

**Nationality, Empire, and Politics in the Russian Empire and USSR:
An Overview of Recent Publications**

by Theodore R. Weeks

Abstract

In the past two decades, a sizeable body of research has come to look at Russia and the USSR as empires with a diversity of national-cultural-ethnic groups. This essay looks at some of the most influential works on nationality and empire in the context of Russian and Soviet history. Without raising any pretensions to comprehensiveness, this overview examines many important works exemplifying the most fruitful tendencies of this „imperial turn.“ Both general works on Russia as Empire and specific studies of individual national groups from the western borderlands to Central Asia are considered. The issue of religion and nationality in recent Russian historiography is also briefly discussed.

Abstract:

In den letzten zwei Jahrzehnten hat eine wachsende Zahl von Forschungen die Geschichte Russlands und der UdSSR als die Geschichte von Imperien mit einer Vielzahl nationaler-kultureller-ethnischer Gruppen betrachtet. Dieser Forschungsüberblick bespricht, ohne Vollständigkeit zu beanspruchen, die wichtigsten Arbeiten zu Nationalität und Imperium im Kontext der russischen und sowjetischen Geschichte. Hierbei werden die vielversprechendsten Tendenzen des „imperial turn“ berücksichtigt. Sowohl allgemeine Werke zur russischen Geschichte als Empire als auch thematisch engere Studien einzelner nationaler Gruppen von den westlichen Grenzregionen bis Zentralasien werden behandelt. Die Frage von Religion und Nationalität in der jüngeren Historiographie wird ebenfalls diskutiert.

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Not so very long ago, Russian history tended to be taught as the history of the Russian people. Over the past generation or so, in particular since the collapse of communism in the late 1980s and early 1990s, this conception has been quite thoroughly discredited. Russia, whether as the Russian Empire of the nineteenth century or the USSR of the 1930s or the Russian Federation since 1992, was not and is not a nation-state. Depending on the exact date and definition of „Russian“, between the 1860s and 1960s (the period mainly covered in this essay), Russians made up between one half and two-thirds of the population of the Russian state. Since the 1990s the study of Russia/USSR as empire has occupied a significant and growing percentage of historians of Russia. This essay aims to provide an overview of some of the major trends and practitioners of the „imperial turn“ in Russian history.

The „imperial turn“ could be defined in a number of ways. It aims to avoid a national teleology in which Russians play the leading (or only) role in the historical narrative, to emphasize the presence and significance of non-Russians in „Russian“ (*rossiiskaia*) history, and to view the Russian Empire and USSR not as would-be nation-states but as *empires*, a different kind of polity. The imperial turn also wants to problematize the very definition of „Russian,“ whether meant in an ethnic (*russkii*) or political-geographical (*rossiiskii*) sense. The history of „nationality policy,“ i.e., how the Russian center dealt with non-Russians, belongs here as does the history of non-Russians within the Russian and Soviet state. Finally, a hardly attempted but promising direction would be the comparison of the Russian/Soviet empire with other empires like the French, British, German, or American.

It is easiest to begin by stating what this essay will not attempt. It will not try to present any in-depth discussion of individual works but instead will attempt to sketch several larger trends then mention a number of outstanding works within each. While I will try to mention the most influential studies that have appeared in the past twenty years or so, I must apologize in advance for any that I have left out. It is simply impossible to include every possible book, but I do hope

that the most influential practitioners of the „new imperial history“ will receive appropriate coverage. After some background I will try to do justice to three large areas of research: general studies in empire and nationality, specific regions, and studies on specific nationalities or ethnic groups within the empire. The latter two areas will be subdivided as followed: (regions) Western borderlands, the „South“ from Moldova to Caucasus, Central Asia, the „East“ and Siberia; (religions) Jews, Muslims, Catholics.

Some background or, why the „imperial turn“?

It would obviously be incorrect to claim that historians never considered nationality and empire when writing Russian history before 1990. Indeed, one could say that the new historiography of nationality „stands on the shoulders of giants,“ that is, builds on a foundation of past scholarly achievements. One of the pioneers of the study of nationality, at least in its institutional-political guise, was the well-known Harvard historian, Richard Pipes. Pipes’s „Formation of the Soviet Union,“ first published in 1954, focuses on the period between the October 1917 revolution and the official formation of the USSR in late 1922. Pipes is primarily interested in what the incorporation of the non-Russian periphery shows us about the nature of the Soviet state. After a chapter of historical and theoretical background, the book is structured chronologically and geographically. Pipes describes the „disintegration of the Russian Empire“ in 1917, and subsequent chapters show how the Bolsheviks succeeded in extending their rule over Ukraine, Belarus, „Moslem Borderlands“ (Central Asia and Crimea), and the Caucasus. The book ends with a discussion of the working out in institutional form of relations between center and periphery that would create the USSR, with its union republics, autonomous republics, etc.

Pipes based his study on an exhaustive use of printed sources available at the time, supplemented by discussions of the national question in periodicals and assessments by foreign diplomats and other analysts. This is in essence a political and institutional history aiming

above all to show that while the creation of union republics seemed to indicate a decentralization of power, in fact this institutionalization of local-ethnic rule functioned in precisely the opposite way: helping Moscow gain control over these peripheral regions. Thus Pipes's main point of departure and fundamental interest remain in Moscow; the internal history of the national groups that appear here are interesting for this study not *per se* but almost exclusively as objects of Soviet policy.

Another pioneer of nationality studies was the French researcher Alexandre Bennigsen. Like many early scholars of Russian history in the west, Bennigsen was born in the region, in St. Petersburg just before the First World War. Bennigsen left Russia with his family after the October Revolution and became professor at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes in Paris. Among his most important works were „Le „Sultangalievisme“ au Tatarstan“ (1960), „Les mouvements nationaux chez les musulmans de Russie avant 1920“ (1964), „Islam in the Soviet Union“ (1967), and „The Islamic Threat to the Soviet State“ (1983). Bennigsen held that Muslim nations of the USSR largely resisted Russification/Sovietization and that ultimately Islam would prove a decisive factor in destabilizing the Soviet state. As we now know, despite their large numbers, Muslim nationalities were actually far less important in undermining Soviet rule than the far less numerous Baltic nationalities.¹ But Bennigsen's great contribution to the field lies not in the „predictive power“ of his research but in the solid scholarship on Islam in the USSR that often retains its usefulness to the present day.

Bennigsen's colleague in Paris, H el ene Carr ere d'Encausse, also made a significant contribution to our understanding of nationality within the USSR. Carr ere d'Encausse also began her career as a specialist on Islam in the Russian Empire and USSR („R eforme et r evolution chez les musulmans de l'Empire russe“, 1963) but later considerably broadened the scope of her historical inquiry. Possibly her most influ-

¹This point is made, for example, by Mark R. Beissinger in his „Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State“, Cambridge 2002.

ential book was published almost a decade before Mikhail Gorbachev came to power: „L'Empire  clat “ (1978; English 1979: „Decline of an Empire: The Soviet Socialist Republics in Revolt“). In many ways this is more a book of demography and political science than of history. Carr ere d'Encausse is less interested in the past development of nationalities, nationality politics, and national relations than in the present-day situation of the multiethnic empire. The author points out that the „integration“ (her word) hoped for by the Bolsheviks not only had not come to pass, but that national differences had persisted and possibly were becoming even more acute. Carr ere d'Encausse laid special emphasis on the uneven demographic development in the USSR, where the population growth was concentrated among non-Russians and in particular Muslims in largely non-industrial regions. But her conclusion, while stressing the failure of the communist state to create a uniform *homo sovieticus*, did not suggest that a breakup or even major disruptions were imminent.²

A final, well-known practitioner of „Cold War“ nationality studies is Robert Conquest, who has for decades now held the position of senior research fellow at the Hoover Institution. Conquest is an unusual figure in many respects, from his several volumes of published poetry, to the fact that for years he lived as a successful writer, to his amazingly productive career as a historian who both won a large popular audience and enjoyed respect (combined, of course, with controversy) among professional historians and Sovietologists. While Conquest is probably best known for his „Great Terror,“ his interest in nationalities is longstanding. Unlike many scholars, from the start he examined the USSR as a multiethnic empire. One of his first historical studies was „The Soviet Deportation of Nationalities“ (1960, later published under the title „The Nation Killers“) that described in detail the expulsion of eight national groups (Chechens, Ingush, Balkars, Karachai, Kalmyks, Volga Germans, Crimean Tatars, Meskehtians) from their homelands during World War II. Later Conquest published an edited volume

²H el ene Carr ere d'Encausse, L'Empire  clat , Paris 1978.

entitled „Soviet Nationalities Policy in Practice“ (1967). While „The Great Terror“ (1968, revised ed., 1990) does not develop the nationality issue in any specific way, his book on the terror famine of 1932-33, „The Harvest of Sorrow,“ sees the famine in mainly national terms, as an attempted ethnocide perpetrated by the Soviet state against the Ukrainian people. While few present-day historians would question that the famine was indeed purposely exacerbated – at least – by Stalinist policy, many question the specifically ethnic emphasis that Conquest (and, it must be said, the major of Ukrainian historians) places on the *holodomor*.³

The historians discussed thus far have many things in common: the desire (and ability) to reach a public broader than a narrow scholarly one, a burning interest in revealing the inadequacies (to put it mildly) of the Soviet system, and an approach based mainly on published sources. Two other important historians of the older generation, Edward C. Thaden and Andreas Kappeler, may be seen as transitional figures (also chronologically) between the immediate post-World War II cohort and the post-1989 group (to use somewhat imprecise terms). Thaden’s initial scholarly contribution was a book on Russian conservative nationalism (1964), followed two decades later by a history of the western borderlands of the Russian Empire. In between he published a number of significant articles and, probably most importantly, an edited volume entitled „Russification in the Baltic Provinces and Finland, 1855-1914“ (1981). In his contribution to this volume, Thaden sets down and develops three varieties of russification: unplanned, administrative, and cultural. The first refers to a more or less spontaneous, natural process by which Russian language, culture, and often religion spread, mainly among the smaller nationalities of the empire. Administrative russification was, for Thaden, the main motivation behind Russian efforts to draw the western borderlands closer to the Russian center, at least in how they were ruled. Cultural russification,

³For example, Terry Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*, Ithaca 2001, to be discussed below.

finally, would be the attempt to spread Russian language and culture among the peoples of the empire with an eye toward assimilating them to the Russian nation. Thaden argued that while contemporary non-Russians and later historians often accused St. Petersburg of pursuing policies of cultural russification, most often the Russian government viewed their own aims as much more modest, i.e., administrative russification.

Andreas Kappeler’s first major study on nationality looked at non-Russians in the middle Volga region over several centuries. „Rußlands erste Nationalitäten“ (1982) was a ground-breaking study of tsarist policy in the face of ethno-religious difference, concentrating on one specific and under-studied region. In a sense Kappeler used the middle Volga as a microcosm for the entire Russian Empire, a novel and intriguing approach. Concentrating his researches primarily on Ukraine, he has a broad interest in nationality and its ramifications for the Russian and Soviet state as a whole. His synthetic work, „Rußland als Vielvölkerreich: Entstehung Geschichte Zerfall“ (1992; published in English in 2001 as „The Russian Empire : a Multiethnic History“; the work was also translated into French and Russian) provides a sophisticated yet readable overview of nationality in the Russian Empire from the sixteenth century to 1917. He has generally confined his scholarly works to the pre-revolutionary period.⁴ Kappeler remains a very important figure among historians of nationality in the Russian Empire.

