

The Concept of Ethnogenesis in Central Asia

Political Context and Institutional
Mediators (1940–50)

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The Stalin era is traditionally identified with the “return” of Russian nationalism, which was denigrated by the Bolshevik regime in its early years but later became an increasingly important element of its official discourse in relation both to the other Soviet peoples and to the “brother countries” of the Eastern Bloc. Unlike other authoritarian regimes that were less ideologically oriented, the Communist Party claimed to embody the movement of history and emphasized the interdependence of political action and scientific development: historical discourse, and related disciplines such as ethnology or archaeology, came under powerful ideological pressure and were subjected to frequent outside meddling. From World War II until the death of Stalin in 1953, the historiographies of the USSR’s various federal entities were subjected to abrupt changes. However, despite the domination of Zhdanovism, the national historiographies—at least in Central Asia—were able to retain an interpretation of history that valorized the titular nation. The research conducted in the different republics’ academies of sciences can therefore be seen as one of the matrices that permitted the symbolic justification and appropriation of the state and its territory: in its choice of historical reference points, the resulting shared sentiment of national identity would never be called into question during the entire second half of the 20th century, not even after the fall of the USSR in 1991.

Autochthonism as a political and narrative matrix for the identities of the Soviet peoples is a well-known subject. Terry Martin has shown how much the Soviet Union was built on the principle of “positive discrimination” toward minorities, who were granted cultural and linguistic rights according to their administrative status as union republics, autonomous regions, and so on. Francine Hirsch’s work on the role of ethnologists and local elites in the construction of identity referents, as well as Ronald Suny’s on primordialism

in Soviet national identities and Yuri Slezkine's on "ethnophilia" in Soviet science, have shed new light on the tight bond between the political environment, the development of the social sciences, and the articulation of discourses on identity.¹ Those studies, however, are mainly concerned with the 1920s and 1930s. The war, the postwar era, and the post-Stalinist upheavals after the mid-1950s remain little known in their impact on Central Asia. Yet it was at just this time, after the large-scale violence of Stalinism had ended, that the elites in the union republics could achieve stability, benefit from greater autonomy in publishing, and take advantage of the institutionalization of the academies of sciences. Autochthonization took shape in the form both of people—through the preference given to the titular nationality in hiring decisions in the human sciences—and of ideas, with the creation of discourses to legitimize the new republican entities.

The historiographic autochthonization of the 1940s–50s that I discuss was made possible when the "archaeological patriotism" available to each republic joined with the conceptualization of the principle of the "ethnogenesis" of eponymous peoples to anchor the notion that there existed an authentic connection among a people, its territory, and the state. This ethnogenetic discourse emerged within the specific context of the late 1930s and was advanced by historians, mainly Russians, who sought to apply in the Central Asian republics the autochthonist principles that had emerged in Russian history. Their discourse had its hour of glory in the last decade of the Stalin era and is considered even now as orthodoxy in the area of ethnogenesis. After a brief introduction on the specific political context of Zhdanovism, this article discusses the diffusion of the concept of ethnogenesis in Central Asia, the carriers of this discourse, and their social space—the republican academies of sciences—before concluding with a consideration of how certain meanings have shifted through the rewriting of history by more nationalist historians in Central Asian academia.

The Political Context of Zhdanovism

During the USSR's first two decades, one of the Bolshevik regime's chief aims in Central Asia was to eliminate any pan-Turkic and/or pan-Islamist sentiment that could lead to a unified front against Moscow's demands. Between 1924 and 1936, the territory of the former tsarist provinces was split into five

¹ Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001); Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005); Ronald Grigor Suny, *Intellectuals and the Articulation of the Nation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999); Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin, eds., *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Yuri Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994).

union republics and two autonomous republics, based not only on a policy of “divide and rule” but also on an attempt to distribute various natural, industrial, and symbolic resources among the new entities. The central government’s goal was to consolidate the new republics by endowing them with at least a minimal viability.² Nevertheless, in historiography, the writing of regional rather than republican histories remained the norm in the 1920s. In the following decade, however, the Soviet Union’s brutal political and social transformation under Stalin accelerated the separation process among the Central Asian peoples and the nationalization of their respective republics. Linguists were thus put in charge of constructing distinct literary languages; this “invention” of national attributes reached its apogee with the adoption of the Cyrillic alphabet, which made it possible to highlight the differences among the officially decreed new national languages.³

The 1940s are traditionally understood as a period when Russian nationalism was intense and the “national Bolshevik” ideology studied by David Brandenberger was articulated.⁴ After the era of proletarian internationalism and Lenin’s condemnation of “Great Russian chauvinism,” the Stalinist rehabilitation of Russian nationalism occurred alongside the political and physical liquidation of the leading personalities of national communism in each of the union republics. In Central Asia, it was the former Jadids, fellow travelers of the Bolsheviks, who were eliminated: Faizulla Khodzhaev in Uzbekistan, Turar Ryskulov in Kazakhstan, and others. This policy was resumed after the war: by institutionalizing Zhdanovism, the regime made clear that it intended to reassert control over all artistic and intellectual life and thereby helped render historical discourses more rigid. Stalin quickly made official the idea that the Russians were the “older brother” of the Soviet peoples as well as those of the new Eastern Bloc. In the historical field, the Party condemned the school of Mikhail N. Pokrovskii (1868–1932) as “deviant” and liquidated its disciples. This school had sought evidence for the unity of Russian and minority laborers and therefore considered any revolt against the tsarist regime as positive and progressive. Following a 1934 decree, however, the empire was rehabilitated: no longer a symbol of retrograde colonization, it was henceforth understood as the road to revolution. The idea of brotherhood among oppressed classes was replaced by Russian supremacy over the other nationalities.⁵

² On this topic, see Arne Haugen, *The Establishment of National Republics in Soviet Central Asia* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

³ See Ingeborg Baldauf, *Schriftreform und Schriftwechsel bei den Muslimischen Russland- und Sowjettürken (1850–1937)* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiado, 1993).

⁴ David Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931–1956* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

⁵ See Lowell Tillet, *The Great Friendship: Soviet Historians on the Non-Russian Nationalities* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969).

