

Reviews and Abstracts

Book Reviews

Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*. The Wilder House Series in Politics, History, and Culture. Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2001. xvi + 496 pp., 4 maps, 46 tables, glossary, bibliography, index. ISBN: 0801486777 (paper), 0801438136 (cloth). \$27.50 paper.

Reviewed by: **Tomasz Kamusella**, Jean Monnet Fellow, European University Institute, Florence, Italy and Opole University, Opole, Poland, tomek672@poczta.onet.pl.

The late Ernest Gellner famously disagreed with received opinion and stated that Austria-Hungary was a kindergarten, *not* a prison of nations. The Habsburg Empire was the first to fully appreciate the centrifugal force of ethnic nationalisms. Austro-Marxists (e.g., Otto Bauer, Karl Renner) developed various solutions to the national question, none of which were ever applied. The young Joseph Stalin picked up their ideas when he was sent to Vienna on a short study tour in January and February of 1913. He wrote there his seminal essay, "Marxism and the National Question," the tenets of which he later would implement in the Soviet Union. Lenin learned his lesson observing the rise of numerous national movements in Central and Eastern Europe. This contradicted Marx's opinion that in class struggle workers of various ethnicities would unite against their ethnic kin of different classes. As Roman Szporluk noted in his 1988 book *Communism and Nationalism: Karl Marx versus Friedrich List*, the fight was not to be only between the proponents of communism and capitalism. Marxists wrongly imagined nationalism as an epiphenomenon of capitalism. Soon enough it proved to be a third party on the battlefield where Marxism met capitalism.

In the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution Lenin promised to do away with the excesses of "tsarist colonialism" and "Great Russian chauvinism," in favor of the principle of the self-determination of nations. The revolutionaries were anxious not to be outdone by President Wilson and Western Europe's initiative of the League of Nations. Although Lenin hoped his concession toward nationalism would be a short-lived instrument, such as NEP, the Soviet Union functioned as school and university in one,

from which numerous nations graduated upon its break-up.

To my knowledge, Martin's work is the first full-length and archive-based treatment of the question of why communism lost out to nationalism. Why, having received the chance to develop in form (because in accordance with Stalin's dictum the content had to be uniformly socialist), did nationalisms not wither away, leaving ideological room for the flourishing of communism? The book does not provide a straightforward answer, but does imply the answer in its narrative. The early clamp-down on any expression of Russian nationalism distanced the emergent Soviet Union from the denigrated tsarist empire and colonialism, while at the same time legitimizing it in the eyes of the ethnically non-Russian inhabitants. The "affirmative action" mentioned in the title was for them, not the Russians. Moscow allowed limited self-rule of the extant national movements in the "developed" West of the Soviet Union (including the Caucasus) as long as they did not oppose the Bolshevik state. They were even given their own national territories. This line could not be immediately followed in the East, where nationalism still had to develop roots. Traditionally, religion, family, village, clan and occupational group prevailed as the *loci* of group loyalty. Modernization meant to change this. Hence, Soviet ethnologists and linguists were charged with the task of identifying distinctive ethnic groups and transforming their dialects into written languages. As "culturally backward," these groups could not do that on their own, and so needed outside help. Stalin propounded the Herderian definition of nation, in which a nation must be grounded in its distinctive culture tied to a specific language. Eventually the

USSR established over 170 of these nations. As of 1932 the largest of them obtained their own federal republics (2), union republics (7) and autonomous republics (15). Smaller nations or minorities were granted status as autonomous oblasts (16), autonomous okrugs (10), national districts (290), national village soviets (7,000) and even national kolkhozes (10,000) (p. 413). Eventually every citizen's obligatory attachment to one and only one of these nations was noted in his/her internal passport.

This preferential treatment excluded the Russians, who were seen as over-privileged in the past and still dominant over the rest of the Soviet population. Even the Cyrillic script of the Russian language seemed incurably tainted with tsarist colonialism and the Orthodox Church's aggressive proselytism. In this paradigm the Latin alphabet equaled freedom and modernity. So between 1922 and 1932 more than sixty languages were alphabetized in or shifted to the Latin script (p. 203). Russian, Ukrainian and Belorussian only narrowly escaped latinization.