The works of the „nationality pioneers“ have many traits in common: an emphasis on factual narrative, lack of archival sources, and an often „Sovietological“ approach, that is, their works often aim to illuminate (and denounce) the situation in the present-day USSR (in the last respect Thaden is an exception, Kappeler’s works fit here only in their narrative approach). What is new among the „new cohort“ of historians of nationality? I will define this group loosely as individuals

⁴Andreas Kappeler’s *Kleine Geschichte der Ukraine*, Munich 1994, is only a partial exception to this rule, as it is more of a textbook or overview than a scholarly work strictly speaking.

finishing their Ph.D. sometime in the 1990s and publishing their first major works in that decade or even in the early 21st century. The newer works I will discuss here are all archivally-based, seldom follow a strict chronological narrative, and are generally more interested in a specific, fairly narrow question than in explicating an entire era or „nationality policy“ (or even „Islam in the USSR“) as a whole. Partly this was made possible by the research already done by the scholars mentioned here (and many others) and partly by political events quite outside of any historian’s control, in particular the collapse of the USSR. Historians within the Russian Federation and in „newly“ independent countries are also very interested in investigating their own histories through the lens of empire. In short, „empire studies“ is alive and well not only in „the West“ (however defined) but throughout the „post-Soviet space“ as well.

General Studies: Empire and Nationality

A number of studies published in the past decade or so have attempted to understand the Russian Empire and USSR as multinational states or empires. Within this rubric, some authors have delved into the position of the Russian nation (culture, language), within this polity. Others have examined the Russian Empire/USSR in the world context as one empire among others. Finally, some studies investigate in depth policies toward one or a few specific nationalities in order to draw broader conclusions about the Russian Empire/USSR as a whole. An example of the latter approach is Alexei Miller. This important specialist began his research with the „Ukrainian question“ in the Russian Empire and has lately broadened his work to draw more far-reaching conclusions about the Romanov Empire and empire in general.

Miller’s „Ukrainian Question“ looks in depth at the Russian government’s attempt to assimilate Ukrainians into the Russian nation and the opposition to these policies on the part of Ukrainian cultural activists.⁵ The subtitle of the book, „The Russian Empire and Na-

⁵Alexei Miller, *The Ukrainian Question: The Russian Empire and Nationalism in the*

tionism,“ indicates Miller’s primary interest. By looking at policies vis-à-vis Ukrainians, Miller aims to reveal the contours of Russian nationalism, both official and popular. The example is very well taken: as a large ethnic-linguistic group distinct from (Great) Russians but also close in religion, language, and historical traditions (the latter can be disputed but certainly Russian nationalists saw matters in this light), the Ukrainians could possibly have been assimilated into the (Great) Russian nation as, for instance, the Plattdeutsche or Bayern were assimilated into the German nation. Miller’s fundamental question, then, is why this did not happen.

The modern Ukrainian nation, with a standardized written language, grammar, and self-consciousness, is the product of the later nineteenth century. Miller discusses the Brotherhood of Saints Cyril and Methodius, repressed by tsarist authorities in the early 1840s, as the first organization of modern Ukrainian nationalists. As ever with such „firsts,“ one can dispute this, but more importantly is the undisputed fact that most Ukrainians, mainly illiterate and living in agricultural villages, hardly gained a consciousness of themselves as belonging to a greater nation until probably the early twentieth century. This being the case, and given the proximity of Ukrainian culture to Russian, why did St. Petersburg’s „All-Russian nation“ project (to use Miller’s phrase referring to the idea that Russians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians are but „branches“ of a single Russian nationality) fail? Miller suggests that several factors came to play. One must acknowledge the scanty resources that the Russian Empire dedicated to „assimilation,“ i.e., teaching Ukrainians to speak and read standard Russian. Miller speaks of a „window of opportunity“ (p. 257) during which the „All-Russian nation“ project could possibly have succeeded, apparently more-or-less the period between the appearance of the Cyril and Methodius society and the Revolution of 1905 (or at latest the outbreak of World War I). However, the „objective limitations of the Russian assimilating potential“ (p. 257), combined with distractions

Nineteenth Century, Budapest 2003.

caused by revolutionaries, Poles, and other ne'er-do-wells, meant that the „window“ slammed shut and Ukrainians developed as a distinct nation in the twentieth century.

I find it difficult to fault Miller's main thesis, but I would further emphasize two other factors: first, the sluggish and bureaucratic nature of the Russian imperial state – capable of reacting with considerable violence but far less competent at carrying out long-term policies and second, the general lack of a perceived urgent need to „russify“ Ukrainians. Given the enormous difficulties faced in the political, economic, and diplomatic-military fields by a modernizing Russian Empire from the 1860s, the differences between Russians and Ukrainians seemed very far from a key and burning issue. True, part of modernization is centralization (in most cases), and centralization demands a standard language. Hence, the Valuev Circular and Ems Edict restricting the development of the Ukrainian language (both discussed at length by Miller) were logical reactions to a case of annoying but hardly life-threatening particularism. In particular when faced by apparently far more dangerous enemies like Poles (who had, after all, risen up against Russian rule twice in the nineteenth centuries) and Jews (who held a particular place in the paranoid-fantasy world of the last two Russian tsars – and not for them alone!), Ukrainians must have seemed far more benevolent. More research needs to be done on the topic, but I suspect that most Russian officials assumed that if „nature“ and „history“ (categories beloved by nineteenth-century European officials and historians) were allowed to run their course, Ukrainians would „naturally“ become amalgamated into the Russian nation. For this to happen, however, the Russian government needed to stymie particularist trouble-makers (i.e., Ukrainian cultural nationalists): hence the anti-Ukrainian measures.

Since publishing „The Ukrainian Question,“ Miller has continued to publish on various aspects of imperial rule (though less specifically on the Ukrainian case *per se*). Of particular interest is his collection of

essays „The Romanov Empire and Nationalism“.⁶ These are historical musings in the richest sense of the word: sometimes based on archival documents, sometimes more interested in theoretical or definitions topics, always a bit polemical and for that reason scintillating. The essays widely differ in topic and approach. The most valuable aspect of this book, taken as a whole, is the spirited and intelligent discussion of the tension between nation and empire in Russian history. Miller argues, for example, in favor of speaking of „russifications“ to emphasize the quite different policies and attitudes lumped together in this term. The short pieces on empire and nation „in the imagination of Russian nationalism“ (more concretely, in works of Aleksandr Pypin) and on Uvarov's vision of nationality could (and should) provide the intellectual impetus for deeper and larger historical research.

Miller's interest in the broader issues of empire in a comparative vein can be seen in the essays collected in a volume edited by himself and Alfred J. Rieber entitled „Imperial Rule“.⁷ This collection features essays by Philipp Ther, Norman Stone, Maciej Janowski, Paul Werth, Dominic Lieven, Ilya Vinkovetsky, and other distinguished historians of empire. These pieces consider, among other things, the intersection of religion and empire, a comparison of Turks and Russians, the Russian Empire compared with its western competitors (especially the British Empire), and a discussion of the Russian-American company „as a Colonial Contractor for the Russian Empire.“⁸ This volume is an excellent introduction to the concept of empire not just in Russia but world-wide, with contributions from some of the most distinguished practitioners in this field.

Another, even heftier, collection of important articles on empire in the Russian Empire is „Russian Empire: Space, People, Power,

⁶Alexei Miller, *The Romanov Empire and Nationalism: Essays in the Methodology of Historical Research*, Budapest 2008.

⁷Alexei Miller/ Alfred J. Rieber, *Imperial Rule*, Budapest 2004.

⁸See also (by the same author) his very significant recent monograph: Ilya Vinkovetsky, *Russian America: An Overseas Colony of a Continental Empire, 1804-1867*, Oxford 2011.

1700-1930," edited by Jane Burbank, Mark von Hagen, and Anatolyi Remnev.⁹ The categories of study most interesting to the authors are listed in the subtitle: Space, People, Power, the latter category being divided into two chapters: institutions and „designs.“ The introduction not only does an excellent job of underlining the most important arguments presented by the essays here but also provides a valuable overview (with extensive bibliography) of recent historiography. The „space“ covered here ranges from the entire empire in the eighteenth century (Willard Sunderland), the „Imperial Center“ in the late nineteenth century (Leonid Gorizontov), Bashkiria (Charles Steinwedel), and finally to „economic regions“ (Nailya Tagirova). The final essay in this section, by Francine Hirsch, nicely meshes with and extends Tagirova's discussion of economic „regionalizing“ (*raionirovanie*) into the early Soviet period (to 1924). In all cases, the key issue is how space/territory is conceived, represented, and ultimately „divided up“ in administrative-economic schemes. The „People“ considered here include Caucasian bandits (Vladimir Bobrovnikov), „Primitive Communists“ in ethnographic discourse (Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov), Don Cossacks (Shane O'Rourke), and peasants, both ethnic Russian (Jane Burbank) and not (Paul Werth). In all of these essays the key issue is how the imperial center dealt with population – whether that be Russian peasants in court, „primitive“ tribes in the lenses of Soviet ethnographers, or *inovertsy* in the Volga-Kama region.

Power is expressed (in this book, at least, but the distinction is a nice one) through institutions and designs. Among the institutions looked at here are financial/monetary (Ekaterina Pravilova), religious-Muslim (Elena Campbell), political (the Provisional Government and Finland, Irina Novikova), and administrative. In the latter category two essays look at attempting to apply the *zemstvo* reforms to Cossack territories (Aleksei Volvenko) and the Dumas and non-Russian elites (Rustem Tsiunchuk). As for designs, three large categories are con-

⁹Jane Burbank/ Mark Von Hagen/ Anatolyi Remnev (eds.), *Russian Empire: Space, People, Power, 1700-1930*, Bloomington 2007.

sidered: how the „imperial geography of power“ viewed Siberia and the Russian Far East (Anatolyi Remnev), „Imperial Political Culture and Modernization“ (Sviatoslav Kaspe), and federalisms (Mark von Hagen). In certain ways these last essays are less satisfying than others in this volume, most likely precisely because of their broad focus which allows the authors only to suggest rather than to flesh out their ideas. Certainly this volume is required reading for anyone seriously interested in empire, nationality, and Russia.

Among the younger historians of nationality and empire, Nicholas Breyfogle and Willard Sunderland have already made their mark.¹⁰ Together with Abby Schrader, author of a path-breaking book on corporal punishment¹¹, these scholars have put together a highly useful volume on migration and colonization that intersects in a very fruitful way with empire and nationality studies.¹² This collection is remarkable in its thematic, geographical, and chronological breadth. The essays exhibit a thematic coherence as all examine some aspect of „colonization“ and „migration.“ Unlike most of the books we will consider here, this volume focuses not on ethnic minorities (an unlovely but useful term) but on Russians as colonizers. In the earliest period covered here, Valerie Kivelson discusses Russian claims on Siberia in the late Muscovite period, Brian Boeck examines Russian settlement of the steppe, and Matthew Romaniello looks at the *pomest'e* as a tool of Russian settlement in the lower Volga region in the late sixteenth and seventeenth century.

