.¹⁶ The supra-national Soviet People was consistently distinguished from the individual sub-state Soviet nations. Nationhood remained the prerogative of sub-state ethnonational groups; it was never predicated of the statewide citizenry.

On the other hand, the Soviet Union was never organized, in theory or in practice, as a *Russian* nation-state. Russians were indeed the dominant nationality, effectively controlling key party and state institutions; and Russian was promoted by the state as its lingua franca.¹⁷ But this did not make the state a Russian nation-state, any more than the dominance of Germans and the use of German as a lingua franca made the Austrian half of the Habsburg empire a German nation-state. A whole series of features of the Soviet nationality regime – some of which are

discussed in greater detail below – were radically incompatible with the organizational model of the nation-state. These included the Soviet system of ethnoterritorial federalism; the elaborate codification of, and pervasive significance attached to, personal nationality; the cultivation of a large number of distinct national intelligentsias; the cultivation of distinct national cadres, allowed, for the most part, to live and work in “their own” national territories; the deliberate policy of nation-building, aimed at the consolidation of non-Russian nations, pursued in the 1920s and early 1930s; the cultivation and codification of a large number of national languages; and the development of an elaborate system of schooling, including higher education, in non-Russian languages.¹⁸

Thus the Soviet Union was neither conceived in theory nor organized in practice as a nation-state. Yet while it did not define the state or citizenry as a *whole* in national terms, it did define component *parts* of the state and the citizenry in national terms. Herein lies the distinctiveness of the Soviet nationality regime – in its unprecedented displacement of nationhood and nationality, as organizing principles of the social and political order, from the state-wide to the sub-state level. No other state has gone so far in sponsoring, codifying, institutionalizing, even (in some cases) inventing nationhood and nationality on the sub-state level, while at the same time doing nothing to institutionalize them on the level of the state as a whole.¹⁹

Ethnoterritorial federalism and personal nationality

This institutionalization of nationhood and nationality had two independent aspects. One concerned the territorial organization of politics and administration; the other concerned the classification of persons. The Soviet system of ethnoterritorial federalism divided the territory of the state into a complex four-tiered set of national territories, endowed with varying degrees of autonomy and correspondingly more or less elaborate political and administrative institutions. At the top level of the ethnoterritorial hierarchy, which concerns us here, were the fifteen Union Republics, each bearing the name of a particular national group²⁰ (and corresponding to today’s independent successor states).²¹ Constitutionally characterized as sovereign, the Union Republics enjoyed, on paper, a broad set of powers including the right to secede from the Union and to enter into relations with foreign states and the authority to coordinate and control production and administration on

their territory. In practice, of course, centralized party and ministerial control sharply, although variably, limited the sphere of effective Republic autonomy. But the significance of the republics as institutional crystallizations of nationhood lay less in the constitutional fictions of sovereignty, statehood, and autonomy – symbolically potent and self-actualizing though they proved to be under Gorbachev – than in the durable institutional frame the republics provided for the long-term cultivation and consolidation of national administrative cadres and national intelligentsias (periodic purges notwithstanding) and for the long-term protection and cultivation of national languages and cultures (the promotion of Russian as a *lingua franca* notwithstanding).

Complementing – and crosscutting – this elaborate and distinctive system of ethnoterritorial federalism was an equally elaborate and distinctive system of personal nationality. While the former divided the territory of the state into a set of national jurisdictions, the latter divided the population of the state into an exhaustive and mutually exclusive set of national groups, over a hundred in all, twenty two with more than a million members. Ethnic nationality (*natsional’nost’*) was not only a *statistical category*, a fundamental unit of social accounting, employed in censuses and other social surveys. It was, more distinctively, an obligatory and mainly ascriptive *legal category*, a key element of an individual’s legal status. As such, it was registered in internal passports and other personal documents, transmitted by descent, and recorded in almost all bureaucratic encounters and official transactions.²² In some contexts, notably admission to higher education and application for certain types of employment, legal nationality significantly shaped life chances, both negatively (especially for Jews²³) and positively (for “titular” nationalities²⁴ in the non-Russian republics, who benefitted from mainly tacit “affirmative action” or preferential treatment policies).

This dual – and unprecedentedly thoroughgoing – institutionalization of nationhood and nationality on the sub-state level was effected through state action. Yet it was not intended by state actors. It resulted rather from the unforeseen and unintended persistence over time of a set of institutional arrangements cobbled together in ad hoc fashion as tactical responses to urgent situational imperatives.²⁵ Lenin, long opposed to ethnoterritorial federalism (or any other kind) on principle, embraced it as expedient in the aftermath of the Bolshevik seizure of power, believing it a necessary and effective means of reconstituting shattered state authority and cementing political loyalty in the ethnic

borderlands, and expecting it to be a temporary transitional arrangement.²⁶ In the belief he was correct; in the expectation, mistaken.

Still less was it intended or foreseen that personal legal nationality would become an enduring ascribed status or an important determinant of life chances. Nationality as an official component of personal status was introduced in 1932 as one of a number of elements contained in the newly instituted system of internal passports. That system was central to the neofeudal ties that bound the coercively recruited labor force of the new collective farms to the land; more generally, it was central to the control and regulation of migration.²⁷ But it was the passport system as such, not the legal nationality that was encoded in it along with much other information, that was crucial for this purpose. Indeed the passport-based regulation and coercive control of labor supply and internal migration could have been effected just as easily without the encoding of nationality. The later uses of official nationality were unrelated to the original purposes for which internal passports were created.

It was thus through an irony of history, through the unintended consequences of a variety of ad hoc regime policies, that nationality became and remained a basic institutional building block of the avowedly internationalist, supranationalist, and anti-nationalist Soviet state, with the land partitioned into a set of bounded national territories, the polity composed in part of a set of formally sovereign national republics, and the citizenry divided into a set of legally codified nationalities.

Territorial and ethnocultural models of nationhood

The dual scheme of ethnoterritorial federalism and personal nationality employed the same set of national categories. The same categories, that is, were attached to territorial polities and to personal nationalities. There were, to be sure, far more of the latter, for the national classification of the citizenry included numerous small nationalities to whom no separate national territory was assigned.²⁸ But of the 53 national territories, almost all bore the names of one or more of the nationalities into which the Soviet citizenry had been divided. There was thus a correspondence, usually one-to-one, between particular national territorial jurisdictions and particular nationalities, i.e., between Ukraine as a national territory and Ukrainian as a personal nationality, between Estonia as a territory and Estonian as a nationality, and so on.

Yet while the national territorial jurisdictions *corresponded* to the nationalities for which they were named, the two were neither legally nor spatially nor even conceptually *congruent*. The jurisdiction of the national republics was territorially, not personally circumscribed. They had jurisdiction over certain matters occurring in their bounded territories, regardless of the nationality of the persons living in those territories. On the other hand, the nationality of persons did not depend on their place of residence. Personal nationality was an autonomous classification scheme, based on descent, not residence. It had no territorial component whatsoever. Moreover, vast and largely state-sponsored migrations, some ethnodemographically arbitrary administrative boundaries, and the sheer impossibility of constructing ethnodemographically “clean” frontiers in areas of historically mixed settlement²⁹ combined to engender a major mismatch between the frontiers of national territories and the spatial distribution of nationalities.³⁰ A substantial fraction of the population of most national territories belonged to “non-titular,” i.e., conceptually “external” nationalities; conversely, a substantial fraction of the population of most national groups lived outside “their own” national territories.