A change of heart came in 1932. Successful indigenization [*korenizatsiia*] policies, i.e., ukrainization of Ukraine and belorussianization of Belorussia, were curbed. "Affirmative action" did not attract Ukrainians and Belorussians from across the border in Poland. Actually, influences from without spread among the Soviet Ukrainians and Belorussians, to the detriment of Soviet security. Too much of *korenizatsiia* seemed anti-Russian, while the Russians and their language were increasingly seen as the necessary glue to keep the Soviet Union together. In the latter half of the 1930s this elevated them to the rank of "first among equals," while other Soviet nations were expected to cooperate. For those perceived to be "enemy nations," mass repression and ethnic cleansing awaited. Because it was no longer "imperialist" the Cyrillic script replaced the Latin one. The number of recognized nations was limited to some sixty, and national districts, village soviets and national kolkhozes were excised from the system. *Korenizatsiia* ceased to be a priority apart from the

East, where it was expected to produce badly needed indigenous cadres skilled in medicine, engineering, communication, pedagogy and the arts.

It was a "soft" policy which subsided in the face of collectivization or terror, but eventually fossilized the Soviet national-cum-administrative structure. The recently constructed nations were projected into the distant past, and primordialism became the *de rigueur* of Soviet nationalisms. I look forward to reading a follow-up study, equal in its breadth to Martin's, that would cover the outcome of this policy in the years 1940-1991.

It is a pity that in an otherwise excellent introduction Martin did not discuss Soviet terminological choices of ideological and practical meaning. First of all, why "nationality" rather than "nation" (perhaps nationality was less than a nation and, thus, not eligible to become an independent nation-state)? Second, why the interchangeable use of "peoples" and "nationalities," which was ideologically fuzzy? In view of the excruciatingly hard access to post-Soviet archives, I can hardly criticize the author for using only those located in Moscow. I trust that his brilliant work will open the way to similar thoroughly researched studies on specific Soviet nationalisms, especially in the scholarly neglected East, where conjectures are rife and socio-cultural studies (such as Olivier Roy's *The New Central Asia: The Creation of Nations*) have to fill in the gap in historical knowledge. Last but not least, Martin's book should become a basis for the comparative study of Eurasian nationalisms. It would be fascinating to trace influences and parallels between Austro-Hungarian and Soviet national policies, as well as between the latter and those in independent India. The Austro-Hungarian experiment in the liberal approach to nationalism wound up in a multitude of ethnic nation-states in East Central Europe. Indian affirmative action aimed at the caste system led to the proliferation of linguistically-based ethnic nationalisms complete with their own administrative states. One wonders whether, somehow, the Soviet Union did not function as a conveyor belt of ethnic nationalism from Central Europe to Asia.

Jacob M. Landau and **Barbara Kellner-Heinkele**, *Politics of Language in the Ex-Soviet Muslim States*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2001. 240 pp. ISBN: 0472112260. \$47.50 hardcover.

Reviewed by: **Sally N. Cummings**, Lecturer in Politics, Department of Politics, University of Edinburgh, United Kingdom, s.cummings@ed.ac.uk.

Politics of Language in the Ex-Soviet Muslim States focuses on language development in the six predominantly Muslim-populated republics in Central Asia and the Caucasus during the 1990s — Azerbaijan (the authors employ the spelling Azerbayjan), Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The collapse of the Soviet Union led all six states to embark on nation- and state-building policies, and at the core of this enterprise lay the status and corpus of titular language. Language, the authors write, “both provides for uniqueness of the group or the *ethnie* ... and differentiates it from others. It can provide both elites and masses with an extrapolation to political independence” (p. 7). The book is divided into ten chapters, five dealing more specifically with the historical and political forces behind language change and legislation, three with the specifics of lexicon, alphabet and language use, and an introduction and conclusion. Each chapter opens with a thematic overview for all six states and follows with detailed analyses of each state in turn.

Landau and Kellner-Heinkele set out to address four interrelated issues. First, they assess the reasons why governments have opted to promote titular languages in the post-independence environment. Governments, they argue, hoped both to ensure the cultural and ethnic survival of the titular nation itself and to achieve a sense of commonality among different groups by creating a wider state identity, such as, for example, Azerbaijani or Kazakhstani. These, they recognize, are common challenges of resolving the language problem in a multilingual polity, the tension between ethnic and civic conceptions of nationhood and cultural belonging. They recognize that nationalist pressures to promote the use of indigenous languages have often been constrained by the presence of substantial Slav minorities on their territories and ongoing dependency on Russia. The duality is a continuation of policy and practice in the Soviet era, which saw the development in use of both indigenous languages and the Russian language.