The second set of essays looks at the frontier in the imperial period,

¹⁰For reasons of space, I will not consider in any detail their excellent monographs except to say that they are highly recommended. Willard Sunderland, *Taming the Wild Field: Colonization and Empire on the Russian Steppe*, Ithaca 2004; Nicholas Breyfogle, *Heretics and Colonizers: Forging Russia's Empire in the South Caucasus*, Ithaca 2005. A recent collection that looks promising (I was unable to peruse it for this essay) is Zaur Gasimov (ed.), *Kampf um Wort und Schrift: Russifizierung in Osteuropa im 19.-20. Jahrhundert*, Göttingen 2012.

¹¹Abby M. Schrader, *Languages of the Lash: Corporal Punishment and Identity in Imperial Russia*, DeKalb 2002.

¹²Nicholas B. Breyfogle/ Abby Schrader/ Willard Sunderland (eds.), *Peopling the Russian Periphery: Borderland Colonization in Eurasian History*, London 2007.

in particular in the nineteenth century. Once again settlement of the steppe (along the Volga and into Siberia) is covered (David Moon), as is Siberia (Andrei Znamenski), Tashkent (Jeff Sahadeo), and imperial administration / „governance“ of this mass movement of settlers (Charles Steinwedel). In all four essays, the main actors are Russians: farmers, government officials, agronomists, soil scientists, *inteligenty*, workers, and ... „rock people.“ These latter (*kamenshchiki*), who form the center of Znamenski’s interesting article, turn out to be a group of several hundred Russian settlers living in southwestern Siberia who bizarrely held the status of *inorodtsy* from 1791 to 1878. Znamenski’s article pinpoints the frequent incoherence of imperial categorization but, at the same, its internal logic. They were, after all, „people out of place“ – so it „made sense“ to categorize them as „other.“

The final section of „Peopling the Russian Periphery“ focuses on the Soviet period. Cassandra Cavanaugh looks into „acclimatization,“ a field originally connected with race theories, its connections to settlement and non-Russians, and its development in the early Soviet years. Lynne Viola looks at the little-known „world of the special villages“ to which the Soviet state relegated nearly two million peasants in the early 1930s, the logic and „aesthetic“ (her word) of this enterprise. Elena Shulman investigates settlement in the Far East from the late 1930s. Michaela Pohl draws on her oral history work in the Virgin Lands to discuss ethnic relations and Soviet identity. Once again, the essays focus mainly on the Russian experience – non-Russians appear in these essays mainly as distant „others“ (with the exception of the Pohl article) – but this is an entirely reasonable focus. In many ways this research helps us better make sense of the Soviet Russian experience, multi-faceted, insecure, and subject to myriad government interventions and repressions.

One more book deserves at least a mention in our survey of recent works on nationality and empire though, strictly speaking, it focuses on neither. This is Marina Mogil’ner’s „Homo imperii,“ the history of

physical anthropology in Russia.¹³ As Mogil’ner’s title clearly points out, the designation of race, nationality, and ethnic types – a central interest of physical anthropology in the nineteenth century – can easily be used for nationalist and imperialist purposes. Traditionally it has been thought that Russians were relatively free of racial prejudices but Mogil’ner makes clear that this rosy scenario does not quite reflect historical realities. Whether or not they specifically used the word *rasa*, Russians certainly were not immune from racialized categorizing.¹⁴ Indeed, much of Jeff Sahadeo’s work on Tashkent (to name just one instance) proves this without doubt. Mogil’ner’s work is innovative both as an institutional and an intellectual history. She traces the creation of an „anthropological paradigm“ in Russia, in particular at three universities (Kiev, Kazan’, and St. Petersburg), then looks at „liberal“ vs. „nationalist“ anthropological approaches, showing how both nationalist and a kind of „multiculturalist“ (or at least tolerant and liberal) political conclusions could be drawn by researchers in the field. The book’s final section investigates the use of „applied anthropology“ in the empire in fields such as criminology, sociology, and the military. As an epilogue, Mogil’ner poses the question, „did physical anthropology become Soviet?“ Here she takes the story well into the 1920s, showing a fair amount of continuity in personnel, though usually with rather different aims and constraints. All in all, this book provides an excellent intellectual foundation for many of the ideas that underlay the nationalist/imperial mentality.

Perhaps the single best recent work on Soviet nationality policy is Terry Martin’s „Affirmative Action Empire.“¹⁵ Martin’s contribution is a considerable one: he attempts both the macro (aiming to explain

¹³Marina Mogil’ner, *Homo imperii. Istoriia fizicheskoi antropologii v Rossii*, Moscow 2008.

¹⁴On this topic, though with a different focus, see Eli Weinerman, *Racism, racial prejudice and Jews in Late Imperial Russia*, in: *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 17,3 (July 1994), pp. 442-495.

¹⁵Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*. In particular on linguistic policy, see Andreas Frings, *Sowjetische Schriftpolitik zwischen 1917 und 1941: eine handlungstheoretische Analyse*, Stuttgart 2007.

the fundamental nature of Soviet nationality policy) and the micro (presenting in some considerable detail specific of the Ukrainian and Belarusian situation) in a single (albeit rather bulky) book. For this reviewer the most important contribution of this book is to ask the simple question: what was the logic behind the sometimes benevolent, sometimes crudely repressive Soviet policies toward non-Russians. In past historiography, it is more or less taken for granted that Soviet power was inherently repressive, centralizing, and inimical to cultural diversity (not that Pipes would ever use that phrase). Indeed, this belief is extremely wide-spread nowadays in formerly communist countries.

Martin shows, following the path-breaking work by Yuri Slezkine, that on the contrary, the USSR was from the start dedicated to fixing nationality and in some cases even creating it.¹⁶ While in practical matters the Russian language became the *lingua franca* of the Soviet Union, in other ways Russian culture was hardly privileged, in particular before the 1940s. The logic behind the „Affirmative Action Empire,“ as Martin sees it, primarily aimed to prevent the development of anti-Soviet „bourgeois nationalism“ while promoting codified linguistic cultures suitable for a modern, socialist state. Martin speaks of „hard-line“ and „soft-line“ policies and institutions, the former being the familiar repressive apparatus, ethnic cleansing, purges, and the like. It is the „soft line,“ however, that interests Martin more. In particular the policy of *korenizatsiia* – „indigenization“ – dominates the book. This policy aimed to promote local cultures (in this book, especially Belarusian and Ukrainian), providing special opportunities for individuals of these nationalities to rise in professional and party hierarchies. Ethnic Russians living in the Ukrainian and Belarusian SSRs were expected – at least in principle – to learn the local languages

¹⁶I refer, of course, to Yuri Slezkine, *The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism*, in: *Slavic Review* 53,2 (Summer 1994), pp. 414-452. Slezkine's first major monograph also provides unique insight into the Russian Empire's and USSR's vision of nationality: *Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North*, Ithaca 1994.

and to cast away „Great Russian chauvinism“ (a particular bugbear of Lenin's). In reality, most Russians proved unwilling to send their children to Ukrainian or Belarusian schools and found ways to short-circuit policies aimed at promoting their non-Russian colleagues and comrades. Still, for a number of years it appeared that the „soft line“ would win out.

As is well known, by the early 1930s the „soft line“ was losing ground and in a certain sense was dealt a fatal blow by the 1932-33 terror famine. Whether or not one accepts that the famine was a genocide aimed specifically at the Ukrainian nation, it is clear that by the early 1930s ethnic particularism had come to be seen as a threat to Soviet power. Martin quotes from the November 1933 Ukrainian Central Party plenum resolution that „the greatest danger is now local Ukrainian nationalism, as it has allied itself with international intervention“ (p. 356). This „Greatest-Danger Principle“ was used to justify resettling and other repressive actions against a number of nationalities, from Karelians to Koreans.¹⁷ The nationalities that had significant ethnic brethren outside the USSR were perceived as the most potentially dangerous. In this way nationality and international politics came together, with fatal results for many (Timothy Snyder has detailed out in his „Bloodlands“ the very high incident of mortality of ethnic Poles in the repressions of the 1930s).¹⁸ And yet *korenizatsiia* – if not the actual name – lived on in certain ways, from the mainly propagandistic „friendship of nations“ to the quite considerable expenditure of resources on language and culture of non-Russians.

Martin ends his book with the line „The Friendship of Peoples was the Soviet Union's imagined community“ (p. 461). He notes that the USSR never functioned as a nation-state and never attempted to create

¹⁷Terry Martin, *The Origins of Soviet Ethnic Cleansing*, in: *Journal of Modern History* 70,4 (December 1998), pp. 813-861; Timothy Snyder, „To Resolve the Ukrainian Problem Once and for All“: *The Ethnic Cleansing of Ukrainians in Poland, 1943-1947*, in: *Journal of Cold War Studies* 1,2 (1999), pp. 86-120.

¹⁸Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin*, New York 2010, pp. 89-109.

a Soviet nationality (much less to recast the USSR as a Russian nation-state). It is true, of course, that in the USSR one could not state „Soviet“ as one’s nationality but at least on a practical level „Soviet“ was used to describe people and territory. Still, Martin’s point is well taken and remains important a generation after the collapse of the USSR when many non-Russian former Soviet citizens have „re-imagined“ the pre-1991 past as uniformly ominous and „russifying.“

A possible weakness of Martin’s book is his concentration on the two nationalities most kindred to ethnic Russians, Belarusians and Ukrainians. He also brings in data on Tatars and dedicates a chapter to *korenizatsiia* in the „Soviet East“ (meaning, apparently, the vast region from Kazan’ eastward). But the bulk of Martin’s documentation and arguments are based on the Belarusian and Ukrainian cases. As we will see, Soviet attempts to rule over and „sovietize“ the population in Central Asia for many reasons was generally unable to break out of paternalistic and inevitably Eurocentric and russocentric modes of action. But if one accepts Martin’s argument that the perceived „greatest danger“ to Soviet power was posed by the borderlands nationalities, how can one explain the fact that no single Soviet nationality suffered as high rates of fatalities in the 1930s as the Kazakhs, living far from any border and without any ethnic brethren „abroad“? Obviously other factors, including Soviet perceptions of modernization (that did not include nomadic herders), played a role, but integrating the Central Asian and Caucasian experience into the narrative of the „affirmative action empire“ remains mainly a goal for future researchers.

Another influential work looking at nations and „nationality policy“ in the USSR is Francine Hirsch’s „Empire of Nations.“¹⁹ If Martin stresses the novelty of the Soviet experience (indeed the pre-1917 empire plays little or no role in his book), Hirsch wishes to show the continuity, in both persons and in ideas, between the two states. This approach reflects the post-1991 „de-emphasizing“ of the erst-

¹⁹Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union*, Ithaca 2005.

while unbridgeable break of the Great October Socialist Revolution. Hirsch’s emphasis on knowledge, categorizing, and power (obviously a reverberation from Michel Foucault) parallels other trends in recent historiography exemplified well in the work of Peter Holquist.²⁰ Hirsch aims to show how the fledgling Soviet regime harnessed the knowledge-power of ethnographers (who had been trained and had made their initial careers in the pre-1917 empire) to sort, categorize, and administer the multifarious polity that the Bolsheviks now ruled over.