The Soviet scheme of institutionalized multinationality was characterized not only by a legal incongruence and a spatial mismatch between its two components – national territories and personal nationalities – but also by a fundamental tension, at once conceptual and political, between two independent, even incompatible definitions of nationhood: one territorial and political, the other personal and ethnocultural. This tension is an old one, long familiar to students of comparative nationalism.³¹ Usually, however, these opposed understandings of nationhood are associated with differing countries or regions. What is interesting, and distinctive, about the Soviet nationality regime was the simultaneous institutionalization of both conventionally opposed definitions of nationhood.

On one definition, the nation is a territorially bounded and self-governing collectivity, a collectivity pervasively shaped, indeed *constituted* by its territorial and political frame. Nationhood, on this view, is both conceptually and causally dependent on political territory. Not every territorial polity is a nation; but nationhood, at least its full realization, requires the form and frame of the territorial polity. Nationhood – at least fully realized nationhood – is an emergent property of certain territorial polities.

This understanding of nationhood captured well the historical experience of Western European state-nations, incubating and emerging within the protective and powerfully shaping territorial and institutional frame of large yet culturally relatively homogeneous territorial states. But in its stronger version – according to which political territory is essential not simply for the full realization, but for the mere existence of nationhood – it did not capture well the historical experience of Central and Eastern Europe. There political units were either much smaller than cultural units – as in the densely urban belt of statelets, principalities, city-states, and free cities along trans-Alpine medieval trade routes from the Mediterranean to the Rhine³² – or much larger than cultural units, as in the great multinational empires of the Ottomans, Habsburgs, and Romanovs. In the context of this radical discrepancy of scale between political authority and cultural commonality, a different conception of nationhood emerged. On this alternative view, the nation is neither conceptually nor causally dependent on political territory. The nation is an ethnocultural community, typically a community of language. It might span several political units (as in the case of pre-unification Germany or Italy), or it might be contained in a much larger political structure (as in the case of the “nonhistoric” ethnolinguistic nations – for example Slovaks and Slovenes – within the Habsburg empire).³³

The gap between the territorial-political and ethnocultural models of nationhood, to be sure, is not unbridgeable.³⁴ Under the standardizing, homogenizing influence of the modern, “citizen-mobilizing and citizen-influencing” state,³⁵ territorial polities may shape their citizenries into relatively homogeneous cultural communities. And from a very different starting point, state-spanning or intra-state ethnocultural nations may attain statehood, or at least territorial political autonomy within a wider state, and thus acquire a territorial and institutional frame.

In regions with highly intermixed ethnocultural communities, however, where political borders cannot be drawn to coincide with ethnocultural frontiers, the territorial-political and ethnocultural models of nationhood are not so easily reconciled. Widely dispersed ethnocultural nations, as well as those that overlap with other ethnocultural nations in inextricably intermixed frontier “shatter zones,” cannot be neatly “territorialized,” cannot easily acquire their own territorial states. And territorial polities that include substantial and self-conscious national minorities cannot, in the age of nationalism, be easily “nationalized,” i.e., nationally homogenized. Thus, in both the Austro-Hungarian and

Russian Empires, ethnically mixed populations, increasingly resistant to assimilation, by the late nineteenth century, prevented a full convergence of the territorial-political and ethnocultural models of nationhood. A persisting tension between the two, and between corresponding proposals for national autonomy, is evident in the history of the national question in both empires.³⁶

The duality of Soviet nationhood: Tensions and contradictions

The Soviet nationality regime institutionalized both models of nationhood – as well as the tension between them. Nations, we have seen, were defined simultaneously in territorial and political terms (as national republics) and in extra-territorial, cultural terms (as nationalities). Had the nationalities lived exclusively in “their own” national republics, the two definitions would have been congruent. But this was far from being the case when the system of ethnoterritorial federalism was established, and even less so after the massive state-sponsored and state-imposed migrations associated with industrialization, collectivization, and war.³⁷ At the time of the 1989 census, more than seventy-three million Soviet citizens, a quarter of the total Soviet population, lived outside “their own” national territory (or belonged to small nationalities without a national territory of their own). To give just a few examples: 17 percent of all Russians – 25 million in all – lived outside the Russian Republic. Another 12 million lived in non-Russian national territories inside the Russian republic. One-third of all Armenians lived outside Armenia, while nearly three-fourth of all Tatars – nearly five million in all – lived outside the Tatar Autonomous Republic.³⁸

The tensions arising from this dual and non-congruent institutionalization of nationhood were attenuated by the strict limits the Soviet regime placed on nationalism. Nations were to be seen but not heard; culture (and, one might add, politics and administration as well) was to be “national in form but socialist in content.”³⁹ The more purely formal the national categories – the smaller, that is, their substantive social significance – the less the lack of congruence between the territorial frame and the personal substrate of nationhood would matter. In the extreme case, it would not matter at all whether, and to what degree, Soviet citizens lived in “their own” national republics or elsewhere, for the republics would be national in name only; what was nominally “their own” national republic would in fact be no more “their own” than any other.

For many, perhaps most Sovietologists, this hypothetical limiting case came close to describing Soviet reality. Dominant currents within Sovietology either ignored nationality altogether or dismissed it as an ideological façade bearing little or no relation to “real” social and political structures. Yet as more perspicuous analysts recognized, even well before the Gorbachev era, nationality was not a purely formal construct, an ideological fig leaf, existing only on paper. It was of course a formal construct, an institutional form; but as such it powerfully shaped Soviet society. The repression of political nationalism was compatible with the pervasive institutionalization of nationhood and nationality as fundamental social categories. Nationalists’ complaints – and Stalin’s murderous policies – notwithstanding, the regime had no systematic policy of “nation-destroying.”⁴⁰ It might have abolished national republics and ethnoterritorial federalism;⁴¹ it might have abolished the legal category of personal nationality;⁴² it might have ruthlessly Russified the Soviet educational system; it might have forcibly uprooted peripheral elites, and prevented them from making careers in “their own” republics.⁴³ It did none of the above. The repression of nationalism went hand in hand with the consolidation of nationhood and nationality.⁴⁴

The tensions arising from the dual institutionalization of nationality, and from the non-congruence between national territories and ethnocultural nations, were indeed attenuated by the repression of nationalism. The problem of irredentism, for example, which might have been nourished by the mismatch between territorial and ethnocultural frontiers, did not arise; for popular demands for such ethnonationally rectificatory border changes were excluded from the universe of legitimate political discourse.⁴⁵ But tensions associated with the dual definition of nationhood, although attenuated, were not eliminated.

The institution of national republics, for example, defined as the states of and for particular nations, legitimated the preferential treatment of members of the “titular,” nominally state-bearing nationalities, especially in higher education and employment. While such preferential treatment, under the name of *korenizatsia* or “nativization,” was an explicit policy of the Soviet center only in the 1920s and early 1930s, local patterns of preferential treatment for titular nationalities persisted, and were generally tolerated by the center. Definition of the republics as national states also legitimated the promotion of the language of the titular nationality – not at the expense of Russian, which the Soviet regime vigorously promoted as a union-wide lingua franca, but at the expense of the other non-Russian languages spoken by non-titulars living in the republic.

Despite their favored access to positions defined by the regime as “strategic” or “sensitive,” and despite the privileges they enjoyed as a result of the special union-wide status of the Russian language, the Russian (and, more broadly, Russophone) residents of non-Russian republics resented the affirmative action programs designed to further the educational and professional chances of titular nationalities.⁴⁶ At the same time, the titular nationalities resented the key positions reserved for Russian (and Russophone) immigrants and the key role accorded the Russian language.