The republican historiographies that had emerged in the 1920s–30s and tried to base the Soviet political project on traditional nationalism suddenly came under attack. Even so, the well-known rehabilitation of the tsarist empire by Soviet historiography did not lead to a total repudiation of non-Russian national sentiments. So monolithic a picture of Zhdanovism would be misleading, for the invasion of the USSR by Nazi armies in 1941, and the regime's determination to arouse a powerful patriotic response, made it necessary to seek reconciliation with the enemies of yesteryear and use nationalism to promote a new social consensus. It is true that one of Zhdanovism's driving forces was its exaltation of Soviet superiority; however, this superiority was not limited to the Russians, instead also permitting the valorization of a certain view of the national past in the union republics. Some elements of the past had to be avoided because they raised too many questions about the relations between Russians and other peoples—for example, the Turkic epics or the revolts led by Shamil in Daghestan, Kenesary Kasymov in Kazakhstan, or Ukraine's Cossack heroes—but ancient history did not have these troublesome implications and opened up a new field for the expression of non-Russian sentiment.⁶

This recourse to ancient history made it possible to refocus national sentiment by casting it in the essentialist terms of the ethnos. Although it ensured the preservation of a national feeling that was being battered in the historiography, this return to ancient times was more than mere compensation for the nationalities to make up for the discourse about the Russians as their “older brother.” The exaltation of antiquity also derived from the official Stalinist idea that a unique genius lay at the heart of each of the cultures encompassed within the Soviet Union, which was thus projected onto the past as a historical space unified since time immemorial. This retrospective projection eliminated the fluidity of a past that was now transformed into a national destiny by the invitation to each people to adopt its own *Volksgeist* so long as it conformed to the hierarchy of Soviet values and the primacy of Russia. The focus on the extreme antiquity of local cultures thus served to reaffirm the image of a Soviet Union that had been, throughout history, at the forefront of world cultural development.

The Circulation of the Concept of Ethnogenesis within the Soviet Union

This historiographic discourse was inextricably tied to the idea of ethnogenesis, understood to mean the process of ethnic crystallization that made it possible to speak of a specific people existing as such through the centuries. Thus

⁶ On the Ukrainian case, see Serhy Yekelchuk, “Stalinist Patriotism as Imperial Discourse: Reconciling the Ukrainian and Russian ‘Heroic Pasts,’ 1939–45,” *Kritika* 3, 1 (2002): 51–80.

focusing research on the question of ethnicity fulfilled several objectives, the first of which was to provide a theoretical foundation for the regime's nationalities policy. This policy operated, with periodic interruptions, through a system of "positive discrimination" toward national minorities, who were assigned identities, territories, and specific administrative and cultural rights to varying degrees as determined by the center. Second, ethnology's subordination to history required that the study of a people's characteristics be anchored in a temporal reading of its existence—that is, ethnogenetic research was regarded as the ethnological version of history. National collectivities were to be studied through time, as participants in a process governed by rules and spanning a trajectory that was common to all and was divided into stages—the tribe (*plemia*), nationality (*narodnost'*), people (*narod*), and nation (*natsiia*)—that also corresponded to the historical stages of humanity's development as proposed by Marxist-Leninist science.

From the late 1930s on, ethnogenetic studies were rapidly integrated into the discipline of ethnology, allowing for the most direct possible realization of Stalin's definition of the nation: "A nation is a historically evolved, stable community of language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a community of culture."⁷ All the focal interests of ethnogenesis were mentioned here: the territory guaranteed the people's autochthonous status, the language and "psychological make-up" permitted an essentialist and naturalist interpretation of community, and the formula "historically evolved" implied that the only possible way to understand nationhood was by inscribing it in the Marxist reading of the past. Lastly, the obsession with ethnic questions contributed to the discipline's borrowing of current methods from physical anthropology, for somatic descriptions of peoples were seen in the USSR as a legitimate way of thinking about the country's national diversity. These approaches from physical anthropology were assigned a sometimes marginal, sometimes central role in the research on the distinctive features of the different Soviet peoples, and similarly so in the definition and preservation of what Soviet scholars later called the *genofond* or genetic stock supposedly specific to each people.

An article in the journal *Sovetskaia etnografiia* in 1942 proclaimed the birth of the discipline of so-called ethnogenetics (*etnogenetika*), which could only "attain its authentic scientific realization in the Soviet Union, on the basis of the theories of Marxism-Leninism, and with the help of progressive teachings in the domain of linguistics such as those of Nikolai Marr."⁸ Marxist theories seemed indeed to occupy an important role in

⁷ Joseph Stalin, *Marxism and the National and Colonial Question* (New York: International Publishers, n.d.), 8.

⁸ "Sessiia po etnogenezu Srednei Azii," *Sovetskaia etnografiia* 6–7 (Moscow: Akademiia nauk SSSR, 1947), 301.

the conceptualization of ethnogenesis, though this remains to be studied in greater detail. In the 1930s, Marr's ideas about a people's development through stages (or *stadial'nost'*) and the autochthonism of its origins enjoyed such success that it came to supersede the various other possible definitions of ethnology. The ethnos thus became the principal focus for a discipline long in search of its object of study and which thereby ratified its own submission to the discipline of history.⁹

In addition to Marrism, it is the historical context of the second half of the 1930s, and in particular Soviet competition with Germany, that helps partly to explain the birth of the concept of ethnogenesis. It was at this time that autochthonist theories arose in the USSR to counter Germanist theses on the origins of the Eastern Slavs. Confronted with the pan-Germanist discourse that presented the Slavs as an "Oriental" people who had arrived from the depths of the Asiatic steppes in the Middle Ages, Soviet science sought to demonstrate that, on the contrary, they had originated in the East European plain: the Slavs had supposedly been present in their modern-day territory since the Bronze Age; and theories based on ancient chronicles, according to which they had come from the Carpathians, were false.¹⁰ These historiographic polemics helped center Soviet discourse on the rejection of all migrationist theories.

Thus Aleksandr Bernshtam (1910–56), a specialist in Kyrgyz history, could assert that migrationist theories were "reactionary" and derived from bourgeois science, whose goal was to diminish the Soviet peoples' place in world history.¹¹ Likewise, Soviet discourse endeavored to counter the tradition of political history in Western scholarship for not adequately taking into account the economic elements highlighted by Marxism: "ethnic history ... cannot be reduced chiefly to migrations provoked by political events and military confrontations. Such an approach could hardly be deemed scientifically correct."¹² What applied to the Slavs, as the original target of the era's Germanist discourses, extended equally to all the peoples of the Soviet Union. On the model of the Slavs, all the "nationalities" of the Soviet Union were invited to play the autochthonism card and challenge migrationist ideas: the Tatars, for example, were said to descend directly from the Volga Bulgars, not the Mongols. This choice dovetailed with the process of anchoring the

⁹ Frédéric Bertrand, "Une science sans objet? L'ethnographie soviétique des années 20–30 et les enjeux de la catégorisation ethnique," *Cahiers du monde russe* 44, 1 (2003): 93–110.