The modern state, to state a banality, is primarily an information state. In order to more efficiently administer a population, it needs a great deal of statistical information. National/ethnic data were particularly vital for a state like the USSR which formally embraced the principle of ethnicity, drew administrative boundaries based on ethnic statistics (Hirsch’s chapter on this is especially interesting), and rejected (initially) the ideal of assimilation. Hirsch demonstrates with a rich variety of specific projects, policies, and individual stories the „alliance“ – temporary but no less real for all that – between ethnographers like Sergei F. Ol’denburg and the young Soviet regime. There was a community of interest between ethnographers and early Soviet administrators in that both were vitally concerned with pinpointing with scientific accuracy the „reality“ of ethnicity. For the ethnographers this was a matter of professional pride and enthusiasm, for the Soviet leadership a matter of practical necessity. At the same time, this difference in motivations made a clash between the two inevitable. And indeed, once the borders had been drawn and the principle of *natsional’nost’* well established (a process culminating in the passport law of 1932), the ethnographers themselves became dispensable.

Hirsch’s ethnographers, like the Soviet leadership, were imbued

²⁰See, for example, Peter Holquist, *To Count, to Extract, to Exterminate: Population Statistics and Population Politics in Late Imperial and Soviet Russia*, in: Ronald Suny/Terry Martin (eds.), *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin*, Oxford 2001, pp., 111-144; and Holquist’s influential book, *Making War, Forging Revolution: Russia’s Continuum of Crisis 1914-1921*, Cambridge, Mass. 2002.

with the nineteenth-century idea of progress. In the Soviet period this was reflected in a belief that „primitive“ peoples would be improved and modernized without, however, losing the markers of their original culture. Unlike contemporary German ethnographers, Soviet ethnographers (with some exceptions that Hirsch notes) resolutely resisted biological and racial explanations. Rather than race, culture was the key distinction and – it was thought – the „primitive“ traits of certain cultures could be „improved“ (or eliminated) while retaining and developing more positive aspects. Very soon, however, already from the 1930s economic and political prerogatives of modernization were sweeping away all other considerations. At the same time, the data gathered by ethnographers for scientific purposes could easily be employed by less scrupulous agencies (the NKVD among them) to discipline and punish, for example, members of a „suspect“ nationality. World War II simply accelerated and sanctified tendencies toward „big brother“ Russian paternalism summed up in the concept of the „friendship of peoples.“ Nationally speaking, all were equal – but the Russian nation was more equal than the others.

In the USA, especially, the teaching of World History has grown enormously in the past decade. The study of empire would seem a natural match with this huge and well-funded teaching (and, increasingly, research) enterprise, but until recently few practitioners of Russian imperial history have been prominent in this field; David Christian is a notable exception.²¹ A recent important book published by two distinguished historians, one of whom is a noted Russian imperialist, may indicate an opening, so to speak, of Russia to the world. Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper’s „Empires in World History“ is in many ways a curious book. Too bulky and sophisticated to be a textbook, it is conversely too sweeping in scope to be considered a specialist monograph.²² In the end it may be classified as a „textbook“ in its effort to

²¹David Christian, *A History of Russia, Central Asia, and Mongolia*, Malden, Mass. 1998.

²²Jane Burbank/ Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference*, Princeton 2010.

cover the entire world from the time of the Roman and Han Empires to the present, but it also contains a wealth of insights and information (and decent coverage of Russia – a rare event in world history texts) that will interest and stimulate specialist historians. It will certainly be used as a „crib“ by many teachers of World History courses (including the writer of these lines). This very important book shows the intellectual sparks that can fly when empire is intelligently incorporated into the world history narrative and it is to be hoped that this example will spawn other hybrids lying somewhere between our own narrowly-focused, specialist-oriented monographs and necessarily simplified and seldom scintillating textbook treatments.

Regions I: Western Borderlands

The western territories of the Russian Empire were always perceived as the most important and in some ways the most threatening regions of non-Russian population. Initially lost to the USSR, most of these territories reverted to imperial control during World War II – some indication of the area’s continuing strategic and economic importance. The „west“ can be divided into at least four parts: Finland, which always had a specific status and ultimately was the only one of these regions successful in effecting a permanent break with imperial rule in 1918; the Baltic territories, comprising in the nineteenth century the three provinces inhabited mainly by Estonians and Latvians and joined to them in the twentieth by the Lithuanians who historically were much closer to the Poles (and did not for the most part live on the Baltic littoral); the „Western territory“ (*Zapadnyi krai*, in imperial parlance) consisting of much of present-day Belarus, Ukraine, and Lithuania (not yet „Baltic“ in imperial times); and finally the Kingdom of Poland which in imperial times was governed under special rules and laws.²³

²³For the record, I will cite my own efforts in the historiography of this region. I do not, however, feel competent to judge the value, if any, of these efforts. Theodore R. Weeks, *Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia: Nationalism and Russification on the Western Frontier, 1863-1914*, DeKalb 1996; *From Assimilation to Antisemitism: The „Jewish Question“ in Poland, 1850-1914*, DeKalb 2006.

All of the books I will discuss in this section cover the imperial period. This reflects the fact that from 1918 (and, indeed, before), Poland has been analyzed in a separate historiography as is the case for Finland and, to a lesser extent, for the Baltic countries (now including Lithuania), Belarus, and Ukraine. Unfortunately historical writing about all of these areas, with the partial exception of Poland, tends to be exclusively in the national language, closing off this historiography to all but the most intrepid (or polyglotous). The books selected for discussion show a good cross-section of topics, approaches, and geographical foci.

One of the pioneers of historical research in this western region is Daniel Beauvois whose works have not lost their importance for anyone interested in the history of Polish, Belarusian, and Ukrainian nations and cultures. Starting with his monumental history of Vilnius university, recently re-published (and immediately sold out) in Polish translation, Beauvois's works have examined the political, economic, social, and intellectual world of the Polish *kresy*, in particular their Belarusian and Ukrainian territories.²⁴ While Beauvois does consider the imperial dimension of this region, it makes more sense, I think, to think of him as a historian of Poland. Russians in Beauvois's works are mainly imperial administrators meddling in a region where they really do not belong. The „logic“ of Russian policy does not greatly concern Beauvois: he is more interested in the outcomes of policy in this region. This focus, while entirely legitimate, causes him at times to over-emphasize (at least to my mind) the denationalizing / russifying element in tsarist policy, for example in the „declassification“ of thousands of members of the Polish *szlachta* in the nineteenth century. In any case, the enormous contribution that Daniel Beauvois has made to the history of this region can hardly be overstated.²⁵

²⁴Daniel Beauvois, *Lumières et société en Europe de l'Est: L'Université de Vilna et les écoles polonaises de l'Empire russe, 1803-1832*, Paris 1977; Daniel Beauvois, *Wilno: polska stolica kulturalna zaboru rosyjskiego 1803-1832*, Wrocław 2010. Despite the different titles, the Polish volume is essentially an updated translation of Beauvois's 1977 work.

²⁵To cite only three of his most influential works: Daniel Beauvois, *Le Noble, le serf*

While Beauvois provides excellent coverage of the *kresy* from the Polish point of view, for a more Russocentric (or „Petersburg-centric“?) view, one can hardly do better than to dip into the volume on „*zapadnye okrainy*“ published in the series „*Historica Rossica*.“ Edited by Mikhail Dolbilov and Aleksei Miller, with contributions from Liliia Berezhnaia, Oleg Budnitskii, Aleksandr Makushin, Ekaterina Pravilova, Rustem Tsinchuk, and Tat'iana Iakovleva, this well-published volume provides a political, institutional, economic, and „national“ overview of the *zapadnyi krai* and Kingdom of Poland, particularly in the nineteenth century.²⁶ This book has in essence two natures: on the one hand it is a kind of textbook, aiming to cover the region with some consistency over the period from the Congress of Vienna to 1914. On the other hand, this is a specialist work and one finds some quite novel and sophisticated treatment of some subjects, in particular Ekaterina Pravilova's coverage of the economic history of the Kingdom of Poland. In a multi-authored book of this kind a certain amount of stylistic diversity is inevitable. In any case, it seems likely that most readers will pick and choose the chapters most germane to their own specific interests.

One very useful aspect of this volume is the inclusion at the end of four historiographic essays by Polish (Andrzej Nowak), Ukrainian (V. Kravchenko), Belarusian (S. Tokt'), and Lithuanian historians (Darius Staliunas). Since the majority of the population affected by the events and policies described in this book belonged to these four nationalities (regrettably no similar essay by a specialist in Jewish history of the region is included), it is only fitting that we are acquainted with the main trends in these national historiographies. The simple fact that the editors of this volume thought to commission such essays is a

et le revizor: *La noblesse polonaise entre le tsarisme et les masses ukrainiennes*, Paris 1985; Beauvois, *La Bataille de la terre en Ukraine: les Polonais et les conflits socio-ethniques*, Lille 1993; Beauvois, *Trójkat ukraiński: Szlachta, carat i lud na Wołyniu, Podolu i Kijowszczyźnie 1793-1914*, Lublin 2005.

²⁶Mikhail Dolbilov / Aleksei Miller (eds.), *Zapadnye okrainy Rossiiskoi Imperii*, Moscow 2007.

very positive sign of increased collaboration between historians of different countries, often viewing „the same events“ in a quite different perspective. Each of these essays provides an excellent bibliography of works for further study. The volume ends with some thirty pages of useful graphs and tables on population, territory, schools, military service, and high tsarist officials serving here from 1815 to 1914.

Belarusians tend to get short shrift in the historiography and unfortunately this essay will be no exception. Up to very recently, it was nearly impossible to find reasonably accurate and high-quality historical investigations of this nation's history and even now it is difficult to think of more than a handful of books that one can truly recommend. Happily, this situation appears to be changing. Rainer Lindner's „Historiker und Herrschaft“ is a pioneering study of Belarusian historians and their role in nation-building in the nineteenth and twentieth century. He has also edited (with Dietrich Beyrau) a highly useful „Handbuch der Geschichte Weißrußlands“.²⁷ Leonid Gorizontov has also edited a short volume of three roundtable discussions among Moscow historians that includes consideration of the formation of the Belarusian nation (together with the Ukrainian).²⁸ Not strictly or exclusively „Belarusian,“ but focusing on one major Belarusian city, Felix Ackermann's „Palimpsest Grodno“ deserves mention, in particular for its coverage of the „Sovietization“ and simultaneously „Belarusianization“ of the city after World War II.²⁹ Still, it is difficult to disagree that this nation of some ten million deserve not only better political institutions but also a more sophisticated historiography.³⁰

²⁷Rainer Lindner, *Historiker und Herrschaft: Nationsbildung und Geschichtspolitik in Weißrußland im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, München 1999; Rainer Lindner, *Handbuch der Geschichte Weißrußlands*, Göttingen 2001.