These mutual resentments stemmed from the dual definition of nationhood – territorial-political and cultural-personal – and from two corresponding conceptions of national autonomy. Here we can extend and enrich the characterization given above by linking conceptions of nationhood to conceptions of national autonomy. On one view, the fundamental parameters of nationhood are territorial. Political territory provides the frame of the nation, fixes the arena of its autonomy, defines the domain of its dominance. The subject of autonomy, on this view, is a unit of territorial administration. Autonomy means that the territorial units “belong” to the nations whose names they bear. They can legitimately be “filled up” with a particular national language and culture. In effect, an updated version of the formula *cuius regio, eius religio* applies. That formula, which dates from the era of religious wars in post-Reformation Central Europe, permitted the rulers of principalities or territorial states (a great profusion of which existed in Central Europe) to determine the religion of their own territories, to “fill up” their territories with a particular religion. Persons of another confession could convert or emigrate. Religious pluralism was thus institutionalized in Central Europe, but religious monism was institutionalized within each territorial unit. Religion, in effect, was territorialized. Similarly, on the territorial view of nationhood, national-cultural pluralism finds legitimate expression in the differences between territorial polities, but national-cultural homogeneity should prevail within each territorial polity. The telos of the national territories is to become fully nationalized, i.e., filled up with a homogeneous national culture. The welter of national cultures adjusts to fit the fixed frame of territorial polities. Culture and territory eventually converge.⁴⁷

On the alternative view, nations cannot be adequately encapsulated or defined by the fixed and more or less arbitrarily drawn frontiers of ostensibly national territories. Even if territorial frontiers could be “correctly” drawn at a given moment, the momentary match between

the division of territory and the distribution of persons would not endure. For nations are inherently mobile and dynamic; their spatial configuration changes over time with the migration of their members. Nations are fundamentally groups of persons, not stretches of territory. The proper subject of national autonomy is not a nominally national territorial polity but the nation itself, that is, a particular group of persons. Nationality is carried by persons, not inscribed in a territory; it is consequently portable, not territorially fixed. National autonomy requires not the convergence of territorial administration and national culture, but their independence; it requires cultural rights – in the sphere of education, cultural facilities, and the language of public life – for members of nations wherever they live.⁴⁸

Elements of both models, as we have seen, were institutionalized in the Soviet Union. On the one hand, the land of the state was divided into national polities that were permitted, to some extent, to “fill up” their territories with a particular national culture. On the other hand, the population was divided into non-territorial national groups, whose nationality was independent of their place of residence. But neither model was realized in full. Territorial autonomy was not carried through because of the special role reserved by the center for Russians and the Russian language. Extra-territorial cultural autonomy was not carried through (except for Russians) because of the leeway afforded to national republics to “nationalize” their territories (with the exception noted for Russians and the Russian language). Moreover, neither principle could have been more fully realized without violating the other. To have instituted cultural autonomy for non-Russians living in republics other than “their own” would have alienated the titular elites of those republics and further infringed their ability to “fill up” their territories with their particular national culture. To have increased the territorial autonomy of the republics, allowing them to “nationalize” more fully their territories, would have eroded the extra-territorial cultural autonomy enjoyed throughout the union by Russians. Tension between territorial and ethnocultural nationhood, and between territorial and extraterritorial national autonomy, was endemic to the Soviet nationality regime.

The successor states

Soviet disintegration: From breakdown to breakup

With the breakup of the Soviet Union, the legacy of its dual institutional crystallization of nationhood and nationality passed to the successor states. The breakup itself, it should be emphasized, was shaped by the territorial-political crystallization of nationhood, not by the ethnocultural definition. The key actors in the drama of disintegration – besides the fragmented political and military elites of the center – were the institutionally empowered elites of the national republics, including, crucially, from late 1990 on, those of the Russian Republic.⁴⁹ Disintegration occurred through intensifying jurisdictional struggles between the center and the national republics,⁵⁰ in which the latter were increasingly emboldened by the deepening divisions within and immobilization of the former.

Not only the gradual breakdown of effective Soviet statehood, but the final breakup of the state into fifteen incipient, internationally recognized successor states, was crucially framed and structured by the territorial-political crystallization of nationhood in the form of national republics. That this paradigmatically massive state could disappear in so comparatively orderly a fashion, ceasing to exist as a subject of international law and withering away as a unit of administration, was possible chiefly because the successor units already existed as internal quasi-nation-states, with fixed territories, names, legislatures, administrative staffs, cultural and political elites, and – not least – the constitutionally enshrined right to secede from the Soviet Union (it is one of the many ironies of the Soviet breakup that it was decisively facilitated by what regime leaders and Western commentators alike had long dismissed as a constitutional fiction).

The dual role played by the Russian Republic in the breakup is worth underscoring. On the one hand, the RSFSR was one national republic among others, formally co-ordinate with them, and allied with them in their jurisdictional struggles against the center. That alliance – dramatized by Yeltsin's trip to Tallinn in January 1991, immediately after the military crackdown in Vilnius, to condemn the attack and to appeal to Russian soldiers to refuse to fire on civilians – strengthened the position of the Republics. On the other hand, because of its preponderant size and (by comparison with other national republics) its much weaker spatial, ethnocultural, and institutional differentiation from the Soviet

center, the RSFSR represented (as the other national Republics did not) a potential alternative center, rather than simply a peripheral contender for autonomy from the center. The high degree of overlap between the RSFSR and the Union – the fact that the great majority of key Union facilities and institutions were located on Russian territory (if not formally subject to Russian jurisdiction), and the fact that Soviet elites, in their great majority, were either Russian by nationality, or longstanding residents of the RSFSR, or both – made it relatively easy for central Soviet military and bureaucratic elites to reorient themselves to the RSFSR at pivotal moments, especially during and immediately after the coup attempt. The jurisdictional struggles of the RSFSR against the Soviet center were therefore two-sided, oriented on the one hand to *weakening* the center and distributing its powers to the national republics, and on the other hand to *capturing* the center and taking over its powers.⁵¹

Contrasting sharply with the central role played by elites of the territorial-political nations – that is, the national republics – in the breakup of the Soviet state was the marginal role played by actors representing ethnocultural nations or nation-fragments. The center made some effort to mobilize them – especially the Russians living in the non-Russian republics – by emphasizing the ethnopolitical dangers of independence for those living outside “their own” national territory. Yet while the ethnocultural groups to whom such appeals were addressed were institutionally defined in national terms (by the legal institution of extra-territorial personal nationality and the associated social practices and cultural attitudes), they were not institutionally organized or empowered. As a result, although some action (for example, strikes protesting republican language laws) occurred in the name of ethnonational communities, they were not capable of the kind of sustained, organized, institutionally framed and legitimated action that the national republics could undertake; and they remained marginal to the jurisdictional struggles that pitted elites of the republics – including, crucially, the Russian Republic – against those of decaying central institutions.

Yet while the ethnocultural crystallization of nationhood, unlike the territorial-political crystallization, did not figure centrally in the jurisdictional struggles through which predefined, deeply institutionalized national territorial polities asserted claims to progressively higher degrees of “stateness” against a divided and immobilized center, the ethnocultural definition of nationhood – and the associated tangle of issues that I call the “ethnonational complex” – will figure centrally,

indeed already is figuring centrally, as the successor states move to consolidate the formally independent statehood to which they so suddenly acceded.

The national question in the successor states

The successor states to the Soviet Union – and to Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia as well – are at this writing merely *emergent* or *incipient* states. Their juridical independence has been widely recognized, but their sociological “stateness” remains to be established. The form of their statehood, even the fact of their durable statehood, is not yet settled. They are states-in-the-making.