The second issue relates to how these governments have tried to promote their indigenous

languages. Landau and Kellner-Heinkele analyze various methods: the promotion of language use at various levels of education; alphabet and lexicon change, for example the move away from the Cyrillic script (Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan have opted to switch to the Latin script); the renaming of place and street names; the preparation and publication of textbooks and reading materials; and various legal and administrative measures.

The third area of inquiry establishes that these measures have been only partly successful, and the fourth concludes by identifying the main differences between language politics in the six republics. The authors are cautious to draw definitive conclusions after only ten years of independence, but conclude that language change “appears to have been done more successfully on behalf of the titular language in Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan; the pace has been more measured in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan” (p. 210). They conclude that the six may be divided into two groups: Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan; and Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The authors argue that the key reason for the differentiation is that the second group has a proportionately larger Slav minority, which constrains implementation, despite the fact that the Kazakhstani and Kyrgyzstani governments have devoted time and resources to language planning (with Tajikistan only really beginning to address language issues in 1998, after the 1992-7 civil war). Whatever their success, all six governments have proclaimed their commitment to multiethnicity and multiculturalism while simultaneously attempting to strengthen the corpus and status of language groups. Overall, they conclude that “despite some new solutions, most of the old problems remain” (p. 211). Underlying all of these challenges is “how to achieve and maintain policy primacy over ethnicity. The problem is more acute in new states and societies, most particularly so in multiethnic ones” (p. 204).

Even if the authors argue that it is “premature” to “formulate general theoretical deductions” (p. 204) the links between the chapters in the conclusion might have been more thoroughly

explored, elaborating on the conclusions they make about, for example, the links between the politics of independence and changes in legislation or lexicon. The authors might also have developed their analysis of existing popular surveys on language use in the six states; these surveys have often conveyed the complexity of language use at home, school and work, determined by variables such as ethnicity, profession, age and education. The book might also have explored levels beyond the national, namely regional and supranational influences. Each of the six states displays regional variations in language use, often primarily the function of a particular region's demographic make-up. International pressures, membership in international organizations and geopolitical location can also exert influences on language use.

Nevertheless, the book draws on much as yet unpublished material, including printed materials, interviews with public officials and scholars, local media, educational material and statistical data. The study is also longitudinal, assessing the period between 1988 and 1998. It is the first work to deal comparatively with the six ex-Soviet Muslim states, other volumes having tended to focus on either Central Asia or the Caucasus or both comprehensively. A further strength of the book lies in its detailed handling of one issue, the politics and use of language. This enabled the authors to go into some depth on themes such as legislation, alphabet change and lexicon. The book is also well organized. Overall the authors offer a rich and thorough treatment of this crucial stage of language choice in the context of the political development of these republics.

Uradyn Bulag, *The Mongols at China's Edge: History and the Politics of National Unity*. Lanham, MD and London: Rowman and Littlefield Publishing, 2002. xi + 273 pp., maps, illustrations, bibliography, index. ISBN: 0742511448. \$34.95 paper.

Reviewed by: **Timothy May**, Department of History, the University of Wisconsin-Madison, tmay@students.wisc.edu.

In his new book Uradyn Bulag has taken on a formidable task in examining ethnicity and national unity in the People's Republic of China (PRC). The focus of his study is the Mongol population of Inner Mongolia, their autonomous region in the PRC, in which the Mongols are a minority. Concepts of ethnicity and nationality are complicated, but Professor Bulag's book becomes more intricate due to the fact that he himself is a Mongol originally from Inner Mongolia.

As stated in the opening pages of *The Mongols at China's Edge*, the purpose of this study is "to understand the multifaceted Mongol experiences in China, past and present, and through it, to highlight broader issues pertaining to the Mongols and other peoples on China's vast border" (p. 1). In addition, Bulag, an anthropologist by training, attempts to study the development and the very concept of minorities in the PRC, particularly in the context of the *minzu tuanjie* or national unity (p. 1). Through this he explores relations between socialism and nationalism, as well as resistance to national unity and the moral dilemmas that arise.

The Mongols at China's Edge consists of seven chapters, divided into the introduction and 3 separate parts. In the first chapter or introduction to the problem at hand, Bulag sets forth the historiography of nationalism and ethnicity as well as a discussion of *minzu tuanjie*. Following this is Part One, entitled "Producing and Reproducing National Unity." Consisting of two chapters entitled "Ritualizing National Unity: Modernity at the Edge of China" and "Naturalizing National Unity: Political Romance and the Chinese Nation," this section examines the concept of *minzu tuanjie* from its origins and how concepts of nationality have changed over the course of time.

