

Russification / Sovietization

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Under tsarist and Soviet rule respectively, russification and sovietization were intended to ensure state control over a diverse population. The Russian Empire rarely attempted to assimilate culturally the diverse ethnic groups living under tsarist rule, and after 1917 sovietization aimed more ambitiously at a total transformation of human existence. While sovietization never overtly advocated cultural assimilation, it did presume that Soviet citizens would use the Russian language as the primary "all-union" language and expected Soviet citizens to adopt "modern" lifestyles that often drew on Russian models. In the end, the spread of Russian culture throughout the USSR and to a lesser degree throughout East-Central Europe after 1945 did not engender a new Soviet identity. Indeed, non-Russians used in their own struggles for political independence the rhetoric of liberation and national self-determination espoused by the Soviet leadership.

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Introduction

Recent decades have seen a vast increase in research into "nationality policy" in the Russian Empire and USSR. This explosion of interest in "ethnic minorities" or "minority nationalities" under the rule of St. Petersburg and Moscow has brought with it a significant revision of the concepts of russification and sovietization. It should be noted, however, that these concepts – while having aspects in common – are far from identical, despite the popular tendency particularly in former non-Russian Soviet republics and Eastern European satellite countries to see nationality policy after 1917 as a direct continuation of imperial russification, which I define below. In fact, I will argue that while sovietization did not strictly imply forcing the populace to adopt the Russian language and culture, in practice the process of sovietization between 1917 and 1991 was far more successful than tsarist russification in spreading the Russian language and Russian cultural norms. It should also be noted that both before and after 1917 russification and sovietization were often considered to be intrinsically linked to modernization, particularly with respect to the Asian parts of the empire. Among the spheres most affected by russification were politics, administration, and education, though Russian was becoming ever more dominant in the economic sphere also by the late nineteenth century. Sovietization represented an attempt to transform all aspects of life from religion and culture to social and gender roles, and even everyday speech, legal norms, and agriculture. (→ [Media Link #ab](#))

▲ 1

Concepts and definitions

Nearly two generations ago, Edward C. Thaden (1922–2008) (→ [Media Link #ac](#)) identified three separate kinds of russification that research has often failed to distinguish between right up to the present: unplanned, administrative, and cultural. Unplanned russification refers to the adoption of the Russian language and culture by non-Russians through a process of more or less voluntary cultural assimilation to prevailing norms. Such assimilation was indeed welcomed by the Russian imperial government, particularly in the case of so-called "backward" non-European ethnicities. Administrative russification refers to the increasing centralization of the Russian imperial bureaucracy that was an on-going process from at least the reign of Nicholas I (r. 1825–1855) (→ [Media Link #ad](#)). Centralization and "standardization" in

the Russian Empire inevitably implied a strong degree of russification, as Russian was the language of the imperial bureaucracy and thus held precedence above all other languages. Finally, cultural russification refers to the deliberate policy of attempting to assimilate non-Russians culturally, that is, to make Russians out of Poles, Uzbeks, or other non-Russians. While the Russian authorities – reflecting the values of the age – did not have a high regard for cultural diversity, they were also too conservative to mount concerted campaigns to assimilate non-Russians. The Belarusians and Ukrainians were a notable exception, though these were in any case considered by the imperial government to be sub-categories of the Russian nation.

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Sovietization involved far more than spreading the Russian language and European – i.e., Russian – ways of life. It is best thought of as a form of "modernization" which includes such processes as industrialization (→ Media Link #ae), urbanization, and the growth of state intervention in everyday life, from universal education to military service to the welfare state. Modernization inevitably brings with it the growth of bureaucracy in the civilian, military, and economic spheres, and bureaucracy functions best in a common language. The common language that bound together the entire USSR was, of course, Russian. Any non-Russians wishing to pursue a career beyond the confines of their own native republic thus needed to possess a sophisticated knowledge of Russian. In this way, sovietization most certainly did entail russification. Indeed the USSR was vastly more successful in spreading knowledge of the Russian language than the Russian Empire had been. Going beyond mere language usage, however, sovietization aimed to create an entirely new, non-ethnic identity: the new Soviet human being. (→ Media Link #af) This new and superior being would be progressive, educated, and scientific, and would, of course, speak Russian, either as a native tongue or as a second language. Sovietization furthermore demanded that women be treated as absolute equal partners in the building of socialism. At the same time, the religious, peasants, and nomads tended to be denigrated as "remnants" of an earlier, less progressive era.