²⁸Leonid E. Gorizontov, *Na putiakh stanovleniia ukrainskoi i belorusskoi natsii: Faktory, mekhanizmy, sotnosheniia*, Moscow 2004.

²⁹Felix Ackermann, *Palimpsest Grodno: Nationalisierung, Nivellierung und Sowjetisierung einer mitteleuropäischen Stadt 1919-1991*, Wiesbaden 2010.

³⁰Meanwhile, see inter alia Ryszard Radzik, *Miedzy zbiorowoscia etniczna a wspólnota narodowa. Białorusini na tle przemian narodowych w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej XIX stulecia*, Lublin 2000; and A. F. Svib, *Gosudarstvenno-pravovoi status Belarusi v sostave Rossii v poreformnyi period (1861-1900)*. Monografiia, Minsk 2004.

In the past decade Mikhail Dolbilov has produced a number of detailed, sophisticated, and profoundly archive-informed publications. His monumental „Russkii krai, chuzhaia vera“ may be seen as the capstone of this stage of his career. In this huge book (999 pages long!), Dolbilov examines the intersection between religion and nationality in Russian policy in the Northwestern provinces (more or less today's Lithuania and Belarus) under Alexander II.³¹ This is an extremely detailed look at the Russian government's conceptions and policies toward Catholics and Jews, in particular in the 1860s and 1870s. Dolbilov's great contribution is to provide an exhaustive archival account of how the Russian administration thought about and tried to deal with religion in this region. „Nationality policy“ here was inevitably viewed through the religious lense. Even when laws and policies stated „Pole,“ implementation nearly always was against „Catholics.“³²

The merits of this rich work are many and obvious: it provides a detailed account of how tsarist administrators defined „Russianness“ and how they aimed to russify this land which was inevitably termed „ancient-Russian.“ At the same time, Dolbilov details the differing opinions within the local administration on just how to deal with the all-too-obvious fact that this „ancient Russian land“ at present had few Russian inhabitants. The Jewish case is also interesting in this context: Dolbilov shows that at first Jews were seen, at least potentially and by some, as allies against the Poles but very rapidly judeophobic sentiments and distrust of converts rose to the surface. True, this story of potential assimilation in the 1860s and 1870s being dashed by the pogroms of 1881 and reinvigorated government repression is rather well known, but not in the specific context of the Northwestern territory. The Catholic-Pole nexus is also well known but the at times quite activist attempts to convert Catholic peasants and the details of attempts to introduce Russian into Belarusian Catholic churches are, if

³¹Mikhail Dolbilov, *Russkii krai, chuzhaia vera: Etnokonfessional'naiia politika imperii v Litve i Belorussii pri Aleksandre II*, Moscow 2010.

³²Theodore R. Weeks, *Defining Us and Them: Poles and Russians in the "Western Provinces", 1863-1914*, in: *Slavic Review* 53,1 (Spring 1994), pp. 26-40.

not unknown, then at least never before documented so carefully. This is a very impressive and informative book.

It is daunting to critique a book of this girth and excellent scholarship. If I were to fault Dolbilov's effort, it would be in two areas. First, at times his love of archival research becomes excessive, as if each document was the central object of a historian's interest.³³ With a bit more rigorous editing, this book could have been reduced considerably in size, some anecdotes relegated to articles or appendices, with very little reduction of the book's overall scholarly worth. Secondly and somewhat related, it is my contention that at times Dolbilov exaggerates the significance of the activist russifying tsarist *chinovniki* who wished to launch campaigns against „*latinstvo*.“ There can be no doubt that these individuals existed and were at times listened to within the Ministry of Internal Affairs. And yet, these activist phases inevitably petered out after a few short years without leaving a major mark on the national-religious landscape. On the other hand, the sheer thoroughness of Dolbilov's work has its great merits: it seems unlikely that we will learn more of significance about the actual policies and discussions surrounding them. Another merit of the book is its careful contextualization of policies, discussions, and controversies in the larger discourse of nationality of the time, helping us bridge the conceptual gap between „administration“/state and „society.“

Dolbilov's volume covers the whole of the Northwestern territory but focuses mainly, one can say, on Poles and Belarusians. Darius Staliunas's „Making Russians“ concentrates specifically on the Lithuanian case (and secondarily on the Belarusians) in more or less the same period after 1863. In many ways, Staliunas's approach mirrors that of Dolbilov: a rich historical narrative based on thorough archival research.³⁴ To be sure, Staliunas's focus on a national group makes the

³³This tendency may be seen in the otherwise valuable book (covering similar territory) Anna A. Komzolova, *Politika samoderzhavii v Severo-Zapadnom krae v epokhu Velikikh reform*, Moscow 2005.

³⁴Indeed, the Russian and Lithuanian historians have produced a very interesting book together: Mikhail Dolbilov/ Darius Staliunas (Staliunas), *Obratnaia unia: Iz*

book a very different one. The Lithuanians are of particular interest as the only Christian nationality in the western provinces that was clearly and unmistakably distinct from the Slavs linguistically. On the other hand, the fact that Lithuanians (in the Russian Empire, anyway) are exclusively and fervently Catholic made Russian policy toward them at times become contaminated with anti-Polish sentiment. Given the overwhelming importance for Russian policy of the „Polish question“ in this territory, it was perhaps inevitable that Lithuanians tended to be seen in one of two ways: as potential allies of Russians or as potential Polish supporters. Staliunas's narrative helps flesh out and problematize this crude, but oft-reappearing, binary choice.

„Making Russians“ synthesizes both theoretical and topical discussions on nationality and on this region in particular, adding a good deal of novel archive-derived information to the mix. The author is particularly good at showing how contemporary Polish, Catholic, and even Jewish issues influenced thinking on policy toward Lithuanians. He skillfully weaves together the larger narratives on language, national, and religious policy with a wealth of individual actors, policies, and anecdotes. This is a very readable as well as informative book. The one major critique I have is of the title, which seems to be taken from a different era and reflects thinking that has been generally discredited in the scholarship and, worse yet, does not reflect the content of this book. In fact, Staliunas shows rather clearly that even the ostensibly most „russifying“ measure, the forcing of Lithuanian publishing to use Cyrillic (a complete fiasco, of course) was more „depolonizing“ than „russifying“ in its intent. While Russian administrators would not have shed many tears at the disappearance of Lithuanians, they also did not expend a great deal of energy to affect this cultural assimilation. Instead, we see in „Making Russians“ the fairly familiar general narrative of repressive measures and bold statements about this „an-

istorii otnoshenii mezhdru katolitsizmom i pravoslaviem v Rossiiskoi Imperii 1840-1873, Vilnius 2010. For a quite different (but also enlightening) approach to Lithuanians under Russian rule, see Vytautas Petronis, *Constructing Lithuania: Ethnic Mapping in Tsarist Russia, ca. 1800-1914*, Stockholm 2007.

cient Russian land“ followed by ... not very much. This interesting, readable, and highly informative book makes a major contribution to our knowledge both of the specifics of this region and how Russia functioned as an empire in the nineteenth century.

The Baltic region in the Russian Empire filled a quite different conceptual space for Russian public and polity. Few Russians denied that this was rather foreign territory, ruled over by Germans and inhabited by non-Slavic peasants. Only in the final decades of the nineteenth century did the Russian Empire try seriously to incorporate these territories administratively into general imperial structures and the Russian encouragement of Latvians and Estonians against the German nobility had the unintended consequence of creating a revolutionary situation which duly exploded onto the scene in 1905. In short, the Baltic provinces may serve as a case study of the inefficiency and wrong-headedness of tsarist nationality policy.³⁵

As the largest and most modern city in the Baltic provinces, Riga attracts particular interest. Ulrike von Hirschhausen's book on the city in a period of significant industrial and population growth (1860-1914) is especially noteworthy in its bringing together of social, urban, and national-ethnic issues. The book is organized by themes: the transformation of the city's population, a kind of sociology of the main four nationalities (Germans, Latvians, Russians, Jews) living here, the nationalization of political culture, development of civic culture(s), and a series of case studies under the title „the segmentation of cultural praxis.“ Von Hirschhausen does an excellent job of integrating social, intellectual, and urban history for this dynamic multi-cultural city. She shows convincingly that while in a certain sense all national groups here were becoming more similar (in the sense of becoming more modern, literate, and integrated into a growing civic sphere), they were also becoming more starkly set apart by language, culture, and identity.

³⁵Thaden's Russification in the Baltic Provinces and Finland remains very helpful in establishing basic historical events and policies.

Only in the final decade of the nineteenth century did the number of Latvians in the city surpass that of Germans but in the pre-1914 period no single nationality was in the majority. The German community was in many ways dominant financially, while the Latvians were growing rapidly in numbers, but as a rule were poorer and less educated than other national groups. Thus even as these groups defined themselves more and more along national-linguistic lines they were also constrained to avoid overt conflict with others. This study details the development of not one „civil society“ but several, not entirely mutually exclusive, but for most purposes defined by language and ethnicity. One hopes that an enterprising young historian will continue this fascinating story to the present day.

Regions II - The „South“

This section and the next focus on regions of the Russian Empire / USSR that are far less familiar to me than the west. The first I call simply „the south,“ a term chosen only for convenience to designate the southern steppes and the Caucasus. I can certainly claim no expert knowledge of this region but will attempt, at least, to present some of the most promising recent scholarship.

„The steppe“ can be variously defined and, as Russian settlement moved southward this once „wild field“ became increasingly tamed. In many ways, Russian history of the pre-Petrine period can be described as one of expansion over flat land. To the south and southeast that land was the steppe. Michael Khodarkovsky's „Russia's Steppe Frontier“ provides a fascinating narrative of this expansion of the Muscovite/Russian state of the interplay and clashes between Russians and the nomadic peoples who inhabited the steppe.³⁶ As the Russian frontier marched south and east, Russians came into contact with a number of mainly Muslim peoples. The interplay between Russian and these peoples is one of Khodarkovsky's main topics.

³⁶Michael Khodarkovsky, *Russia's Steppe Frontier: The Making of a Colonial Empire, 1500-1800*, Bloomington 2002.

Russian expansion into the steppe and clashes with the nomadic people there were, Khodarkovsky argues, inevitable given the different political and sociological structures of these two societies. As a modernizing state, Muscovy/Russia demanded stable borders and could not tolerate raids and „endemic guerilla warfare“ in what it considered Russian territory. The nomadic peoples, on the other hand, were economically and culturally dependent upon such raids and did not conceive of territory as something that one man – or state – could control absolutely (one thinks of Tolstoy’s „How Much Land Does a Man Need“). These opposing world views meant that agreements between Russians and, say, Nogays, Kalmyks, or Kazakhs (all three groups are discussed in some detail here), were understood quite differently on the two sides.

Russia came to regard the agreements with, say, the Kalmyks, as binding pacts between a dominant and a subordinate party. The Kalmyks, on the other hand, regarded these treaties as mutual obligations between two independent parties which could be abrogated if the other side did not live up to its responsibilities. For Moscow, the Kalmyks’ continued independent behavior was simply treason that warranted stern punishment.³⁷ What Khodarkovsky is describing is a classic imperialist scenario that has played out in the Americas, Oceania, Asia, and Africa at least since the sixteenth century. The great merit of this book is to acquaint English-speakers with this Russian example which one hopes will lead to interesting and thought-provoking comparisons with similar scenarios in other parts of the world.