¹⁰ See V. A. Shnirel'man, "Zlokliucheniia odnoi nauki: Etnogeneticheskie issledovaniia i stalinskaia natsional'naia politika," *Etnograficheskoe obozrenie*, no. 3 (1993): 52–68.

¹¹ V. F. Shakhmatov, "K voprosu ob etnogeneze kazakhskogo naroda," *Izvestiia Akademii nauk Kazakhskoi SSR*, no. 6 (1950): 81.

¹² S. M. Abramzon, *Kirgizy i ikh etnogeneticheskie i istoriko-kul'turnye sviazi* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1971; repr. Frunze: Kyrgyzstan, 1990), 28.

union republics and with the Bolshevik desire to break up the older cultural and linguistic configurations.

In the first ethnogenetic studies, recurring references to Germanist Aryan theories clearly show how the Soviet discourse on autochthonism developed in response to German ideas but with reliance on the same kinds of arguments. Thus, in his study of the Tajiks, Bobodzhan Gafurov (1909–77) insisted that the “Iranophone nationalities and tribes never represented a ‘pure race,’ they were never ‘pure-blooded Aryans,’ victorious newcomers, as bourgeois historians have baselessly claimed. It is known that the theory of the ‘pure race’ is a reactionary lie, a myth. The eastern Iranian populations of Central Asia did not come from anywhere but constituted themselves right there, on site.”¹³ In 1950, a conference on the ethnography of the Baltic peoples, recently integrated into the Soviet Union, again refuted the “legend of German cultural superiority.” It thus seems that Germanist racial doctrines contributed, by way of negative contrast, to the crystallization of Soviet ethnogenetic discourse, although direct allusions to these theories would disappear after the 1950s.

In the years preceding World War II, as the pursuit of ethnogenesis spread to all the Soviet peoples, Central Asia did not fail to affirm the ancient and prestigious past of its eponymous peoples. In 1936, at the initiative of Academician Iurii Got’e, the *Drevniaia istoriia narodov SSSR* (Ancient History of the Peoples of the USSR) was published. The Academy of Sciences decided to pursue this initiative further and organized, under A. D. Udal’tsov’s leadership, four conferences on ethnogenesis: one on the peoples of the Far North in 1940, another on those of Central Asia in 1942, another on the Slavs in 1943, and a last one in 1944 more specifically on the Indo-European problem. The conference on Central Asia was held in August 1942 in Tashkent and involved some 15 researchers, mostly Russians, whose papers were published in summary form in a 1947 volume of *Sovetskaia etnografiia*.¹⁴ This foundational conference established the principles of ethnogenesis for Central Asia as a region: each eponymous people with its own republic was to establish a dynasty of reference and identify a chronologically well-defined historical period in which the nation’s formation was completed; the period should be as ancient as possible for maximum prestige value.

Reading the papers from the 1942 conference, one cannot help being struck by the insistence of all the participants on the question of interethnic miscegenation, on the one hand, and on a people’s degree of “purity,” on the other. Although no value judgment was rendered on the latter question—a more hybrid people was not deemed inferior—the logic of autochthonization

¹³ B. G. Gafurov, *Istoriia tadzhikskogo naroda v kratkom izlozhenii* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1949), 26.

¹⁴ “Sessiiia po etnogenezu Srednei Azii” (1947).

went beyond pure territoriality and seemed associated with ideas about a people's ethnic or even racial continuity. This was, in fact, what was continually asserted by the era's great figures in physical anthropology, such as Georgii F. Debets (1905–69). In his view, bourgeois Western anthropology either developed racist theories or denied the links between race and language. Soviet science, by contrast, had accurately demonstrated the “correspondence between anthropological types and linguistic, cultural, and ethnic groups,” and the study of this correspondence proved to be the “principal means for a multifaceted analysis of ethnogenesis.”¹⁵

Physical anthropology was thus called upon to play a foundational role in confirming the existence of the nation. As several papers from the August 1942 session imply, once scholars succeeded in reconciling the findings from linguistics, archaeology, and anthropology, the question of a people's ethnogenesis could be considered solved. The overarching inquiry in these discourses was therefore whether one was dealing with the “same” people across time and whether a physical continuity was detectable. In recurring fashion, several papers from 1942 ponder the “racial type of the aborigines” (*rasovyi tip aborigenov*) to determine whether this type had been preserved in this or that republic. The importance of race in Soviet anthropological science thus remains a question of current interest, as the debate published in *Slavic Review* in 2002 demonstrates.¹⁶ The explicit rejection of Nazi theories and the absence of a racial policy carried out by the political authorities did not indicate the nonexistence of racial criteria in the scientific debates of the time, for these were considered one element—one among many—in the ongoing discussion on the nature of national entities.

The Circulators of Ethnogenesis and Their Social Domain

The development of an ethnogenetic discourse for each eponymous people of Central Asia paralleled the institutionalization of the republican academies of sciences. From the 1920s onward, each capital maintained subsidiaries of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, but a national academy would not be established in each Central Asian republic until World War II or later, and not until 1954 in Kirgizia. The early research carried out in the history departments of these academies was systematically dedicated to ethnogenesis. Although the Tashkent conference of 1942 marked the official introduction of the ethnogenetic theme into the national historiographies of Central Asia, it should be noted that the concept of ethnogenesis had emerged in the region a year earlier, for Uzbekistan had its first official discourse on the subject in 1941.

¹⁵ G. F. Debets, M. G. Levin, and T. A. Trofimov, “Antropologicheskii material kak istochnik izucheniia voprosov etnogeneza,” *Sovetskaia ethnografiia*, no. 1 (1952): 24, 28.

¹⁶ See, in particular, Francine Hirsch, “Race without the Practice of Racial Politics,” *Slavic Review* 61, 1 (2002): 30–43.

The quincentennial celebration of the birth of the poet Alisher Navoi (1441–1501), considered the greatest figure of Uzbek literature but also claimed by the Tajiks for their national pantheon, permitted the elites to crystallize an Uzbek national sentiment that had been under assault in the 1930s.