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Russification: Theory and practice

The era of russification is generally considered to have begun with St. Petersburg's crushing of the 1863 "January Insurrection". One can, however, trace its roots back to at least the reign of Nicholas I, who insisted on the use of Russian – not French – in internal government correspondence. The coining of the term "Official Nationality" by Nicholas I's long-serving minister of education, Count Sergei Uvarov (1786–1855) (→ Media Link #ag), may appear to presage the policy of russification. Some have even seen Uvarov's famous tripartite formula of "Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationality" as the potential basis for a nationalist program.¹ It is difficult to accept this view without reservation, however. After all, "nationality" was the last and most vaguely defined of Uvarov's three pillars of the empire. In some instances, the use of the term "nationality" seemed to imply that it was simply a logical consequence of the first two concepts, i.e., that real Russians subscribed to the Christian Orthodox faith and were loyal to the tsar. One significant aspect of Official Nationality is indicative of the Russian Empire's self-image: its total ignorance of non-Russians. While the tsars obviously were aware that they ruled over a multiplicity of national groups, this knowledge did not, except at times of crisis, penetrate very deeply into Russian consciousness and imperial policy. Thus it was the ethnic Russians themselves who were the first target of "russification", as they failed to identify with modern concepts of the nation and defined themselves primarily, or exclusively, as Orthodox Christians. It was only after the Polish, or more correctly Polish-Lithuanian, Insurrection of 1863 that the russification of Belarusians and Ukrainians – the latter more commonly referred to as "Little Russians" at the time – became an urgent priority.²

▲4

In the Russian language it is possible to differentiate between ethnic Russian (*ruskii*) and Russian as an administrative or geographic marker (*rossiiskii*). Both the Russian Empire and the present-day Russian Federation use the adjective *Rossiiskaia*, while most inhabitants of Moscow would describe their own ethnicity and the language they speak as *ruskii*. However, this distinction was very often not maintained in practice. Thus the first governor general of Turkestan, Konstantin Kaufman (1818–1882) (→ Media Link #ah), asked to be buried in the *ruskaia* soil of Tashkent. Kaufman's words are indicative of a more general tendency: Russian administrators tended to regard and refer to the country they administered as ethnic Russian, or to assume that it one day would be. Consequently, it is possible to discern an "ideal of russification" among tsarist administrators from at least the 1860s.³

▲5

The death of Nicholas I in the midst of the Crimean War marks a major turning point in Russian history. While even Nicholas himself had recognized weaknesses in the Russian state structure and had worried about the immorality of serfdom, he was too conservative and fearful of change to tamper with the system he had inherited from his forefathers. The new tsar in 1855, Alexander II (1818–1881) (→ Media Link #ai), could not adopt such a passive course. The defeat of Russian armies in the Crimea had laid bare the profound weaknesses of Russian economic, social, and political structures. Even conservatives admitted that major reform was required. To be sure, the primary target of this reform was the Russian peasantry, but the larger goal of the Great Reforms of the 1860s and 1870s was the creation of a stronger, more modern, and more centralized Russian state. This urge toward modernity would inevitably have an impact – most likely a negative one – on non-Russians.⁴

▲6

The outbreak of a rebellion, which the imperial authorities preferred to call a "mutiny" (*miatezh*), in Warsaw in January 1863 demonstrated the divergence in concepts of "legitimate rule" between non-Russians – in this instance Poles and Lithuanians – and the imperial authorities. From the point of view of the insurrectionists, St. Petersburg had reneged on the agreement set down in the Polish constitution granted by Tsar Alexander I in 1815 and should properly return to that document. For official Russia, the 1815 constitution was a dead letter; Polish cultural differences could be tolerated, but only insofar as these differences did not adversely affect imperial integrity. The geographical position of Polish territory between the Russian heartland and Germany made the extirpation of any possible separatist threats all the more crucial.⁵