In his „Taming the Wild Field“ Willard Sunderland plows, so to speak, the same field as Khodarkovsky, though a bit further west.³⁸ The two books share the locus of the steppe, an interest in imperialism through colonization, but not much else. Sunderland’s story is far more Russian (and Slavic) than Khodarkovsky’s, more concerned

³⁷The tragic Kalmyk example is the central topic of Khodarkovsky’s earlier *Where Two Worlds Meet: The Russian Steppe and the Kalmyk Nomads, 1660-1771*, Ithaca 1992.

³⁸Willard Sunderland, *Taming the Wild Field: Colonization and Empire on the Russian Steppe*, Ithaca 2004.

with the steppe itself (as land and physical environment), and his *dramatis personae* are more varied. The steppe (and the book) passes chronologically through periods of pacification/taking possession of the land, „enlightened colonization“ (predictably, under Catherine II), „bureaucratic colonization“ (the early nineteenth century), „reformist colonization“ (from the creation of the Ministry of State Domains in 1837 to ca. 1870), and finally „Correct Colonization“ (or „scientific colonization“ in the era of high imperialism). While the periodization may seem schematic, even a bit flip, on the whole it works. Throughout, Sunderland backs up his characterizations with innumerable anecdotes based on a great deal of research. Sunderland’s work is at point explicitly comparative (with other world regions) showing, I think, both the importance of his topic and the growing integration of our field into world history. In the end this book tells us as much about the mentality of official Russia as it informs us of specific events and trends on the steppe. And this is exactly as it should be in a book investigating empire.

Heading south from the steppe, passing through Mikhail Gorbachev’s hometown of Stavropol’, one reaches the Caucasus Mountains, one of the most ethnically-rich areas in the world. The present border between the Russian Federation on the one hand and Georgia and Azerbaijan on the other runs along these peaks. On the „Russian“ side, even today, there live a number of national groups including Ossetians, Chechens, Avars, Kumyks, Lezgians, and others. This is the territory covered by „Severnyi Kavkaz v sostave Rossiiskoi Imperii,“ another volume in the series „Okrainy Rossiiskoi imperii.“³⁹ It begins with a historiographical essay on the fates of this region in Soviet times, then proceeds in a mainly chronological fashion beginning in the eighteenth century and ending in the Duma period.⁴⁰ The book

³⁹Vladimir O. Bobrovnikov/ Irina L. Babich/ Dimitrii Iurevich Arapov (eds.), *Severnyi Kavkaz v sostave Rossiiskoi Imperii*, Moscow 2007.

⁴⁰On the topic of orientalizing perceptions of the Caucasus, Susan Layton’s book is still unsurpassed and curiously is not cited here: Layton, *Russian Literature and Empire: Conquest of the Caucasus from Pushkin to Tolstoy*, Cambridge 1994.

contains very informative and useful narratives, if at times a bit old-fashioned. However, the authors have made great efforts to integrate recent historiography into their approach. This book will prove very useful in establishing the historical narrative for historians wishing to pursue research on or in this region.⁴¹

Moving across the high peaks of the Caucasus range we arrive at Jörg Baberowski's „Der Feind ist überall.“⁴² The main topic here is Soviet rule in Azerbaijan to the mid-1930s and in particular Soviet terror. Baberowski ties Soviet policies and attempts to „modernize“ Muslim Azeris (still generally known simply as „Tatars“ into the early Soviet period) with the late tsarist „civilizing mission“ here. The book is impressive and not just for its length: it covers educational policy, anti-religious (i.e., anti-Muslim) campaigns, administrative changes, village life, collectivization, and of course terror. The volume fairly bristles with specific anecdotes, many of them hair-raising, of the impact Soviet power had on life for Azeris. The narrative is based on profound published and archival research but, interestingly, without Azeri language sources. To be sure, the Soviet authorities here left records primarily in Russian and Azeri historiography until recently could not investigate these issues in any serious way. Still, one cannot help but think that this concentration on Russian, official documents somewhat warps the narrative, at least in the sense that it makes the narrative reflect the official line, and ironically thereby makes the stark brutality of the period seem even more overwhelming and ubiquitous. Be that as it may, the book is a huge contribution both to our understanding of Soviet rule in Azerbaijan and to the discussions of Soviet nationality policy, *korenizatsiia*, and the terror.

⁴¹On this region, see also Thomas M. Barrett, *At the Edge of Empire: The Terek Cossacks and the North Caucasus Frontier, 1700-1860*, Boulder, Colo. 1999, and Austin Jersild, *Orientalism and Empire: North Caucasus Mountain Peoples and the Georgian Frontier, 1845-1917*, Montreal 2002.

⁴²Jörg Baberowski, *Der Feind ist überall. Stalinismus im Kaukasus*, München 2003.

Regions III - Central Asia

The Caucasian region has been strangely neglected in recent historiography, at least compared to the next region we will consider, Central Asia.⁴³ The past decade has seen an amazing burgeoning of research and publishing on this fascinating and important area. To be sure, historians such as Alexandre Benningsen, Edward Allworth and Michael Rywkin had been researching and publishing on this region decades earlier.⁴⁴ Among these early researchers was Seymour Becker whose „Russia's Protectorates in Central Asia. Bukhara and Khiva, 1865-1924“ first appeared in 1968. Happily, this classic has recently been reissued with a useful new introduction and bibliography⁴⁵, but no further attempt to update the material. Nonetheless, the coverage is thorough if old-fashioned: political, diplomacy, military campaigns, economic development, absorption into the USSR. That short list indicates the broad scope of this study which begins in the mid-nineteenth century and ends in 1921. As one would expect from a western work on Central Asia researched in the 1960s, archival sources are not used, but Becker bases his findings on an amazingly thorough survey of published sources. Becker's fact-dense study speaks to many recurring themes of Russian/Soviet Central Asian history: the lack of well thought-out plans of conquest and consolidation of power, mutual distrust between Russians and local peoples (and their rulers), complex economic relations, and the peculiar paternalistic-imperial relations that developed between Central Asian territories and St. Petersburg.

Going from the microcosm of Khiva and Bukhara to a general account of Central Asia in the imperial period, we find the appropriate volume in the series „Okrainy Rossiiskoi imperii,“ „Tsentral'naia Aziia v sostave Rossiiskoi Imperii.“⁴⁶ This is a very useful overview

⁴³In part, this may reflect the reviewer's own weaknesses and ignorance.

⁴⁴Still very useful is the compendium of articles and bibliographic information: Edward Allworth (ed.), *Central Asia: 130 Years of Russian Dominance, A Historical Overview*, 3d ed., Durham 1994.

⁴⁵Seymour Becker, *Russia's Protectorates in Central Asia. Bukhara and Khiva, 1865-1924*, London 2004.

⁴⁶Sergej Nikolaevich Abashin/ Dimitri Iurevich Arapov/ Natalj E. Bektakhanovna

of Russian rule in this rather amorphous region (the authors do devote several pages to explaining the complications in setting precise boundaries), more or less Kazakhstan, „Turkestan“ (to use the imperial phrase), and Bukhara/Khiva. The authors (who number over a dozen) cover a number of important topics: administration, military conquest, socio-economic and demographic development, education, press, Russian cultural influences and russification, migration, religious policy, and a very interesting chapter on national classifications. The main political story is taken all the way to 1920 when Soviet power is being established (though not yet very firmly) here.⁴⁷ The image of Central Asia in Russian society is considered, as is present-day Kazakh and Uzbek historiography. On the whole the coverage is, if not precisely pro-Russian, then at least not condemnatory. On the whole Russian rule here is portrayed as a positive influence toward economic, social, and political modernization. Whether or not one accepts this evaluation, this volume will be extremely useful as an overview and political history of the Russian Empire in Central Asia.⁴⁸

If the previous work centered on Russian rule and influence, Adeeb Khalid's „Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform“ has its focus squarely within the Muslim community in Central Asia.⁴⁹ Khalid focuses on the *Jadids* whose „new method“ aimed not only to modernize Muslim society and to update Muslim religious practices but even more ambitiously wanted to create one single unified „Turkic“ people using a single standardized language. The story of *jadidism* is fascinating on a number of levels: essentially, the movement strove to create an entirely new, modern, progressive Turkic Muslim nation. One may see paral-

(eds.), *Tsentrāl'naia Aziia v sostave Rossiiskoi Imperii*, Moscow 2008.

⁴⁷For more on the tragic fate of Central Asia in the early revolutionary years, see Marco Buttino, *La Rivoluzione capovolta. L'Asia centrale tra il crollo dell'impero zarista e la formazione dell'URSS*, Naples 2003.

⁴⁸A recent work that provides a corrective to the overly Russo-centric and political coverage in „*Tsentrāl'naia Aziia v sostave Rossiiskoi Imperii*“ is the more sociological approach of Paul Georg Geiss, *Pre-Tsarist and Tsarist Central Asia: Communal commitment and political order in change*, London 2003.

⁴⁹Adeeb Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia*, Berkeley 1998.

els in contemporary Jewish cultural and political movements: both advocated „modernization“ in order to integrate their own religious-national communities into the modern world as respected cultural-religio-national groups. But the *Jadids* faced very specific problems, from the variety of mutually incomprehensible Turkic „dialects“ to the huge territory Muslims inhabited to the overwhelming levels of illiteracy and, of course, the very hostile attitude of the Muslim religious establishment. For all these reasons the *Jadids* failed across the board and yet, it was a noble failure that showed a first serious effort to deal with the pressures of modernization on the Muslim/Turkic community. The brief period of influence of individual *Jadids* within Soviet Central Asia only makes more poignant their sidelining (or worse) in the late 1920s and 1930s.

Khalid's study provides a multi-layered introduction to the *Jadids*, their times, and the cultural-religious setting in which they operated. He discusses the individuals leading the reform movement, their use of the press and schools, their proposals for religious and social reform, and opposition to their ideas from the religious establishment and conservative Muslim elites. Khalid's research is thoroughly grounded not only in western and Russian-language scholarship, but also in nineteenth-century and present-day works in Central Asian languages. Khalid's was one of the first – if not *the* first – serious post-Soviet western research monograph on Central Asian history. Well over a decade after its publication it remains a basic work for understanding tsarist Central Asia.

Another influential book by a member of the younger generation of scholars is Jeff Sahadeo's „Russian Colonial Society in Tashkent.“⁵⁰ The title is slightly misleading: true, the main focus is Russian rule and Russians in the capital of Turkestan, but in reading this book one gains a good deal of knowledge about the local peoples resident here. The great originality of Sahadeo's work is to look at Tashkent as a colonial

⁵⁰Jeffrey Sahadeo, *Russian Colonial Empire in Tashkent, 1865-1923*, Bloomington 2007.

metropolis where „European“ (Russian) norms and practices clashed with „Asian backwardness.“ This dichotomy is familiar in studies of the British or French empires but is quite novel in the Russian case.⁵¹ Sahadeo is just as interested in how Tashkent acts on Russian mentality and social structures as he is in the more obvious colonizer-„native“ distinction. As his research shows, Russian society in Tashkent quickly developed strong social, economic, and political tensions that paralleled those of late imperial Russian cities in Europe.