Questions of citizenship and nationhood, broadly understood, are among the core aspects of statehood that remain unsettled and vigorously contested. Among the still unsettled, and unsettling, questions are the following: Who “belongs,” by formal citizenship, or in some other sense or status, to the state? What circle of persons comprises, or should comprise, the citizenry of the state? To what extent should citizenship depend on, and coincide with, ethnocultural nationality? Are there others, outside the circle of formal citizens – for example, co-ethnics in other states – who have special claims on the state, and in whose fate the state takes a special interest? Conversely, are there some inside the circle of formal citizens who are not full members or citizens in a substantive sense? And what *kind* of citizenship will the state institutionalize? Will citizenship be held individually, or will it be mediated, in some form, by ethnic or national group membership? Will the rights of citizenship consist solely in individual rights, or will they include group or collective rights as well?

A similar set of unsettled questions clusters around the issue of nationhood or nationality. In what sense is the new state to be a nation-state, or a national state? If the state is understood as the state of and for a particular nation, how is the nation in question defined? Is it understood as a civic nation, defined and delimited by the legal and political status of citizenship, and consisting of the sum of the citizens of the state? Or is it understood as an ethnocultural nation, defined independently of the state, and not necessarily coextensive with its citizenry? In the latter case, how is the principle of nationality or national self-determination, on which the successor states base their claims to legitimacy, to be reconciled with the practices of democratic citizenship, to the idea of which successor state elites make uniform obeisance?

A comprehensive exploration of these questions would far exceed the scope of this article.⁵² My discussion here focuses on the way in which the legacy of the dual Soviet institutional crystallization of nationality is likely to shape the national question – and notably the questions of citizenship and nationhood enumerated above – in the emerging successor states. To keep the discussion manageable, I consider here only one aspect of the national question, albeit one that is central to its overall configuration in post-Soviet Eurasia. This is the pervasive tension between incipient national states harboring substantial national minorities and the external “homeland” states to which those minorities “belong” by ethnonational affiliation but not legal citizenship. Actually, this pervasive tension involves not two but three parties: (1) a set of new states, ethnically heterogeneous yet conceived as nation-states, whose dominant elites promote (to varying degrees and in varying manners) the language, culture, demographic position, economic flourishing, and political hegemony of the nominally state-bearing nation; (2) the substantial, self-conscious, and (in varying degrees) organized and politically alienated national minorities in those states, whose leaders demand cultural or territorial autonomy, and resist actual or perceived policies or processes of assimilation or discrimination; and (3) the external national “homelands” of the minorities, whose elites (again to varying degrees) closely monitor the situation of their coethnics in the new states, vigorously protest alleged violations of their rights, and assert the right, even the obligation, to defend their interests.

This triangular relationship among incipient nation-state, national minority, and external national homeland is replicated in varying configurations throughout post-Soviet Eurasia. For reasons of space, though, I consider only one class of cases: those involving Russian minorities (and Russia as external national homeland). This class includes almost all the successor states, for all except Armenia have, or had, substantial Russian minorities (more than 5 percent of their population in 1989). There are evident reasons for focussing on Russia and the Russians. Representable by contenders for power as an unjustly truncated, humiliated great power, Russia is a potentially revisionist state. While other successor states, too, are potentially revisionist, and may be more likely than Russia to be drawn into wars with their neighbors, the presence of nearly 25 million Russians in non-Russian successor states, the enormous military power of Russia, and the uniquely radical decline in status experienced both by the new Russian minorities and by key segments of Russian elites in Russia would make a revisionist Russia a potentially much graver threat than the other successor states to regional and even global security.

In the dynamic interplay among these three elements – the newly nationalizing non-Russian successor-states, their large Russian minorities, and the Russian state – the contingency inherent in political action, especially when the “very parameters of political action are in flux,” will play a key role.⁵³ Yet without adopting a determinist stance, I want to specify the way in which the broad contours of this interplay will be structured by the institutional legacy of the Soviet nationality regime. Consider first the situation of the newly nationalizing successor states, ethnically heterogeneous yet conceiving themselves as nation-states. Clearly, their prior institutional incarnation as Soviet republics laid the foundations not only for their independent statehood but also for their self-understanding as specifically *national* states. Their explicit *raison d'être*, in the Soviet scheme, was to serve as the institutional vehicles for national self-determination. They were explicitly defined as the republics *of* and *for* the nations for whom they were named.

Thus despite their ethnic heterogeneity – extreme, by comparison to Western European national states – the Soviet republics understood themselves, and were supposed to understand themselves, as national polities. But national in what sense? Here we can extend and refine the argument that the Soviet regime institutionalized both territorial-political and personal-ethnocultural models of nationhood as well as the tension between them. The Soviet territorial-political definition of nationhood not only – as I argued above – stood in *tension* with the personal-ethnocultural definition, but *presupposed* that alternative definition. The relation between the two institutional crystallizations was asymmetrical. Ethnocultural nationhood did not depend on the existence of national republics; but the national republics did depend on – indeed their very existence was predicated on – the existence of ethnocultural nations. The republics were defined as the polities of and for particular nations; these nations were explicitly understood as prior to and independent of the polities whose creation they legitimated. The national republics did not (as the strong territorial-political model of nationhood requires) *constitute* “their” nations; rather, independently existing nations were given “their own” territorial polities. Even the territorial-political crystallization of nationhood in the Soviet Union, therefore, presupposed the existence of ethnocultural nations defined independently of them, and imperfectly “contained” by them. There was indeed, as we argued earlier, a tension between the territorial-political and ethnocultural crystallizations of nationhood. But the latter was clearly the more fundamental concept in the Soviet scheme. That scheme began by recognizing, and crystallizing in institutional form,

the existence of ethnocultural nationalities. Then the larger and more compact nationalities were endowed with their own national republics. The nationalities "possessed" their respective territorial republics rather than being constituted by them.

The Soviet regime, then, deliberately constructed the republics as national polities "belonging" to the nations whose names they bore. At the same time, the Soviets severely limited the domain in which the republics were autonomous. They institutionalized a sense of "ownership" of the republics by ethnocultural nations, but they limited the political consequences of that sense of ownership.⁵⁴ Ethnocultural nations were given their own political territories, but not the power to rule them. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the sense of ethno-national entitlement and ownership of national territory persists, but is now joined to substantial powers of rule. Successor state elites can use these new powers to "nationalize" their states, to make them more fully the polities of and for the ethnocultural nations whose names they bear. This they can do by promoting the language, culture, demographic predominance, economic welfare, and political hegemony of the state-bearing nation. Such policies and programs of nationalization, oriented to an ethnocultural nation distinct from the total population or total citizenry of the state, are likely to be politically profitable – and in some cases politically irresistible – in the new states, in considerable part because of the institutionalized expectations of "ownership" that the successor states inherited from the Soviet nationality regime.

I do not mean to suggest that successor state politics will be uniformly driven or dominated by such programs of ethnic "nationalization." Successor state elites do have certain incentives to pursue civically inclusive, trans-ethnic state- and nation-building strategies, oriented to the citizenry as a whole rather than to one ethnonationally qualified segment of that citizenry. Such incentives may be provided by international organizations or by economically, politically, or militarily powerful states that are perceived by successor state elites as likely to be significantly more favorably inclined toward successor states whose domestic politics they perceive as civic rather than ethnocentric.