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The main outlines of russification as a policy were in place by the end of the 1860s. In this region it was primarily an anti-Polish policy, aimed at reducing Polish and Catholic influences, two concepts which were largely treated as synonymous. The policy did not, however, aim to eradicate Polish culture completely, as St. Petersburg was aware that this was not a realistic goal. Moreover, the imperial bureaucracy and the tsar were far too conservative to desire the wholesale transfer of individuals from one nationality or religion to another. The exceptions to this rule are instructive. The Russian historian Mikhail Dolbilov has shown that there were some attempts among local administrators in the ethnically-mixed "Northwestern provinces", corresponding to present-day Belarus and Lithuania, to encourage mass conversions.⁶ Such attempts were not, however, strongly supported by central authorities and did not have a lasting impact.

▲8

It should be noted that there was a marked difference between the "Western provinces", where Poles were a minority and predominated only among the urban and landowning classes, and the erstwhile Kingdom of Poland which was officially re-named the "Vistula Land", where the population was overwhelmingly ethnic Polish. The imperial authorities declared that the Western provinces, corresponding roughly to present-day Belarus, western Ukraine, and Lithuania, were "ancient Russian land" where Poles had settled over the centuries. Consequently, Polish culture in, for example, Vilna or Kiev was to be actively opposed.⁷ In the overwhelmingly ethnic Polish Vistula Land – a designation which was hardly used, even by officials, for decades after 1863 – however, it was considered sufficient to protect the minority rights of Russians and ward off the threat of separatism. The imperial authorities had come to view education, particularly above the primary level, in the imperial context. The decision to close down the Polish-language *Szkoła Główna* ("Main School") in Warsaw and to replace it with an imperial, Russian-language institution made sense in this context, though many Poles understandably took a different view.

▲9

Fear of the threat posed by Polish influence – a fear which was pervasive and strong among Russian administrators and nationalists – was particularly acute in relation to two populations considered branches of the Russian nation: Belarusians and Ukrainians. While these groups are generally accepted as nation in their own right today, few Russians and fewer Russian administrators in the late nineteenth century saw them as such. Russian administrators saw a clear choice between these mainly peasant peoples being polonized and lost to the Russian nation or being "saved" through vigorous action to reinforce their Russian and Orthodox identity. The Russian historian Aleksei Miller has argued that post-1863 policies aimed at the incorporation of Ukrainians into the Russian nation were severely hampered by the weakness of the Russian imperial state. When modern national identity came to Ukrainians (for the majority, only in the twentieth century), it was in opposition to *both* Polish and Russian.⁸ The case of the Belarusians is more complex. The failure to develop a significant cadre of national activists – in contrast to the Ukrainian or Lithuanian examples – meant that Belarusians were far more susceptible to russification, though this process occurred mainly after 1917.⁹

Russification and centralizing impulses went hand in hand. This is most clearly visible in the case of policy towards the autonomous Grand Duchy of Finland and the Baltic provinces of Estland, Courland, and Livonia. Finland had enjoyed a large degree of internal autonomy since it had been incorporated into the Russian Empire in 1809. For most purposes, Finland ran its own internal affairs in Swedish (and later also in Finnish), with its own currency, legal code, and tariffs. From the 1890s, the imperial authorities began to reduce Finnish autonomy, abolishing the separate Finnish postal service in 1890 and working to reconcile Finnish and Russian legal systems. In 1898 St. Petersburg embarked on an ambitious program of russifying Finnish institutions, sending a new governor general, Nikolaj Ivanovič Bobrikov (1839–1904) (→ Media Link #aj), to carry out these policies. The result was catastrophic. The hitherto loyal Finns opposed the imposition of Russian bureaucrats and the use of Russian in their own institutions. Bobrikov's attempted russification program culminated in his assassination by a young Finn in 1904. The chaotic revolutionary years that followed prevented St. Petersburg from continuing the russification drive. Further plans to reduce Finnish autonomy were introduced just before 1914, though they were never fully implemented.¹⁰