By taking his book into the Soviet period Sahadeo shows rather clearly parallels between the paternalist attitudes of would-be Russian modernizers here and the similar outlook of Soviet „enlighteners.“ While „race“ was seldom an explicit category used by Russians in Central Asia, their self-image and attitude toward local peoples were firmly grounded in racial categories. Well documented with both archival and published sources, „Russian Colonial Society in Tashkent“ vividly portrays the creation of a Russian city in the middle of Central Asia.

Daniel Brower’s short book „Turkestan and the Fate of the Russian Empire“ takes up many of the same topics as Sahadeo’s book.⁵² Brower’s focus and argument, however, differ significantly. The main question here is why the Russian Empire’s attempt to build a stable colony failed: Brower’s first chapter on the Turkestan revolt of 1916 examines the most obvious indication of a fatal flaw in Russian policies here over the past half-century. Beginning with „failure,“ Brower then proceeds back to the founding of Russian colonial rule here to tease out the reasons for this debacle. The main trigger of the 1916 revolt, it seems, was the creation of a „settler-colony“ in the 19th century with the in-migration of hundreds of thousands of European farmers to the steppe. None of these arguments are particularly novel for specialists, but Brower is able to back them up with much more archival and

⁵¹Interestingly, one observes this „colonial relationship“ even in the early nineteenth century in Russian Alaska. Ilya Vinkovetsky, *Russian America : an Overseas Colony of a Continental Empire, 1804-1867*, Oxford 2011.

⁵²Daniel Brower, *Turkestan and the Fate of the Russian Empire*, London 2004.

published material than researchers hitherto and thus provides an excellent introduction to the fortunes and failures of Russian colonization in Central Asia.⁵³

Only very recently have Russianists begun to compare, even implicitly, the policies and attitudes in their own research with those exhibited by colonizers in other parts of the world. The only extended comparison of British and Russian colonial practices in Asia to date is Alexander Morrison’s remarkable „Russian Rule in Samarkand 1868-1910: A Comparison with British India.“⁵⁴ As Morrison himself admits, the huge differences between Russian Central Asia and British India, from religious make-up to length of imperial stay to physical aspect of the land, might seem to make a comparative study absurd or an exercise in comparing apples to oranges. In fact, however, in particular in the region of Morrison’s main research (the Zarafshan Valley with the main city of Samarkand), the two imperial experiences may be fruitfully studied. Morrison does so by examining a number of aspects of rule, including dealing with religion, supplanting (at times integrating) existing administrative/economic structures with colonial ones, military and civilian administration, irrigation, and the judiciary. Morrison’s conclusions echo those of Daniel Brower: in its fifty years of rule in Central Asia, Russia was signally ineffective in creating an efficient and stable administration. Instead, the Russian administration here was staffed by ill-educated, ill-paid, and largely corrupt individuals; the native elites created by Russian rule were even worse from the point of view of efficient bureaucratic rule and modernizing. But even the Soviets – who were far more activist and less concerned about employing repression and violence – puzzled over the problem of ruling this region.

The fate of Central Asia in the Soviet period is a major research topic among young scholars and research students. Two path-breaking

⁵³See also the earlier edited volume: Daniel R. Brower/ Edward J. Lazzerini (eds.), *Russia’s Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700-1917*, Bloomington 1997.

⁵⁴Alexander S. Morrison, *Russian Rule in Samarkand 1868-1910: A Comparison with British India*, Oxford 2008.

books in this field appeared in 2004. I will cover them alphabetically, beginning with Adrienne Edgar's „Tribal Nation.“⁵⁵ At the beginning of Soviet rule, the Turkmen were among the most „backward“ of any major national group there. Indeed, while a Turkmen identity was recognized, there was no standardized language and specific clans of Turkmen were intermittently at war with each other. As a nomadic people, the Turkmen had little use for written language or standardization, but as a modern state, the USSR frowned on nomadism and embraced standardization as a basic administrative and nation-building principle. Remarkably, as Edgar notes, the Turkmen received their own union republic (SSR) already in 1924. Thus they were well positioned to take advantage of *korenizatsiia*. But, as Edgar shows, Russian resistance to this „affirmative action“ took on many forms. Russians in Soviet Turkmenistan found ways of privileging other Russians. Their contempt for publications in the Turkmen language is shown in a number of amusing cartoons that Edgar reproduces here. Despite these difficulties, by the 1930s a recognizable Soviet Turkmen national elite, modern and bilingual, was taking shape, though at the cost of exacerbating relations between Turkmen and Russian residents.

As Edgar demonstrates, the „making of Soviet Turkmenistan“ in the 1920s and 1930s involved compromises between Bolshevik ideology, modernization, and Turkmen cultural norms. The new Turkmen elite had little problem embracing a new, standardized language, learning Russian, becoming accustomed to living in cities, and even allowing their women a public role. But the actual definition of nation remained for Turkmen genealogical rather than cultural or linguistic. The chapters on language standardization and on the „woman question“ are particularly interesting to compare with similar policies in other Soviet republics. Another, more tragic, union-wide policy was collectivization. Edgar shows that widespread Turkmen resistance was facilitated by the possibility of flight across the long border with Turkey and Iran. It would have been interesting to continue this

⁵⁵Adrienne Edgar, *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan*, Princeton 2004.

story through World War II as the war is generally acknowledged to have been a major moment in the crystallization of Soviet identity. Still, Adrienne Edgar's „Tribal Nation“ is a major contribution to our understanding of the creation of a modern Turkmen nation, Soviet Turkmenistan, and Soviet nationality policy.

A final major recent work on Soviet Central Asia is Douglas Northrop's „Veiled Empire“.⁵⁶ Brilliantly combining historical and anthropological insights, Northrop focuses on the veil (and de-veil-ing campaigns) in Soviet Uzbekistan in the 1920s and 1930s. Then and now, Muslim attitudes toward women seems an obvious target for westernizing reform. Just as some cities and countries in the early twenty-first century seek to improve Muslim women's status by outlawing the wearing of certain garments, Soviet activists of the 1920s saw the veils that Uzbek women wore as embodying all that was backward, stultifying, and appalling in local religious and cultural practices. In 1927 in a major campaign party activists argued that by showing their faces in public, Uzbek women both liberated themselves and offered up a potent symbol of a new, liberating, Soviet era. As Northrop shows, the campaign (and others like it) was both ineffective and had the unintended consequence of elevating the veils to key markers of Uzbek identity. Soviet reactions (including those of Uzbek activists) to the veil as well as to campaigns against it provide Northrop with a marvelous single issue around which crystallize a number of aspects in Soviet (and Russian) - Uzbek relations, from modernization to paternalism to definitions of national-cultural distinction and even to criminality. Stalin's USSR was a state that did not hesitate at unleashing hugely violent campaigns: why, then, did Soviet Uzbek authorities not simply outlaw the veil? For the answer and many other insights into the formative period of Soviet Central Asia, read Douglas Northrop's „Veiled Empire.“

⁵⁶Douglas Northrop, *Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia*, Ithaca 2004.

Nationality and Religion

An aspect of nationality and of imperial rule not always easy for westernizers to understand is the nexus between religion and nationality. To be sure, every American knows that Poles are inevitably Catholic (unless, of course, they are Jews) and Germans recognize that a Lutheran Bavarian is an exception. In the Russian Empire, where nationality had no legal status (unlike in the USSR), religion often functioned as a prime indicator of nation.

Both the Russian Empire and the USSR had to deal with religion on a number of levels. For the Russian Empire, religion was seen mainly as a positive and inevitable aspect of human life. However, certain aspects of religion and some specific religious leaders (the Polish Catholic clergy, among others) were regarded with grave suspicion. In the USSR, on the other hand, while religious freedom was ostensibly guaranteed, religion was relegated to the category of beliefs that were outmoded, which complicated Soviet policy toward nationalities firmly associated with a specific religion such as Poles, and more obviously Jews and Muslims of any nationality.

Religion as an aspect of nationality in the Russian Empire and USSR has long been part of the scholarly landscape, particularly in the example of Jewish history. Certainly Jewish history in this context has produced a number of impressive studies. In what follows I would like to discuss the religious-national-imperial nexus using a few quite varied but all excellent recent works that look at how considerations of Jewish, Muslim, and Christian denominations affected Russian and Soviet nationality policy.

The most obvious intersection between religion and nationality in the Russian case, indeed arguably in world history, is the Jewish religion/nation. In the context of East-Central Europe and Russia before World War I, Jews were not simply a religious group but were recognizably a nation with their own calendar, customs, eating habits, dress, and language(s). While a sizeable group of acculturated Jews had developed within the Empire (indeed, at least two major groups –

Polish Jews and Russian Jews) by 1900, the persistence of primordial attitudes is revealed even in language: one speaks always of *russskie evrei* („Russian Jews“), while the phrase *evreiskii russkii* („Jewish Russian“) sounds peculiar or even laughable. Attempts to modernize Jewish identity go back at least to Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786) and developed in a variety of directions: assimilation, acculturation, and nationalism (Zionist, Bundist, and „other“). Modernizing Jewish religious and everyday life called forth a number of conflicts both within the Jewish community and with non-Jewish neighbors. The best known of the Gentile reactions to Jews and modernization (to put matters baldly) is antisemitism.⁵⁷

If earlier generations of researchers in the history of Russian Jewry tended to emphasize pogroms, antisemitism, and government repression, it seems fair to say that recent works are more interested in accommodation, „using the system,“ and survival strategies.⁵⁸ No one disputes that the Russian Empire (and, in different ways, the USSR) was not hospitable to Jews but given this generation’s interest in social history and the view from the „bottom down,“ the way that Jews managed to live and even prosper in these hostile conditions have been more interesting as a research topic than the well-known narrative of victimhood. An excellent example of this tendency is Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern’s „Jews in the Russian Army.“⁵⁹ Petrovsky-Shtern does not, of course, deny that life in the Russian army was difficult for

⁵⁷Much remains to be done in tracing the intellectual and social origins of modern antisemitism in the context of the Russian Empire. Meanwhile, see Heinz-Dietrich Löwe, *The Tsars and the Jews: Reform, Reaction, and Antisemitism in Imperial Russia, 1772-1917*, Chur 1992; Weeks, *From Assimilation to Antisemitism*.

⁵⁸To name just a few of the works in Jewish history that have changed the landscape of that subfield of Russian history in the past decade or so: Gabriella Safran, *Rewriting the Jew: Assimilation Narratives in the Russian Empire*, Stanford 2000; Benjamin Nathans, *Beyond the Pale: The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia*, Berkeley 2002; Jeffrey Veidlinger, *Jewish Public Culture in the Late Russian Empire*, Bloomington 2009; Kenneth Moss, *Jewish Renaissance in the Russian Revolution*, Cambridge 2009; David Shneer, *Through Soviet Jewish Eyes: Photography, War, and the Holocaust*, New Brunswick, NJ 2011.