How powerful will this "discipline" imposed by external audiences turn out to be? No doubt its strength will vary greatly across successor states and over time and context. In general, though, it is likely that the discipline imposed by Western states and European organizations, although significant in the immediate aftermath of independence, will

erode rapidly as the successor states are disappointed in their hopes for major economic assistance. What about the discipline imposed by powerful neighboring states, above all by Russia? Will the anticipated sanctions, positive and negative, offered by Russia significantly shape the politics of citizenship and nationhood in the non-Russian successor states? No doubt the proximity of the (potentially) enormously powerful Russian state, as well as the presence of large Russian minorities in the successor states, other things being equal, would lead prudent successor state elites to avoid alienating their Russian minorities (and provoking the Russian state) by an overzealous program of nationalization. Considerations of this sort are doubtless partly responsible for the moderate, conciliatory, inclusive stance taken so far in questions of citizenship and nationhood by the rulers of Ukraine and Kazakhstan, whose Russian populations are not only by far the largest, in absolute numbers, among the successor states (11.4 million and 6.2 million respectively), but also the most deeply rooted, and the most significant from the point of view of the Russian state. Moreover, a strong emphasis on the need for improved economic ties with Russia helped return to power the former Lithuanian Communist Party and its chairman Algirdas Brazauskas in legislative and presidential elections of late 1992 and early 1993. But prudential considerations did not deter Estonia and Latvia from pursuing a restrictive politics of citizenship, although their diminutive size and the presence of Russian soldiers on their territory make them much more vulnerable than Ukraine or Kazakhstan.⁵⁵ Nor is there any guarantee that such counsels of prudence will continue to guide elites in Ukraine and Kazakhstan. Indeed, the presence of large Russian minorities, and the proximity of the powerful Russian state, may – given the institutional legacy of Soviet nationality policy – work to exacerbate rather than attenuate ethnic nationalism in the successor states.

Russians as a new national minority

To see how this might occur, let us shift our focus from the first to the second element of our tripartite scheme: from the incipient successor states to the national minorities within those states. The first point to underscore is that their quality as specifically *national* minorities is not an objective fact of ethnic demography, but a subjective precipitate of their self-understanding, as channeled and shaped by the national scheme of social classification that was so pervasively institutionalized in the Soviet Union. Ethnic minorities think of themselves as members

of distinct nations or nationalities because this is the way they learned to think of themselves under the Soviet regime. This is not a merely terminological matter; it has political implications. Minority elites will tend to represent the minority as *belonging to a different nation* than the members of the “titular,” nominally state-bearing nation amongst or alongside of whom they live. This will tend to be true even where – as is the case in many instances – intermarriage and assimilation, from a sociological point of view, have blurred the boundaries between the nations that are represented as distinct.

This tendency for ethnic minorities to define themselves in national terms hold *a fortiori* for the Russians living in non-Russian successor states. They were accustomed, under the Soviet regime, not only to thinking of themselves subjectively in national terms as Russians, but to enjoying a public existence as Russians, with full cultural and educational facilities, and with full recognition of Russian as *a*, if not *the*, language of public life. Except where emigration is rapidly depleting the Russian communities (mainly in Central Asia, excluding northern and eastern Kazakhstan), many Russians in the successor states will want to retain, in some form, the public status and public rights they enjoyed under the old regime. They will seek a form of citizenship that is mediated by nationality, that is, by membership in an ethnocultural group. They will be suspicious of liberal forms of citizenship, in which rights attach directly to individuals, and group membership has no public significance; for they will see such formally liberal models as ideological masks for substantively ethnocentric forms of rule, assuring the cultural predominance and political hegemony of the dominant, state-bearing nation, and disregarding what they regard as the public, collective rights of ethnocultural minorities.

Under the Soviet regime, the public status, linguistic privilege, and cultural facilities enjoyed by Russians throughout the Soviet Union meant that Russians tended to think of the entire Union rather than only the Russian Republic as “their” national territory. The Russian Republic, in this sense, held less significance for Russians than the other national republics did for their corresponding nationalities. With the loss of this wider home territory, Russians living in territorially concentrated settlements in the successor states are likely to seek to redefine areas of the successor states in which they form a local majority or plurality as “their own” territories by demanding some form of territorial autonomy in those areas (including, most significantly, northern and eastern Kazakhstan, Moldova east of the Dniester River, northeastern Estonia, and parts of Eastern and Southern Ukraine, notably Crimea).

These demands of Russian (and other) national minorities for collective public rights and (where plausible) territorial autonomy, both shaped by the institutional legacy of the Soviet nationality regime, directly challenge successor state elites’ claims to unitary “ownership” of what they regard as “their own” politics and territories. Such demands are easily perceived by successor state elites as threatening and as fundamentally illegitimate, even if political prudence dictates that limited concessions be made to them. Minorities’ demands for collective rights or territorial autonomy may render them vulnerable to charges of equivocal loyalty or even outright disloyalty. Although they belong, formally, to the citizenry of the state, they may be excluded, substantively, from taken-for-granted membership in the state-bearing nation. Minorities’ self-definition as members of distinct nations, and their claims for public rights in that capacity, may thus reinforce the “ethnocentric” self-understanding and ethnocentric practices of successor state elites, may reinforce their tendency to define their own nations in ethnocultural rather than civic-territorial terms and to rule their states with the interests of that ethnocultural nation in mind. This can be true even where successor state elites formally define their statehood and citizenship in liberal terms; for as minorities correctly suspect, formally liberal and ethnically neutral definitions of statehood and citizenship may, in an ethnically heterogeneous state in which state-bearing majority and minority or minorities understand themselves as belonging to distinct ethnocultural nations, mask a substantively ethnocentric organization of public life.

Reconstructing Russia

To round out this sketch of the ethnonational nexus of successor state politics, we turn to the third element of our triangular scheme, the Russian state. Under the Soviet regime, as we noted above, Russians tended to think of the entire Union rather than the Russian Republic as “their own” territory, as the space in which they could live and work *as Russians*.⁵⁶ They did not think of the institutions of the Russian Republic as “their own.” On the one hand, the Russian Republic was institutionally underdeveloped: it lacked key institutions found in other Soviet republics. On the other hand, Russians, despite their privileged position outside the Russian Republic, paradoxically felt underprivileged inside Russia. Much of the vast territory of the Russian Republic was formally allocated to non-Russian nationalities as their national homelands – sixteen “autonomous republics” and fifteen lower-level auton-

mous national formations in 1989, all designated as the national territories of and for particular non-Russian nationalities, and together comprising more than half of the territory of the RSFSR.⁵⁷ And nationally minded Russians complained of Russian underrepresentation (especially vis-à-vis Jews) in what were nominally “their own” institutions, leading Russian nationalists to campaign in the last few years on the slogan of proportional representation for Russians in the RSFSR!⁵⁸

In the Soviet era, then, Russians’ national self-understanding was not firmly embedded in, or contained by, the territorial and institutional frame of the Russian Republic. The Russian Republic was not for Russians what other national republics were for their corresponding nationalities. Elites of other nationalities viewed “their own” national polities as broadly adequate territorial and institutional frames for national statehood, and pursued greater autonomy or outright independence within those frames. But significant segments of the Russian elite did not view the Russian Republic as an even broadly adequate territorial and institutional frame for Russian national statehood. As a result, the core institutional parameters of the emerging Russian state – territorial boundaries, internal state structure, demographic composition – are in even greater flux, and even more vigorously contested, than those of most incipient non-Russian successor states.⁵⁹

The mismatch between ethnocultural nation and citizenry is central to this unsettledness. Twenty-five million Russians lived, in 1989, in non-Russian Soviet republics. Despite a substantial migration to Russia since then (mainly from the Central Asian republics), the vast majority of these remain in the incipient successor states.⁶⁰ They are not Russian citizens; indeed the large majority (except in Estonia and Latvia) are, legally speaking, citizens of the emerging non-Russian successor states. But they are definitely considered members of the Russian nation by elites in Russia. As such, they are viewed as legitimate, even obligatory objects of concern on the part of the Russian state. They are viewed as belonging not only to the Russian nation but also, in an elusive yet potent sense, to the Russian state.