The Uzbek Communist Party's Alisher Navoi Jubilee Committee commissioned the historian and Orientalist Aleksandr Iu. Iakubovskii (1886–1953), an expert on the Golden Horde, to compose a small brochure on the ethnogenesis of the Uzbek people. Titled *K voprosu ob etnogeneze uzbekskogo naroda* (On the Question of the Uzbek People's Ethnogenesis), the brochure challenged the manner of writing national history that had prevailed until that time in Soviet works. These histories traced the origin of the Uzbeks to the arrival of a nomadic population in the territory of the present republic; the nomads had come from the eastern part of the Golden Horde and established themselves in Transoxiana at the beginning of the 16th century. While this Shaybanid dynasty was considered the Uzbeks' national symbol in the 1920s–30s, the rewriting of their history in 1941 attempted to refute this allegedly too-recent crystallization of Uzbek national consciousness and offered instead a genealogy that was more ancient, that is, more prestigious. Indeed, Iakubovskii criticized the idea that the Uzbeks could have appeared as a people on the world stage only with the advent of their ethnonym. From the first sentence of his book, he enunciated the fundamental postulate of future ethnogenetic research: "We must distinguish the conditions under which this or that people was formed from the history of its name."¹⁷

As soon as the Uzbek Academy of Sciences was created in 1943, local historians undertook to publish a two-volume *Istoriia narodov Uzbekistana* (History of the Peoples of Uzbekistan). Paradoxically, it was volume 2, covering the period from the Shaybanids to the 1917 Revolution, that was the first to appear in 1947. It has been suggested that its publication was hastened by a desire to ignore the writings of Iakubovskii, who raised questions about the rupture that the arrival of the Shaybanids was thought to have represented. This first volume therefore continued to identify the Shaybanid dynasty as the crystallizing element that signaled the birth of the Uzbek nation. Local historians at the time thus appear to have had quiet disagreements on this sensitive point, but this was one of the last manifestations of any fundamental divergences on the matter of ethnogenesis. In 1950, with the publication of the second volume—the first in chronological order, dealing with the period prior to the arrival of the Shaybanids—Iakubovskii regained control over the ethnogenetic discourse and reiterated in his preface the claim that the Uzbek people's existence predated its ethnonym.¹⁸

¹⁷ A. Iu. Iakubovskii, *K voprosu ob etnogeneze uzbekskogo naroda* (Tashkent: Uzfan, 1941), 1.

¹⁸ A. Iu. Iakubovskii, introduction to *Istoriia narodov Uzbekistana* (Tashkent: Akademiia nauk Uzbekskoi SSR), 1: 8.

Iakubovskii's approach was continued by the historian Sergei P. Tolstov (1907–76). Here, too, there can be no doubt as to the official nature of his historical interpretation, since Tolstov was one of the great figures of Stalin-era Soviet scholarship. From 1939 to 1951, Tolstov held the chair for ethnology at Moscow State University; and from 1942 to 1965, he headed the Soviet Academy of Sciences Institute of Ethnography and its well-known journal *Sovetskaia etnografiia*. He joined the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1944 and was named corresponding member of the Soviet Academy of Sciences in 1953. His public career declined after Stalin's death, and under pressure from his opponents Tolstov was even forced to resign as scientific secretary of the Academy of Sciences in 1954. He was nonetheless named honorary academician when he retired in 1965, and until 1969 he continued to lead the Khorezm archaeological and ethnological expedition.

As the most visible personality in archaeological research on Central Asia, Tolstov led the large, multidisciplinary expeditions of 1937–40 to Khorezm, a region he had frequented since his earliest research in 1929. Tolstov's famous book based on his research, *Drevnii Khorezm* (Ancient Khorezm), was published in 1948 and won the highest Soviet award, the Stalin Prize, in 1949.¹⁹ This distinction reflected the interest of the country's top leader in the Central Asian region as well as in the gigantic project of the Great Turkmen Canal that was supposed to give Khorezm, which was surrounded by desert sands, river access to the Caspian Sea. The awarding of the prestigious prize did not occur without some twists and turns: it was supposed to go to the historian of early Russia Boris A. Rybakov, but the order was apparently changed at the last minute by Stalin himself, who decided to give the prize to both Rybakov and Tolstov.²⁰ Tolstov was also one of the main editors of the second major historical anthology on Uzbekistan, *Istoriia uzbekskoi SSR* (The History of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic), published in five volumes between 1955 and 1958. In the preface to the first volume, the authorial collective made no secret of the revision to which the nation's history had been subjected between the publication of the 1947–50 *History of the Peoples of Uzbekistan* and the present edition. Thus the authors noted, "the division between volumes 1 and 2 does not correspond to Marxist historical periodization, thereby giving the reader the impression that the authorial collective regards the era following the Shaybanid conquest as a new period."²¹

This historical discourse concerning the formation of the Uzbek nation makes sense, however, only when considered alongside the parallel discourse

¹⁹ S. P. Tolstov, *Drevnii Khorezm* (Moscow: Moskovskii gosudarstvennyi universitet, 1948).

²⁰ V. Germanov, "S. P. Tolstov: Maître, docteur, commandeur, ou l'histoire à travers l'archéologie et l'ethnographie," *Cahiers d'Asie centrale*, no. 10 (2002): 193–216.

²¹ S. P. Tolstov, R. N. Nabiev, Ia. G. Guliamov, and V. A. Shiskin, eds., *Istoriia uzbekskoi SSR*, 1, bk. 1 (Tashkent: Akademiia nauk, 1956), vi.

being articulated in the other republics, especially Tajikistan, for the two peoples were in competition with each other owing to the territorial divisions of 1924–29 and each people's selective appropriation of their common past. While Uzbek science relied on both Iakubovskii and Tolstov, Tajikistan looked above all to Bobodzhan Gafurov, the major figure of local Stalin-era scholarship. After graduating from Moscow's Communist Institute of Journalism and starting a thesis at the Institute of History in Moscow, Gafurov was named secretary for propaganda of the Central Committee of the Tajik Communist Party and later, in 1946, first secretary of the Tajik Communist Party. He held this post until 1956, when de-Stalinization forced him to relinquish his duties while continuing his pursuit of historical research. He was then named director of the Institute of Oriental Studies in Moscow, edited the journal *Aziia i Afrika segodnia*, and was charged after the 20th Party Congress with reorganizing the institute to bring it into line with the new conception of the East that Nikita Khrushchev was promoting. Gafurov continued, however, to study Tajik history, joined with A. A. Semenov (1873–1958) in launching *Istoriia tadjzhikskogo naroda* (History of the Tajik People), which appeared in three volumes in 1963–65, and in 1968 was named to the Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan.²²