⁵⁹Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, *Jews in the Russian Army, 1827-1917: Drafted into Modernity*, Cambridge 2009.

many Jews. But he shows rather convincingly that many Jews were highly successful in maintaining Jewish identity even while serving as Russian soldiers.

The book's subtitle indicates its main thrust: „drafted into modernity.“ That is, Jewish soldiers were forced into a system that was alien and in many ways hostile to them, but they found methods of resistance and self-preservation that allowed many, in the end, to emerge „from the army as robust, strong-willed, reliable, Russian-speaking individuals“ (p. 270). Perhaps Petrovsky-Shtern is exaggerating the positive here, but his main point is well taken. Serving in the military was one of the major engines of modernization and nationalization throughout Europe. The crucial point is that while Russian Jews were „equalized“ in responsibilities toward the state, they were denied equal rights. But even here one can exaggerate Jewish disabilities: after all, Russian peasants even after 1861 were for the most part denied free mobility and no subject of the tsar (one can only with qualification speak of „citizens“ before 1917) enjoyed full civil rights. This is a remarkable book showing that Jews in the Russian army, while often mistreated, discriminated against, and subject to a variety of hardships, were not simple victims but active participants in a process of modernization. At turns scintillating, provocative, and amusing, this book has much to tell us about the way the Russian Empire dealt with ethnic-religious difference and the way Jews bent but did not break (or assimilate) within one of the least liberal institutions of the Russian Empire.⁶⁰

If the army is one vehicle for modernization, schools are an even more obvious one. The Russian Empire's confused and contradictory attitude toward its Jewish subjects is reflected in the vagaries of policy concerning Jewish education. These ups and downs can be seen in the development and fates of the „rabbi schools“ of Warsaw, Vilna (Vilnius), and Zhitomir, the center of Verena Dohrn's book on „Jewish

⁶⁰For a parallel account of conscription, cantonists, Jewish society, and the Russian Empire, based primarily on literary sources, see Olga Litvak, *Conscription and the Search for Modern Russian Jewry*, Bloomington 2006.

elites.”⁶¹ The idea behind these seminaries was simple: these schools would train a new generation of teachers and rabbis who would then spread the Russian language and „enlightenment“ among the Jews. From the start, however, these institutions were plagued by hostility from the Jewish community as well as an attitude ranging from lukewarm to downright chilly from Russian administrators themselves. The seminaries in Vilna and Zhitomir lasted only a long generation, from the late 1840s to the early 1870s, and were subsequently converted into normal schools (teachers' colleges).

Dohrn argues that these institutions were crucial in creating a new „Jewish elite“ that was Russian-speaking, progressive, and influential. Like Petrovsky-Shtern, she wants to show this new class of educated Jews as successfully navigating the disabilities posed by the Russian imperial government to serve as a „bridge“ between the larger traditional community and the Russian intelligentsia. In order to make this argument Dohrn describes in great detail the existing communal structures within which Russian Jews lived, the Rabbi Schools themselves, their curriculum, faculties, and students, and the careers as well as ideas of some of the graduates. These teachers and graduates formed the core of a future acculturated and loyal Russian Jewry (on the model of German Jews in this period).⁶² This class of acculturated Russian Jews pegged their loyalty not on the Russian state but on Russian culture and by extension, on the Russian intelligentsia. Dohrn's book provides a detailed and scholarly overview of how this core of educated Russian Jews was formed as well as its aspirations for uplifting and modernizing the Jewish masses in Russia. Unfortunately for all concerned, that process ended up devolving to a much more ruthless set of modernizers, the Bolsheviks.⁶³

⁶¹Verena Dohrn, *Jüdische Eliten im Russischen Reich. Aufklärung und Integration im 19. Jahrhundert*, Cologne 2008.

⁶²For another view of Jews and the modernizing process, concentrating on the two capital cities, see Yvonne Kleinmann, *Neue Orte - neue Menschen: Jüdische Lebensformen in St. Petersburg und Moskau im 19. Jahrhundert*, Göttingen 2006.

⁶³For a provocative argument about Russian-Jewish modernization in the twentieth century, see Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish Century*, Princeton 2004.

Jews were the most predominant non-Christian religion in the mind of St. Petersburg officialdom, but Muslims came close. As we have seen, the Russian conquest of Central Asia brought large numbers of Muslims into the empire, adding to those along the Volga and in the south, and forcing the empire to formulate more explicit policies toward Islam. In his „Prophet and Tsar,“ Robert Crews argues that the encounter between Islam and the Russian Empire was characterized less by conflict than by accommodation and a process of Muslim elites using imperial structures to buttress their own position and power.⁶⁴ In essence, following Crews’s argument, the Muslim elites had much in common with the imperial authorities: both were fundamentally conservative and deeply committed to keeping order. In particular in Turkestan and other Muslim regions, the enlightened impulse one encounters among progressive Russian administrators in the west was nearly seldom predominant. The Russian administration tended to embrace the status quo in order to avoid antagonizing the elites upon whom this stability seemed to depend. Crews demonstrates how this mutually advantageous relationship worked in a number of ways. This is a sweeping book covering well over a century of interaction between Islam and empire in a number of very diverse locales, so it is not surprising that specialists have not accepted all of Crews’s arguments.⁶⁵ Nonetheless, as a novel and well-researched approach to the complex attitude of the Russian Empire to the second-largest religion in the Empire, this book merits a wide readership.

If Islam and paganism were among the most „alien“ religions practiced in the Russian Empire⁶⁶, certain denominations of Christianity appeared no less threatening. In particular official Russia regarded

⁶⁴Robert Crews, *For Prophet and Tsar. Islam and Empire in Russia and Central Asia*, Cambridge 2006.

⁶⁵See, for example, the critical review by Alexander Morrison published in *The Slavonic & East European Review* 86,3 (July 2008), pp. 553-7.

⁶⁶For a fascinating account of a region populated by Christians, Pagans, and Muslims (with the boundaries between these groups not always clear), see Paul Werth, *At the Margins of Orthodoxy: Mission, Governance, and Confessional Politics in Russia’s Volga-Kama Region, 1827-1905*, Ithaca 2002.

Catholicism, always associated with the Poles, with grave misgivings. And one step away from Catholicism was the Uniate (or Greek Catholic) church, in a certain sense even worse than Catholicism itself because it blurred the boundaries between Orthodoxy (*Pravoslavie*) and Catholicism. The tsarist government „re-united“ (the word „conversion“ was always avoided) Uniates with the Orthodox Church in the late 1830s and 1875.⁶⁷ The example of the Uniate church is just one facet of the complicated borderlands of Orthodoxy and Catholicism that forms the center of Ricarda Vulpius’s study „Nationalisierung der Religion.“⁶⁸ Vulpius is particularly interested in the relationship between the Russian Orthodox church and the formation of the Ukrainian nation. The Orthodox church in its Ukrainian diocese played an interesting and double role: on the one hand, protecting local (Ukrainian) culture and interests from Jews and Poles while at the same time carving out a space for Ukrainian language and culture in opposition to Russian. Vulpius argues that these Ukrainian dioceses were used to russify local populations (albeit mainly unsuccessfully). At the same time she portrays an emerging younger generation of Ukrainian clergy as proposing their own Ukrainian cultural program. This process of national and religious differentiation parallels in an interesting way contemporary (late nineteenth century) developments in Catholic churches in the northwest provinces. In the case Vulpius describes, the distinction between Russian and Ukrainian is not so easy to detect and her argument is somewhat weakened by her desire to place Ukrainian-minded clergy in the progressive, anti-imperial camp with Russian-minded individuals generally portrayed as chauvinistic outsiders. Still, this is an important work with much to teach us about the complicated nexus between religion, nationality, and empire.

⁶⁷On these processes, see Theodore R. Weeks, *Between Rome and Tsargrad: The Uniate Church in Imperial Russia*, in: Robert B. Geraci/ Michael Khodarkovsky (eds.), *Of Religion and Empire: Missions, Conversion, and Tolerance in Tsarist Russia*, Ithaca 2001, pp. 70-91; and Weeks, *The „End“ of the Uniate Church in Russia: The Vozsoedinenie of 1875*, in: *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 44 (1996), pp. 28-40.

⁶⁸Ricarda Vulpius, *Nationalisierung der Religion. Russifizierungspolitik und ukrainische Nationsbildung 1860-1920*, Wiesbaden 2005.

As this „report“ has made clear, a great deal of progress has been made in researching empire in the Russian Empire over the past decade and a half. Archives have been perused, diverse approaches from other fields integrated into our studies, hitherto-neglected regions have been examined. Perhaps most important of all, it is becoming the norm to view the Russian Empire and USSR as multinational states. To be sure, this breakthrough has not been universal. We continue to teach our „Russian history“ courses as if the Russians lived alone instead of surrounded by and commingling with a variety of other nationalities and confessions. Many continue to try to view the Russian Empire (and worse, the USSR) through an exclusively Russo-centric prism. On the whole, however, signs are positive for increasing appreciation of the multinational and multi-religious character of Russia, both in research and in teaching.

What remains to be done? Perhaps one key element would be more profound research into the nature of „Russian-ness“ in both imperial and Soviet contexts, as well as the experience of Russian culture and nationality/nationalism in these contexts. Conversely, specialists in more strictly „Russian“ history need to do a better job incorporating the imperial nature of that history and indeed of Russian nationality consciousness into their teaching and writing.

I would see three fruitful approaches to „Russia as empire“ for the immediate and middle-term future: micro, macro, and comparative. Looking at western European history over the past few decades, one is struck by the huge number of local studies. With few exceptions we have nothing comparable in Russian imperial history.⁶⁹ More close and detailed work on specific towns, regions, and provinces would allow us to understand better the variations in imperial rule not only over time, but in different geographical spaces.⁷⁰ As for „macro,“ it is

⁶⁹There are, of course, notable exceptions, e.g., Donald Raleigh (ed.), *Provincial Landscapes: Local Dimensions of Soviet Power, 1917-1953*, Pittsburgh 2001; and more recently, Catherine Evtuhov, *Portrait of a Russian Province : Economy, Society, and Civilization in Nineteenth-Century Nizhnii Novgorod*, Pittsburgh 2011, but both of these admirable works concentrate mainly on the Russian provinces.

⁷⁰An example of the „micro“ approach, focusing on a single city (though in this case,

probably time for a brave historian to try to take on a look at Russia as empire in the modern period: we have Andreas Kappeler's admirable book but it is more of an overview than an argumentative work. In any case, in the twenty years since its appearance a great deal of work has been done in this field. Finally, we have very few comparative works, either comparing different regions of the empire (Finland and Georgia? Moldova and Baskiria? Revall and Kodiak?) or comparing specific policies, attitudes, or experiences in the Russian Empire with those in other European empires or for that matter in the westward-expanding USA in the nineteenth century. Obviously the comparative has its pitfalls but even with its dangers and weaknesses, when done properly it has the ability to open up entirely new vistas in historical research.

To conclude, the field of „Russia (and USSR) as empire“ has advanced markedly in the past generation. But, comrades, much remains to be done. An appeal to the younger scholarly generation: packt zu!

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