Why should this be the case? Why should the Russian state concern itself with persons who are not Russian citizens? Why should the Russian nation, as distinct from the Russian citizenry, be a cardinal point of reference for Russian politics? The dual (and asymmetrical) institutional legacy of the Soviet nationality regime again supplies an important part of the answer. Ethnocultural nationality, I have argued, was

more fundamental in the Soviet institutional scheme than territorial nationhood. The national territories presupposed the existence of ethnocultural nations; they were defined as the territories of and for independently defined ethnocultural nations. For Russians, unique among major Soviet nationalities in lacking an even roughly “adequate” national territory of “their own,” the disproportion or asymmetry between strongly institutionalized personal nationality and a weakly institutionalized sense of territorial nationhood was even greater. Under the Soviet regime, the salient territorial and institutional frame “of” and “for” Russians was that of the Soviet Union as a whole, not that of the Russian Republic. Union territory was “their” territory; union institutions were, in an important sense, “their” institutions. With the collapse of this wider institutional and territorial frame, the fundamental parameters of Russian statehood are deeply contested. This is not chiefly a question – as it is in most non-Russian successor states – of nationalizing the “given” state territory and institutions, of making them more fully the territory and institutions of and for the dominant ethnocultural nation, in accordance with the institutionalized expectations of “ownership” that were discussed above. In the Russian case, the basic parameters of statehood lack even the minimal “givenness” that characterizes those of the non-Russian successor states.⁶¹ It is a question of what the basic parameters of statehood should be in a situation in which the existing, provisional parameters defining the territory, citizenry, and internal ethnofederal structure of the state have little institutional weight or normative dignity in the eyes of Russians – in part because they stand in no “adequate” relation to the far-flung Russian nation.

Conclusion

The Soviet nationality regime, with its distinctive and pervasive manner of institutionalizing nationhood and nationality, has transmitted to the successor states a set of deeply structured, and powerfully conflicting, *expectations of belonging*. Successor state elites, with their deeply institutionalized sense of political ownership and entitlement, see the polities that bear the names of their nation – above all the territory and institutions, but also, with some ambivalence, the population as well – as “their own,” as belonging, in a fundamental sense, to them. National minorities, above all Russians, with their institutionally supported, basically ethnocultural understanding of nationhood, see themselves as belonging, in a deep if not exclusive sense, to an “external” nation; this

cannot help but color and qualify, even if it does not exclude, their belonging to the would-be nation-state in which they live, and of which they (or most of them) hold citizenship. Russian state elites, finally, whose national self-understanding was not in the Soviet period embedded in, and is now only very imperfectly contained by, the institutional and territorial frame of the Russian Federation, see the Russian minorities in the non-Russian successor states as belonging, in an ill-defined yet potent sense, to the emerging Russian state. These deeply rooted and powerfully conflicting expectations of belonging – interacting, of course, with conflicts of interest engendered by state-building, regime change, and economic restructuring – will make the dynamic interplay between non-Russian successor states, Russian minorities, and the Russian state a locus of refractory, and potentially explosive, ethnonational conflict in coming years.

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Notes

1. Paul J. DiMaggio and Walter L. Powell, "Introduction," in *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*, ed. Powell and DiMaggio, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 2.
2. *Ibid.*, 2–15; John Meyer, "The world polity and the authority of the nation-state," in *Institutional Structure: Constituting State, Society, and the Individual*, ed. George M. Thomas, John W. Meyer, Francisco O. Ramirez, and John Boli (Newbury Park: Sage, 1987).

3. Pierre Bourdieu, "Social space and symbolic power," in *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 134.
4. For persuasive criticisms of static, essentialist, primordialist accounts of nationhood and nationality in the Soviet context, see Gail Lapidus, "Ethnonationalism and political stability: The Soviet case," *World Politics* 36 (July 1984): 560; David Laitin, "The national uprisings in the Soviet Union," *World Politics* 44 (1991): esp. 148–151; and John Comaroff, "Humanity, ethnicity, nationality: Conceptual and comparative perspectives on the U.S.S.R.," *Theory and Society* 20 (1991): esp. 670ff.
5. The crucial role of institutionally constituted national elites is stressed by Philip Roeder in "Soviet federalism and ethnic mobilization," *World Politics* 43 (January 1991).
6. See among others Richard Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union*, revised edition (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964); Gregory J. Massell, "Modernization and national policy in Soviet Central Asia: Problems and prospects," in *The Dynamics of Soviet Politics*, ed. Paul Cocks et al. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976), 268–269; Lapidus, "Ethnonationalism and political stability," 578–579; G. E. Smith, "Ethnic nationalism in the Soviet Union: Territory, cleavage, and control," *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy* 3 (1985): 49–73; Allan Kagedan, "Territorial units as nationality policy," in *Soviet Nationality Policies*, ed. Henry R. Huttenbach (London and New York: Mansell, 1990), 163–176; Roeder, "Soviet federalism and ethnic mobilization."
7. See for a particularly clear statement of this point, Walker Connor, *The National Question in Marxist-Leninist Theory and Strategy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 201ff.
8. The first aim, to be sure, was realized to a considerable degree, although as Philip Roeder has persuasively argued, the center's ability to contain and control ethno-political mobilization had been gradually eroding for a quarter century before Gorbachev took power ("Soviet federalism and ethnic mobilization," 212ff; for an earlier diagnosis along the same lines, see Grey Hodnett, "The debate over Soviet Federalism," *Soviet Studies* 18/4 (1967): 459–460). The second aim, however, was never realized on a large scale. Throughout the Soviet period, the net effect (although not the intention) of Soviet nationality policies was strongly to reinforce rather than to attenuate the salience and significance of nationality as a central organizing principle of social life.
9. According to a calculation made by Walker Connor in 1972, only 12 of the world's (then) 132 states were "essentially homogeneous from an ethnic viewpoint" ("Nation-building or nation-destroying?" *World Politics* 24 (1972): 320). For a more recent statement of the point, see Anthony Smith, "State-making and nation-building," in *States in History*, ed. John A. Hall (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 229.
10. On the distinction between an ethnic group and a nation, see Anthony Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), esp. 21–31, 135–152; Benjamin Akzin, *States and Nations* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966), 51. I deliberately elide here the distinction between nation and nationality, crucial in some contexts (in the Hungarian half of the Habsburg Empire, for example, where it was used to justify major differences in political status and cultural standing), but not central to the Soviet nationality regime.
11. On the social effects of codification generally, see Bourdieu, "Codification," 76–86 in *In Other Words: Essays Toward a Reflexive Sociology* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