Gafurov's most famous work, *Istoriia tadjzhikskogo naroda v kratkom izlozhenii* (A Brief History of the Tajik People), appeared in Tajik in 1947 and in Russian in 1949.²³ Like Iakubovskii a few years earlier, Gafurov challenged the historical discourse of the 1920s that Vasilii Bartol'd had formalized for Tajikistan in his 1925 book *Tadjzhikistan: Sbornik statei* (Tajikistan: An Anthology of Articles), which treated the Tajiks as culturally Persian.²⁴ Gafurov reversed the comparison, asserting that the Tajiks were at least as ancient a culture as the Persians and had been the great disseminators of Persian culture. Like Tolstov, Gafurov sought to give historical primacy to future Soviet territories and refused to acknowledge Iran as the sole heir to antiquity. He thus appeared to appropriate for his purposes the remarks of Namuna-yi adabiyat-i Tajik, published in 1926 in *Khrestomatiia tadjzhikskoi literatury* (A Chrestomathy of Tajik Literature), which already defined a portion of Persian literature as "Tajik."²⁵ Gafurov's study covered the period from the origins of the Tajiks to 1917 and had the same objective as Iakubovskii's works on Uzbekistan: to deny the crystallizing role of the Samanid dynasty

²² See A. Mukhtarov and Sh. Sharipov, *Akademik Bobodzhan Gafurov* (Dushanbe: Irfon, 1983).

²³ Based on the comments of those who could compare the Russian and Tajik editions, it appears that there are differences between the texts. No systematic account of these differences has been recorded, however, by any researchers fluent in both languages.

²⁴ See B. G. Gafurov: *Dialog kul'tur i tsivilizatsii* (Moscow: Institut vostokovedeniia RAN, 2000), a conference in New Delhi on 28–29 July 1999 honoring Gafurov's 90th birthday.

²⁵ I thank the anonymous *Kritika* reader for bringing this reference to my attention.

(875–999), which he considered too recent to symbolize Tajik ethnogenesis. Gafurov pointed out that the eastern Iranophone tribes had achieved statehood (*gosudarstvennost'*) in the first millennium BC. Following this logic, the ethnogenesis of the Tajiks could not have begun with the Samanid dynasty; on the contrary, it had ended with them, since the Samanid rulers had carried to its conclusion the “tendency of a number of sedentary Central Asian peoples toward unification and fusion into one—the Tajiks.”²⁶ This assertion of ancient Tajik autochthonism provoked the anger of the Uzbek authorities, who insisted that Tajik history be clearly contained within the borders of that union republic and that its ethnogenesis not intrude on its neighbors’.

Kazakhstan likewise found itself in a paradoxical relationship to Uzbekistan. In 19th-century Russian historiography and up until the 1930s, the prevailing view explained the ethnogenesis of the Kazakhs as having crystallized with the development of a 15th-century khanate out of the wreckage of the Golden Horde. The departure of two nomad chieftains, Janibek and Girei, was said to symbolize the separation of the future Uzbeks and Kazakhs and mark the creation of the first Kazakh khanate on the steppes. However, since it had the flaw of deriving from migrationist principles and insisting on the common past of two ethnonyms, this theory was challenged by the emerging ethnogenetic discourse in the 1940s. Thus in 1950, V. F. Shakhmatov denounced *Istoriia kazakhskoi SSR* (History of the Kazakh SSR, published in 1943) as too subservient to bourgeois migrationist theories and instead advocated following the lead of the *History of the Peoples of Uzbekistan*, which asserted the soundness of autochthonist theories. Although the historiography of Uzbekistan was recognized from 1941 on as setting the standard for the others, the competition among republics for their “share” of history grew in intensity, with the autochthonist principle sharpening the rivalries. Thus Shakhmatov not only praised the Uzbek history but also found fault with it on the grounds that by insisting on the Sogdians as the original inhabitants of Uzbekistan, it implied that the Kazakhs were latecomers to the area.²⁷ On the contrary, according to Shakhmatov, one could speak of a Kazakh “nationality” as early as the pre-feudal stage, thereby enabling Kazakhstan to rival its Uzbek neighbor in antiquity and deny it the privilege of being alone in having an ancient ethnogenesis; in this view, the Kazakhs’ nomadism in no way signified non-autochthonism.

In Turkmenistan, the founder of ethnogenetic discourse was none other than Iakubovskii. Following his brochure on Uzbek ethnogenesis, the Russian researcher turned his attention to Turkmenistan and published an article in *Sovetskaia etnografiia* entitled “Questions of Turkmen Ethnogenesis in the Eighth to Tenth Centuries.” The title indicates clearly the historiographic

²⁶ Gafurov, *Istoriia tadjikskogo naroda*, 173.

²⁷ See V. F. Shakhmatov, “K voprosu ob etnogeneze kazakhskogo naroda,” 87.

issue at stake—to situate the birth of the Turkmen as a nation as far back in time as possible. Until then, the conventional official discourse had the Turkmen arriving in the territory of present-day Turkmenistan in the 11th century, during the Seljuk migrations toward Anatolia. However, according to Iakubovskii, Arab sources attested the presence of Oghuz Turks near the Ustyurt plateau as early as the ninth century, with the term “Turkmen” designating those who had converted to Islam. For Iakubovskii, the encounter of these Oghuz with the other Turkic populations already present in southern Turkmenistan since the sixth century represented the origin of the Turkmen as such.²⁸ Here again, the ethnogenetic discourse’s goal was to anchor in ancient times the titular nation’s presence on its republican territory.