In the first chapter Uradyn Bulag states that his work asks several questions as he attempts to understand the role of ethnicity and national identity. He asks: what are the characteristics of Chinese *minzu tuanjie* and how do national groups, many of whom were enemies in the past, adjust to the harmonious atmosphere of *minzu tuanjie* in the People's Republic of China? Next he examines how Mongolian nationalism and socialism in Inner Mongolia function in China, which is also nationalistic and communist in its own right. This

leads to a third problem, namely, how does a small minority in Inner Mongolia, the Mongols, legitimately exercise autonomy as the "titular nationality of their historic homeland?" (p. 2). Finally, he asks to what extent the Mongols of China struggle to maintain or achieve cultural and historical integrity, while still maintaining the concept of *minzu tuanjie*.

The second and third chapters examine two case studies. In the second chapter Bulag undertakes a multi-disciplinary approach to the Mongols of Kökō Nur and their relationships with the Manchus, Han, and Tibetans in that region or in the government. Chapter Three examines the modern perceptions as well as the change in interpretation of Wang Zhaojun, a Han princess who was sent to be the bride of a Hsiung-nu khan. Whereas the first case study was grounded in history, the third chapter examines gender and sexuality.

The second part, entitled "Tensions of Empire," examines the conflict between various ethnicities within the PRC as well as ethnic tensions that originated in the Qing Empire. Two chapters comprise this section. The first, "From Inequality to Difference: Colonial Contradictions of Class and Ethnicity in 'Socialist' China," examines the contradictions between ethnicity and class in a socialist state. The second chapter, "Rewriting 'Inner Mongolian' History after the Revolution: Ethnicity, Nation and the Struggle for Recognition," is a study of the Mongolians' attempts to come to grips with their position within the PRC, as well as Han Chinese and the Communist government's own relationship with the Mongolians of Inner Mongolia.

The final part, entitled "Models and Morality," presents two case studies on ethnicity and nationality. The sixth chapter of the book, "Models and Morality: The Parable of the 'Little Heroic Sisters of the Grassland,'" examines how two Mongolian girls are transformed into role models for all of Communist China, while their story is changed to accommodate the idea of *minzu tuanjie*. The final chapter, "The Cult of Ulanhu: History, Memory, and the Making of an Ethnic Hero" examines the life of Ulanhu, the most prominent Mongolian figure in Inner Mongolia, and indeed, the PRC. Ulanhu (1906-1988) was the founder of the Inner Mongolia

Autonomous Region and its leader until 1947. During the 1980s he served as vice president of China, becoming the highest-ranking minority in the PRC's government. A cult of ancestor/hero worship developed after his death out of the memory of what he accomplished for the Mongolian nation in China, a cult that was partially encouraged by the government.

Bulag's study is a much-needed work on minorities in China, especially since the lion's share of attention given to this issue in the mass media is focused on Tibet and, to a lesser extent, the situation in Xinjiang. In spite of its many merits, this work suffers somewhat from poor organization. The chapters in *The Mongols at China's Edge* read as a series of articles rather than as coherent and interconnected chapters of a single book with a unifying theme. While it is certainly true that the theme is the relationship between the Mongols as a separate ethnic group and their position as part of China, there is little transition between the chapters. The major reason for this, as Uradyn Bulag states in his acknowledgments, is that chapters three, six, and seven appeared in earlier form as articles in academic journals (p. xi). However, these articles provide only the framework for later research that has been added as they form the chapters in *The Mongols at China's Edge*. Nevertheless, each chapter provides insight and they work wonderfully as separate case studies on various aspects of minority relations.

The other weakness of the book is the lack of a conclusion. Chapter seven deals with possibly the most important figure in modern Inner Mongolian history and politics: Ulanhu. Bulag's treatment of Ulanhu is thorough and admirable. While one may justifiably comment that Ulanhu represented the pinnacle of achievement in Inner Mongolia, a separate concluding chapter would have better tied all of the chapters together.

Nevertheless, Uradyn Bulag's *The Mongols at China's Edge* should be an essential read for anyone working on minorities in China, or for that matter in any region. Bulag's multi-disciplinary approach to the topic is balanced, as is his choice of subject matter in each chapter.