12. This institutionalized multinationality sharply distinguished the Soviet state from its Romanov predecessor, to which it is too often casually assimilated as a modernized but essentially similar "prison of nations." The Romanov Empire was indeed for centuries a polyglot and polyreligious state; and it became by degrees a multinational state in the late nineteenth century as ethnolinguistic and ethnoreligious heterogeneity were increasingly interpreted as national heterogeneity (Hugh Seton-Watson, *Nations and States* [Boulder, Col.: Westview, 1977], 143, 148, and *The Russian Empire 1801–1917* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967], 485ff). But its multinationality, while increasingly (although far from universally) perceived as a central political fact by some peripheral and central elites, was never institutionalized.
13. Seton-Watson, *Nations and States*, 164; Oscar Jaszi, *The Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1929), 304ff.
14. C. A. Macartney, *National States and National Minorities* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934).
15. See, for instance, Smith, "State-making and nation-building," 232; idem, *State and Nation in the Third World* (New York: St. Martin's, 1983), 126; and Crawford Young, *The Politics of Cultural Pluralism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976), chap. 3.
16. Bohdan Nahaylo and Victor Swoboda, *Soviet Disunion: A History of the Nationalities Problem in the USSR* (New York: Free Press, 1990), 186. See also the detailed discussion in Yaroslav Bilinsky, "The concept of the Soviet People and its implications for Soviet nationality policy," *Annals of the Ukrainian Academy of Arts and Sciences in the United States*, vol. 14, 1978–1980, 87–133. Notwithstanding its publication in an organ of emigré scholarship, this is a balanced and probing analysis.
17. For an analytically sophisticated account of Russian dominance of the Soviet state, see Alexander J. Motyl, *Will the Non-Russians Rebel* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1987), esp. 41ff.
18. On Soviet "nation-building," see Gerhard Simon, *Nationalism and Policy Toward the Nationalities in the Soviet Union* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991), chap. 2. For a concise and wide-ranging overview of Soviet language policy, see Jonathan Pool, "Soviet language planning: Goals, results, options," in *Soviet Nationality Policies and Practices*, ed. Jeremy Azrael (New York: Praeger, 1978).
19. Yugoslavia comes closest, with its Soviet-inspired system of ethnoterritorial federalism (see Connor, *The National Question in Marxist-Leninist Theory and Strategy*, 222–231); yet the close ethnolinguistic kinship of the various South Slav peoples, comprising the very large majority of the Yugoslav population, made it possible to conceive of the citizenry as a whole as at least a potential or incipient Yugoslav (=South Slav) nation, and to institute the category "Yugoslav" as an official nationality (chosen as a self-designation by more than 5 percent of the population in the 1981 census).
20. As P. Kolstø reminded me, the vast Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic (RSFSR), like the Russian Federation today, bore the territorial-political distinction "Rossiiskii," not the ethnolinguistic designation "Russkii" – a distinction lost in English, which renders both as "Russian."
21. Below them – mainly in the vast Russian Republic but also in a few other Union Republics – were twenty Autonomous Republics and eighteen lower-level autonomous formations. For a discussion of the historical genesis, ethnic demography, and political significance of these autonomous formations, see Lee Schwartz,

- "Regional population redistribution and national homelands in the USSR," 121–161 in *Soviet Nationality Policies: Ruling Ethnic Groups in the USSR*, ed. Henry R. Huttenbach (London and New York: Mansell, 1990).
22. When the system of internal passports was introduced in the early 1930s, nationality was initially registered by self-designation. But thereafter, nationality depended exclusively on parental nationality, not on residence, language, or subjective identity. There was no possibility of changing one's nationality, and no regard for individual choice, except for children of mixed-nationality marriages (and even their choice – made once and for all at age sixteen – was limited to the two parental nationalities). See Victor Zaslavsky and Yuri Luryi, "The passport system in the USSR and changes in Soviet society," *Soviet Union*, 6, Part 2 (1979): 147ff; Rasma Karklins, *Ethnic Relations in the USSR: The Perspective from Below* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1986), 23, 31–32, 42–43.
 23. Discrimination against Jews – treated as a nationality in the Soviet classificatory scheme – induced most children of mixed marriages involving Jews and non-Jews to choose the non-Jewish nationality for their passports, and probably to identify subjectively with the non-Jewish nationality as well (Zaslavsky and Luryi, "The passport system in the USSR," 149). Since intermarriage rates for Jews were extremely high (see the data reported in the *Journal of Soviet Nationalities* 1/2. [Summer 1990]: 160ff), this reclassification strategy contributed substantially to the apparently dramatic shrinkage of the Jewish population of the Soviet Union (from 2.2 million in 1959 to 1.4 million in 1989). More recently, of course, ethnonational reclassification has proceeded in the opposite direction, since the lifting of restrictions on emigration and the automatic immigration and citizenship rights extended by Israel to diaspora Jews have revalorized Jewish nationality, at least for would-be emigrants (see Brubaker, "Political dimensions of migration from and among Soviet successor states," in *International Migration and Security*, ed. Myron Weiner [Boulder, Col.: Westview Press, 1993]). The more general analytical point is that even the rigidly ascriptive Soviet system of personal nationality did leave room at the margins – considerable room, for some groups – for the play of individual strategies.
 24. In standard Sovietological usage, the "titular" nationality of a particular ethnoterritorial unit is the nationality whose name the unit bears: thus Georgians were the titular nationality in the Georgian SSR, Kazakhs in the Kazakh SSR, and so on.
 25. Cf. G. Gleason, *Federalism and Nationalism* (Boulder, Col.: Westview, 1990), 5.
 26. The most thorough account of the ad hoc development of ethnoterritorial federalism is Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union*, which carries the story through 1923. See also E. H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution* (London: Macmillan, 1950), vol. 1, 253ff; Hélène Carrère d'Encausse, *Le grand défi: Bolcheviks et nations 1917–1930* (Paris: Flammarion, 1987), 143ff; and Gleason, *Federalism and Nationalism*, esp. chap. 2.
 27. Zaslavsky and Luryi, "The passport system in the USSR and changes in Soviet society."
 28. Although 22 nationalities, according to the 1989 census, included over 1 million members, and 33 numbered between 100,000 and a million, another 47 individually enumerated nationalities (not counting 26 individually enumerated "peoples of the north") had fewer than 100,000 members, some only a few hundred (Gosudarstvennyi Komitet po Statistike, *Natsional'nyi Sostav Naseleniia SSSR* [Moscow, 1991], pp. 5–8).
 29. Julian Birch, "Border disputes and disputed borders in the Soviet federal system," *Nationalities Papers* 15/1 (Spring 1987): 44.

30. To a considerable extent, this spatial mismatch between the distribution of nationalities and the boundaries of "their" territories was induced or even directly imposed by the regime. Thus migrations of persons outside "their own" homeland were induced as a means of weakening homeland attachments and identities and promoting an emergent supranational Soviet identity. And some territorial frontiers – notably in parts of Central Asia and Transcaucasia – were drawn in a manner that departed deliberately from the dictates of ethnic demography. This last point, however, should not be exaggerated: for the most part, national territorial borders reflected ethnic demography about as well as could be expected given mixed populations (Schwartz, "Regional population redistribution and national homelands in the USSR"). For a comparative discussion of the "redistribution and gerrymandering of ethnic groups" in multiethnic Communist states, see Walker Connor, *The National Question in Marxist-Leninist Theory and Strategy*, 300ff.
31. See for example Hans Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism* (New York: Collier Books, 1944), esp. 329ff; Theodor Schieder, "Typologie und Erscheinungsformen des Nationalstaats in Europa," in Schieder, *Nationalismus und Nationalstaat* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991); Jenő Szücs, *Nation und Geschichte*, 21ff; Anthony Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*.
32. Stein Rokkan and Derek Urwin, *Economy, Territory, Identity: Politics of West European Peripheries* (London: Sage, 1983), 26–27.
33. On nonhistoric nations – those without an independent political history – in the Habsburg Empire, see Robert Kann, *The Multinational Empire: Nationalism and National Reform in the Habsburg Monarchy*, vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950), 271ff.
34. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, chap. 6.
35. Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 83.
36. Kann, *The Multinational Empire*, vol. 2; Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union*, chapter 1.
37. On migrations induced or compelled by the state, see E. Glyn Lewis, "Migration and language in the U.S.S.R.," 310–341 in *Advances in the Sociology of Language*, vol. II, ed. Joshua Fishman (The Hague: Mouton, 1972); Simon, *Nationalism and Policy Toward the Nationalities in the Soviet Union*, chaps. 5, 7.
38. Robert A. Lewis, "The migration of Russians outside their homeland," *Nationalities Papers* 20/2 (Fall 1992): 36; Gosudarstvennyi Komitet po Statistike, *Natsional'nyi Sostav Naselenia SSSR*.
39. For an extended discussion of this formula, introduced by Stalin to characterize proletarian culture, but aptly summarizing the core idea informing Soviet nationality policy as a whole, see Connor, *The National Question in Marxist-Leninist Theory and Strategy*, 202ff.
40. The expression is Walker Connor's; see his "Nation-building or nation-destroying," *World Politics* 24 (1972). Under Stalin the regime did, of course, act with extraordinary brutality toward certain national groups, notably those accused of collaborating with the Germans in the Second World War, who were stripped of their national institutions, erased from history books, and deported in their entirety, with great loss of life, to remote regions of the state. Stalin also ordered the wholesale deportations of the elites of the newly reincorporated Western territories. But despite his murderous repression of particular national groups, he did not attack the social or legal foundations of institutionalized multinationality as such. On wartime deportations, see Simon, *Nationalism and Policy Toward Nationalities in the*