By the late 1940s, all the Central Asian republics thus had at least one book that established the principle of ethnogenesis—all, that is, except for Kirgizia, which stood out for the trouble it had in constructing an ethnogenetic orthodoxy as quickly as its neighbors. Reconciling the different historical sources that mention the term “Kyrgyz” proved difficult and required a choice between different approaches: either do without authoritative historical sources and make the autochthonist claim that the Kyrgyz were the original inhabitants of the Tian-Shan, or glorify the Kyrgyz as having constituted a “state” since ancient times but in various places located outside the borders of the present-day republic. In 1952, the Kirgiz branch of the Soviet Academy of Sciences expressly asked the Presidium to organize a series of ethnological expeditions and publish the results. A special session of the Academy of Sciences, held in Frunze in 1956, was devoted exclusively to the question of the ethnogenesis of the Kyrgyz. The last of the three anthologies to appear in 1956 and 1959 was devoted entirely to the ethnogenetic question and combined approaches from ethnology, linguistics, folklore, and physical anthropology to provide a consensus answer that would be, it was hoped, definitive.²⁹ Bernshtam’s opinion, reflecting the dominant view, was officially reproduced in 1956 in the first *Istoriia kirgizskoi SSR* (History of the Kirgiz SSR): the ethnogenesis of the Kyrgyz was due to their migration, in multiple historic stages, from Siberia to the Tian-Shan.³⁰

²⁸ Iakubovskii, “Voprosy etnogeneza turkmen v VIII–X vv.,” *Sovetskaia etnografiia*, no. 3 (1947): 54.

²⁹ G. F. Debets, ed., *Trudy kirgizskoi arkhologo-etnograficheskoi ekspeditsii*, no. 3 (Frunze: Akademiia nauk, 1959), 234.

³⁰ Published in S. M. Abramzon, *Kirgizy i ikh etnogeneticheskie i istoriko-kul'turnye sviazi*. In an article in *Sovetskaia Kirgiziia* (28 February 1973), the first secretary of the Kirgiz Communist Party, T. U. Usunbaliev, criticized the book for undervaluing Russian contributions in the region and the changes experienced by the Kirgiz in the Soviet period. If Abramzon’s study was not conciliatory enough on the question of the Russian “older brother” or the analysis of the 19th and 20th centuries, the text did end up representing orthodoxy in ethnogenetic matters and is still considered as a reference work today.

National Contexts and Shifting Meanings

The development of the concept of ethnogenesis in each of the USSR's union and autonomous republics suggests a process of translation and adaptation to a local context that was always specific. For Central Asia, one might mention at least two important shifts in meaning: the first concerned the confusion of ethnic and racial discourses within the concept of ethnogenesis; and the second, the desire to use ethnogenetic theories to deny the importance of clan divisions in Central Asian society. These shifts in meaning were particularly visible in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan.

In the 1920s–30s, anthropological research aimed to identify the main physical types found in Central Asia and was almost systematically dissociated from historical and ethnological studies. The main experts interested in this subject, such as Debets and Lev V. Oshanin (1884–1962), came from the medical or biological disciplines, not the human sciences. They saw no direct link between the major original races and contemporary peoples: on the contrary, Soviet doctrine insisted, for example, on the common racial origin of Tajiks and Uzbeks, even though they each had a distinct history. With the arrival of ethnogenetic research, the linkages between the concepts of ethnicity and race grew more complex, with some researchers tending to treat the two terms as synonyms and hoping to prove the continuity of a people's somatic traits across time. Ever since the 1940s, many texts have thus conflated the somatic data from archaeological digs (in the Scythian tombs of the region, for example) and from anthropological investigations among contemporary peoples and have employed interchangeably the various names given to ancient races and the ethnonyms of today.

In Turkmenistan from the 1950s on, the question of ethnogenesis was closely tied to research in physical anthropology. This research supposedly confirmed the preponderance of the Iranian substratum in Turkmen physiognomy, thereby validating the people's antiquity and ethno-racial continuity.³¹ In the 1960s, the researcher Ata Dzhikiev argued that the connection between the contemporary Turkmen and ancient peoples could be proven thanks to the studies of Oshanin, who linked them to the local dolichocephalic Caspian race. Hence, "from the anthropological point of view, the Turkmen are the direct descendants of the Scythians."³² This same researcher likewise asserted, with M. B. Akhinzhanov, that the Turkic languages were native to Central Asia and the region had always been characterized by Persian–Turkic bilingualism. Dzhikiev thus transposed a desire for ethnic autochthonism onto a linguistic one. In 1967, at a special conference of the Academy of

³¹ See, for example, G. P. Vasil'eva, *Etnograficheskie dannye o proiskhozhdenii turkmenskogo naroda* (Moscow: Nauka, 1964).

³² Ata Dzhikiev, *Ocherk etnicheskoi istorii i formirovaniia naseleniia iuzhnogo Turkmenistana* (Ashkhabad: Ylym, 1977), 28.

Sciences of Turkmenistan on the ethnogenetic question, the speakers insisted in particular on the importance of Turkmen racial features that were said to validate the ethnogenetic theory of their Scythian autochthonism.³³

In Kazakhstan, the same racializing of ethnogenetic discourse became apparent in the 1960s and was formally theorized in the following decade. To this end, from the late 1970s through the present, Orazak Ismagulov (b. 1930)—the director of the Laboratory for Ethnic Anthropology of the Kazakh Academy of Sciences Institute of History and Ethnology—has continuously published studies in physical anthropology to show the racial unity of the Kazakhs. According to Ismagulov, there not only exists a specific Kazakh race that is uniform throughout the republic, but the anthropological facts also confirm that this race occupies a central position among Turco-Mongol peoples and exceeds them in the harmonious way in which it combines the various somatic criteria.³⁴ A book from 1977, *Etnicheskaia genogeografiia kazakhov* (The Ethnic Geno-Geography of the Kazakhs), in which Ismagulov speaks of “man’s biosocial nature,” later came under direct attack from the CPSU for being “nationalist.”

These racial references were employed in an ambiguous manner with regard to the ethnic question: the dolichocephaly of the Turkmen was not the result of a deformation but, Oshanin suggested, a “persistent racial feature” (*stoikiĭ rasovyi priznak*) that made it possible to differentiate the Turkmen from the other peoples of Central Asia.³⁵ In the 1970s, the researcher Orazmukhammed Babakov, a specialist in this matter, analyzed the place of the Turkmen “in the racial system” (*v rasovoi sistematike*) of the region and openly affirmed the Turkmen people’s anthropological unity notwithstanding their tribal diversity.³⁶ As in Kazakhstan, the persistence of tribal and/or clan divisions poses a problem for theorists of national ethno-racial unity: omnipresent in oral literature thanks to genealogies and always invoked in the self-definitions given by a part of the population, the reference to tribe disrupts the idea of unity underlying any modern socialist nation.

Faced with this situation, physical anthropology can use mutually supporting data from craniology, serology, odontology, or dermatology to affirm the physical unity of the nation. The internal divisions represented by tribes,

³³ See *Vsesoiuznoe soveshchanie po etnogenezu turkmenskogo naroda: Tezisy dokladov i nauchnykh soobshchenii* (Ashkhabad: Akademiia nauk Turkmenskoi SSR, 1967).

³⁴ Orazak Ismagulov, *Etnicheskaia antropologĭia Kazakhstana* (Alma-Ata: Nauka, 1982), 9.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

³⁶ This “racial system” was composed of a Europoid dolichocephalic Transcaspian race (the Turkmen), a Europoid brachycephalic race situated between the Amu Darya and the Syr Darya (the Uzbeks, the Tajiks, a portion of the Karakalpaks), a Europoid dolichocephalic Caspian race (the Azeris), and a Siberian race from the south of Semirech’e (the Kazakhs and Kirgiz). See Orazmukhammed Babakov, *Antropologicheskii sostav turkmenskogo naroda v svyazi s problemoi etnogeneza* (Ashkhabad: Ylym, 1977), 18.

clans, or regionalisms can be treated as matters of history or culture, “vestiges” (*perezhitki*) that are doomed and scarcely relevant to understanding the reality of contemporary societies. Combined with the assertion of the people’s racial unity, the ethnogenetic discourse makes it possible to affirm the *modernity* of society: no disruptive internal element such as tribal divisions, considered “shameful,” can challenge the existence of an indivisible nation.

Subsequent Nationalist Rewritings and Reinterpretations

These ethnogenetic discourses, which developed in a very brief period (between 1941 and 1956 for Central Asia), continued to be held as orthodoxy in historiographic matters throughout the Soviet period, and even after the fall of the regime.

Ethnological interest in the theory of the particularly ancient ethnogenesis of the Uzbeks continued into the 1960s, personified by the principal figure of Uzbek ethnology, Karim Shaniiazov, whose career spanned the Soviet and post-Soviet periods. Shaniiazov received his candidate’s degree in 1960 and his doctorate in 1975. In 1967, just after the arrival of Iulian Bromlei at the Miklukho-Maklai Institute in Moscow, Shaniiazov was elected as head of the Ethnology Department of the Uzbek Institute of History. After 1990, he led a scientific group studying the ethnic and ethnogenetic processes of the Uzbeks and supervised all the institute’s theses in ethnology. He was the only ethnologist who was likewise a member of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan, and until his death in 2000 he continued to publish on the question of national ethnogenesis, pursuing the theories enunciated by Iakubovskii and Tolstov a half-century earlier.³⁷

Gafurov pursued his quest to push back Tajik ethnogenesis to the most ancient date possible in his last book, *Tadzhiki: Drevneishaia, drevniaia i srednevekovaia istoriia* (The Tajiks: Early, Ancient, and Medieval History), published in 1972. Compared to the 1949 version, there are two differences of note: the complete disappearance of references to Marr and the Japhetides, both of whom fell out of favor in the 1950s, and the more intense criticism of the Turkic peoples, especially the Uzbeks. The book sparked outrage in Uzbekistan, where the Academy of Sciences of Tashkent officially complained to the Central Committee of the CPSU that individuals regarded as Uzbek, such as al-Khorezmi, al-Farabi, and al-Biruni, should not appear in a book about the Tajiks; the academy also rejected the idea that Tajik ethnogenesis could have predated that of the Uzbeks.³⁸

³⁷ For a short biographical notice, consult *Obshchestvennye nauki v Uzbekistane*, no. 6 (2000): 69–70.

³⁸ See G. Ashurov, “Ideinaia bor’ba vokrug knigi Akademika B. G. Gafurova *Tadzhiki*,” *Merosi niegon/Nasledie predkov*, no. 6 (2003): 72–78.

Paradoxically, independence has helped reinforce ethnogenetic theories and has only rarely been seen as an invitation to rethink possible discourses on the nation. Far from stimulating new methodological inquiries, the events of 1991 reaffirmed the older currents of thought, which continued to be considered relevant. Thus in the 1990s, Tajik President Emomali Rakhmonov declared Gafurov a “hero of Tajikistan,” and his works still serve as introductory textbooks for the study of the nation’s history. In the other republics, the quest for autochthonism likewise remains the chief concern of scholarship on the question of ethnogenesis: the goal is to disprove the hypothesis of a massive arrival of Turkic populations from the Altai or the Siberian steppes in the first centuries AD and to verify instead their presence since time immemorial in their current eponymous territory.³⁹ In Kazakhstan, the disciples of Ismagulov, who still heads the Laboratory for Ethnic Anthropology of the academy’s Institute of History and Ethnology, continue to assert that “the Kazakhs’ genetic stock is biologically indivisible and unified, and a division into clans, tribes, or hordes is not justified.”⁴⁰ The Museum of National History in Almaty maintains a physical anthropology department that displays tableaux on Kazakh ethnogenesis based on the somatic, dermatological, serological, odontological, and craniological criteria worked out by Ismagulov.

Even though Kyrgyzstan contended in Soviet times with the most complex discourses on the ethnogenetic question, the official tendency has been to emphasize theories about the nation’s continuity since time immemorial. Thus in 2003, the government organized a jubilee to celebrate “2,200 years of Kyrgyz statehood,” accompanied by a profusion of scholarly publications. In 2006, the organization by the Tajik government of the “year of Aryan civilization,” in celebration of 15 years’ independence, brought the racialist and even downright racist underpinnings of the ethnogenetic theories to the surface. The institutes of history of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan faced off in aggressive verbal duels, with both institutes looking to their archaeologists to prove that their own nation was autochthonous and Aryan while disproving their neighbor and rival’s claim to a similar ethnogenetic discourse. The director of the Institute of History of Tajikistan, Rakhim Masov, asserted, for example, that the Uzbeks could not claim Aryan ethnogenesis for themselves on the basis of somatic characteristics: “They are in no way the same in physical appearance and racial origin: ... the Aryans had blond hair, blue

³⁹ See Marlène Laruelle, “Continuité des élites intellectuelles, continuité des problématiques identitaires: Ethnologie et ‘ethnogenèse’ à l’Académie des Sciences d’Ouzbékistan,” *Cahiers d’Asie centrale*, no. 13–14 (2004): 45–76.