- Soviet Union, chap. 7; Aleksandr M. Nekrich, *The Punished Peoples* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978); Robert Conquest, *The Nation Killers: The Soviet Deportation of Nationalities* (New York: Macmillan, 1970).
41. For a discussion of the Soviet debate of the 1950s and 1960s concerning whether the federal forms and national republics had outlived their usefulness, see Hodnett, "The debate over Soviet federalism;" and Gleason, *Federalism and Nationalism*, chap. 4.
42. Some consideration was given in the 1970s to abolishing the legal status of nationality, but it came to nothing (Lapidus, "Ethnonationalism and political stability," 567–568; Zaslavsky and Luryi, "The passport system in the USSR," 149–150; Karklins, *Ethnic Relations in the USSR*, 32).
43. John Armstrong notes that "peculiar features of the official system facilitate retention of ethnic ties by permitting... upwardly mobile persons to obtain higher education and pursue subsequent careers in their home republics. Only those intent on highly specialized activities (from ballet to nuclear physics) or on very high level Party careers must prepare to merge in the all-Soviet (Russified) career pool... It is frankly puzzling why, decades ago, the Soviet regime did not take radical measures to integrate career patterns [rather than allowing the upwardly mobile to pursue careers in their own languages and in their own republics]. Even Stalin's totalitarianism eschewed the most extreme precedents for creating a supraethnic elite," notably the Ottoman Janissary system, which "entailed forcible removal, in early adolescence, of boys in Christian families, followed by rigorous resocialization to Islamic and Ottoman dynastic norms" ("The autonomy of ethnic identity: Historic cleavages and nationality relations in the USSR," in *Thinking Theoretically About Soviet Nationalities*, ed. Alexander J. Motyl (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992, 39).
44. For an authoritative statement of this point with respect to the Baltic republics, arguing that Baltic nations, far from being on the verge of extinction after a half-century of Soviet rule, as many Baltic nationalists asserted in the Gorbachev era, were much more firmly established and consolidated as nations than they had been in 1940, see Romuald J. Misiunas and Rein Taagepera, *The Baltic States: Years of Dependence, 1940–1980* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 260–262. For a similar argument formulated in more general terms, but resting especially on research on Transcaucasia, see Ronald Grigor Suny, "Nationalist and ethnic unrest in the Soviet Union," *World Policy Journal* 11/3 (Summer 1989): 507.
45. Many border changes were in fact made, but typically in top-down fashion, for various political or strategic reasons, not in response to irredentist ethnopolitical mobilization. The closest thing to such mobilization, in the pre-perestroika era, involved Armenian campaigns, particularly during the Khrushchev thaw, for the transfer of the overwhelmingly Armenian Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast from Azerbaijan to Armenia (Birch, "Border disputes and disputed borders in the Soviet federal system," 50–53).
46. See for instance Karklins, *Ethnic Russians in the USSR*, 64–65, 96.
47. For a theoretical argument on the tendential convergence of culture and territory in industrial society, see Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983).
48. This conception of extra-territorial or personal national autonomy was first elaborated in 1851 by the Hungarian statesman Louis Kossuth in the aftermath of the Austro-Russian suppression of the incipient Hungarian Republic; it received its most thorough development a half century later in the writings of the Austro-Marxists, above all in Otto Bauer's *Die Nationalitätenfrage und die Sozialdemokratie*.

49. See Roeder, "Soviet federalism and ethnic mobilization;" and Gail Lapidus, "From democratization to disintegration: The impact of perestroika on the national question," 45-70 in *From Union to Commonwealth: Nationalism and Separatism in the Soviet Republics*, ed. Gail Lapidus and Victor Zaslavsky, with Philip Goldman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
50. I am concerned here only with the Union Republics, not with lower-level autonomous formations. The latter, locked in their own jurisdictional struggles with the Union Republics to which belonged, tended to collude with the center against the Union Republics. See Ian Bremmer, "Reassessing Soviet nationalities theory," in *Nations and Politics in the Soviet Successor States*, ed. Ian Bremmer and Ray Taras (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).
51. *Report on the USSR* 3/4 (1991): 28-29; Riina Kionka, "Russia recognizes Estonia's independence," *Report on the USSR* 3/5 (1991): 14-16; Alexander Rahr, "Are El'tsin and Gorbachev now allies?" *Report on the USSR* 3/27 (1991): 8; Stephen Foye, "The Soviet Armed Forces: Things fall apart," *RFE/RL Research Report* 1/1 (1992): 15-16, 18.
52. I have addressed some of them in preliminary fashion in "Citizenship struggles in Soviet successor states," *International Migration Review* 26 (Summer 1992): 269-291.
53. For a sophisticated emphasis on contingency see Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), and William H. Sewell, "Three temporalities: Toward an eventful sociology," forthcoming in Terrence J. McDonald, editor, *The Historic Turn in the Human Sciences* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press). The quotation is from O'Donnell and Schmitter, 4.
54. On the centrality of notions of "ownership" to ethnic conflict, see D. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: U. of Cal. Press, 1985), esp. 201ff. The sense of ownership and entitlement felt by titular nationalities of non-Russian republics, which developed well before the Gorbachev era, is thoroughly documented by Karklins, *Ethnic Relations in the USSR*, 51ff, 66, 96-97.
55. Brubaker, "Citizenship struggles in Soviet successor states."
56. Victoria Koroteyeva, in a personal communication, has suggested that this was true for Russians in the Russian Republic as well as for the diaspora living in non-Russian Republics.
57. Calculated from *Bolshaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia*, third edition, vol. 22, 212-213.
58. I am indebted to Sergei Sibirtsev for pointing this out.
59. On the pervasive uncertainty concerning the core parameters of Russian statehood, see Koroteyeva, "The old imperial power or an emerging nation: Russian responses to ethnic separatism." Paper presented at conference on "Nations, states and ethnic identity," European University Institute, Florence, May 1992.
60. On post-Soviet migrations of ethnic unmixing, with special attention to the Russians in the successor states, see Brubaker, "Political dynamics of migration from and among Soviet successor states;" and Brubaker, "Aftermaths of empire and ethnic unmixing," forthcoming in *Current and Emergent Migration Within and From the Former USSR: Domestic and International Policy Consequences*, ed. Jeremy Azrael.
61. On the question of the givenness or "hegemony" of state boundaries, see David Laitin and Ian Lustick, "Hegemony and the state," *States and Social Structures Newsletter* 9 (Winter 1989): 1-4; Lustick, "Becoming problematic: Breakdown of a hegemonic conception of Ireland in nineteenth-century Britain," *Politics and Society* 18 (March 1990): 39-73; Lustick, "Israeli state-building in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip: Theory and practice," *International Organization* 41 (Winter 1987): 151-171.