⁴⁰ S. Islamiyeva, “Gosudarstvennaia teoriia etnogeneza kazakhov v istoriografii XX veka,” *Otan tarixy*, no. 4 (2003): 149.

eyes, and were tall; whereas the Turks have wide faces, small eyes, flattened noses, sparse facial hair, and a Mongoloid physical appearance."⁴¹

In Uzbekistan, any challenge to the discourses of Iakubovskii or Tolstov immediately provokes the wrath of the Institute of History. In 2002, violent polemics ensued when the Soros Foundation published an *Etnicheskii atlas Uzbekistana* (Ethnic Atlas of Uzbekistan) that failed to satisfy the official norms on the ethnic question and attempted to introduce some constructivist perspectives into the discussion. Debate on the *Atlas* took the form of a methodological polemic over what in reality has for decades been a political issue, namely, the question of the formation of the Uzbek people. Alisher Ilkhamov, who authored the section of the book devoted to the Uzbeks, openly challenged the literature on national ethnogenesis that has prevailed for the last half-century. Making no secret of his rejection of the official historiography, he accused the great Soviet classics of contributing to the “canonization of Uzbek national history” and transforming it into a teleology of the nation.⁴² He likewise raised one of the fundamental ambiguities of Soviet ethnology, the confusion between ethnos and nation, which was, according to him, at the origin of many epistemological errors in ethnogenetic science. From the fall of 2003, important debates over this publication erupted in the electronic journal *Etno-zhurnal*, and then in a long article in the very official *Pravda Vostoka* of 14–15 January 2004. The Soros Foundation, established in Uzbekistan since 1996, had to close on 1 March 2004 when it was unable to obtain re-registration. Its website is no longer accessible from Tashkent; many academics who participated in the Soros Foundation’s various projects in recent years received unfavorable notations in their personnel files; the salaries of foundation associates have been blocked by the National Bank of Uzbekistan; and the Soros director, Alisher Ilkhamov, had to leave the country.

The unexpected magnitude of this debate—over some 20 pages summarizing the creation of the contemporary Uzbek nation—reveals the depth of the interactions between politics and scientific discourse, interactions that were already very much present in the Soviet era when the regime regarded ethnology as a way to justify its nationalities policy. The scholarly debate was poisoned by the fact that the *Atlas* was funded by a Western foundation that the Uzbek government already viewed as highly politicized: the underlying political motives were quite obviously the primary issue, with the *Atlas* merely providing the pretext for closing the Soros Foundation. Even

⁴¹ R. Masov, “Fal’sifitsirovat’ i prisvaivat’ chuzhuiu natsistoriiu nel’zia (otvet panturkistam),” *CentrAsia*, 9 March 2006. On this subject, see M. Laruelle, “The Return of the Aryan Myth: Tajikistan in Search of a Secularized National Ideology,” *Nationalities Papers* 35, 1 (2007): 51–70.

⁴² A. Ilkhamov, ed., *Etnicheskii atlas Uzbekistana* (Tashkent: Open Society Institute Assistance Foundation—Uzbekistan, 2002), 295.

so, the orchestrated attack on the *Atlas* should not be understood only as the product of a simple order from the authorities, for the internal struggles within local academia are quite real. The manner in which sociology was put on notice, as well as the condemnation of theories like constructivism precisely for being a “Western import,” illustrates the perpetuation of essentialist theories in the post-Soviet human sciences, at least in Central Asia.⁴³

Conclusion

The attention to the issue of nationhood never really disappeared during the decades of the Soviet regime, and Zhdanovism, for all its exacerbated Russocentrism, did allow the national historiographies some room to maneuver. While not all national heroes, particularly those of the 19th century, were amenable to rehabilitation, many proved fully compatible with the official ideology and the notion of the primacy of the Russians as the “older brother.” Local scholars therefore saw no contradiction in asserting the positive character of Russian colonization even while exalting national sentiments through a discourse on the prestigious antiquity of each of the USSR’s cultural zones. The concept of ethnogenesis was thus reinforced by a pan-Soviet “archaeological patriotism” that was centered on the idea that the glorious past of the different regions within the present Soviet Union ensured *a posteriori* the legitimacy of its frontiers and the soundness of its political messianism.

The major scholars who launched the ethnogenetic theories in Central Asia all had a particularly brilliant official trajectory in the last decade of Stalin’s rule. These theories clearly enjoyed the blessing of the central political leadership; and Iakubovskii, Tolstov, Gafurov, and Shakhmatov were all trained in Moscow in a specific intellectual and political context and formed part of the same academic networks. Subsequently, the work on ethnogenesis by researchers who were almost all *Russians* was never repudiated or presented as discriminatory or foreign; instead, it remains to this day internalized by local academics and is considered to be “national.”

The ethnogenetic discourse is intimately connected with the political issue of consolidating the young republican identities created in the partitions of the 1920s–30s. The desire of the Bolsheviks to anchor identities in the soil—at the expense of the Austro-Marxist principle of the national and cultural autonomy of individuals—crystallized the idea of a necessary overlap between a collectivity and its territoriality. The chief aim of national histories was therefore to anchor each eponymous people in its spatial dimension as well as prove the existence of a state, or what could retroactively be considered a state, that contained both the population and the territory.

⁴³ Regarding the polemic on the *Atlas*, see M. Laruelle, “Etnologiiia, natsional’noe stanovlenie i politika v Uzbekistane,” *Ab Imperio*, no. 4 (2005): 279–92.

Soviet scientific and political authorities under Stalin thus contributed to the birth of a local patriotism or “republicanism” that quickly, from the 1940s on, acquired the attributes of the nation-state. While that term was obviously not used at the time, because it was deemed bourgeois and in any case did not fit the Soviet system’s logic of unification, the arsenal of scholarly arguments supporting the nation-state was nonetheless perfected.

The postulate of a parallel between territory, population, and proto-state apparatus, as well as the claim that clan, tribal, or regional elements were secondary because they had dissolved in the ethnogenetic melting pot, thus heralded a form of modernity that was already that of the nation-state. The frantic search for autochthonism for the Central Asian peoples, which was begun in the scientific domain with the ethnogenetic research of the 1940s, has thus continued to bear its fruits. What the independent states inherited in 1991 from the Soviet regime, particularly from the research of the last decade under Stalin, is a “ready-to-think” idea of the nation-state that appears to suit them and seems, at least for now, to require no major methodological adjustments in the areas of history, archaeology, and ethnology.

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