▲ 11

In the Baltic provinces, where landowners traditionally spoke German and peasants spoke Estonian or Latvian, russification efforts of the 1880s concentrated on reducing the power of local German elites. Ironically, to do this the Russian government encouraged, or at least benevolently tolerated, the development of Latvian and Estonian cultural institutions. While the German university in Dorpat (now Tartu, Estonia) was transformed into the Russian "Iur'ev" University in the early 1890s, elementary schools using Estonian and Latvian as the language of instruction were tolerated. By weakening traditional German privileges in these provinces, the Russian government unwittingly undermined its own position as an arch-conservative state dependent upon traditional elites. The newly energized Latvian and Estonian national movements were hardly likely, given the choice, to support the continuing existence of the Russian Empire.¹¹

▲ 12

In the course of the nineteenth century, the Russian Empire expanded across the Caucasus Mountains and, especially from the 1860s, into Central Asia. The Transcaucasian region was inhabited by a large number of diverse nationalities, from Muslim Chechens and Azeris to Christian Armenians to Orthodox Georgians.¹² Central Asia was almost uniformly Muslim, but home to diverse nations, nomadic peoples and settled urban cultures. No serious efforts were made to russify local populations either in Transcaucasia or in Central Asia. Indeed, the governor general of Turkestan, Kaufman, explicitly forbade any attempt to proselytize among local Muslims, fearing that such efforts would be ineffective and could provoke violent opposition. At the same time, it seems clear that Russian administrators shared attitudes toward Asians and Muslims which were prevalent among Europeans generally and which defined them as backward and doomed by history to eventually disappear. Little was done, however, to speed up this process. On the whole, Russians in Central Asia lived apart from local Muslim people and the two groups had little direct influence on each other.¹³

▲ 13

The Russian Empire's large Jewish population is less easy to categorize in terms of russification. The imperial authorities, along with many progressive Jews, rejected Yiddish as a "jargon" unsuitable for the modern world. Thus the imperial authorities opened three "rabbinical schools" in Vilna and Zhitomir in western Ukraine in the 1850s. A Polish "rabbinical school" had already been opened in Warsaw in 1826. It was subsequently closed down by the Russian authorities in 1863. The aim of these institutions was to modernize and, with the exception of the institution in Warsaw, to russify the empire's Jews. The graduates of these schools have long been portrayed as being essentially trapped between Russian and Jewish worlds and being not quite trusted by either. Certainly, the increasing influence of Russian culture on Jews in the empire cannot be denied.¹⁴ Ironically, however, it was precisely this class of Russian-speaking, progressive (or radical) Jews that caused the imperial authorities to become concerned. Given the considerable legal restrictions under which Russian Jews lived, it is not surprising that few supported an unreformed Russian Empire. Thus by the 1870s at the latest, the Russian authorities tended to associate young, educated, Russian-speaking Jews with subversion, demonstrating that cultural russification did not necessarily mean the creation of loyal subjects of the tsar.¹⁵

▲ 14

Sovietization: Politics, modernization, and culture

The revolutions of 1917 which ended tsarist rule and brought the communists to power changed nearly every aspect of life for erstwhile subjects of the tsar, who now inhabited the world's first socialist state. This included nationality policy. While one can hardly speak of "nationality policy" as a unified, consistent set of laws and directives under tsarist rule, the Bolsheviks had already given the national question significant thought before 1917. Among their first decrees were ones directed at non-Russians within the Russian Empire, vowing to respect and support cultural development and even holding out the promise of independence, or "national self-determination", if this proved to be the wish of the nation in question.¹⁶ In practice, of course, the communists tended to see such requests for independence as clear evidence of reactionary "bourgeois nationalism": both in the Baltic region and in Finland, it was only after the decisive defeat of the Red Army and their allies that Moscow relinquished its claims to these territories. There was an uneasy tension, even contradiction, at the heart of the communist attitude toward nationality. On the one hand, the diversity of national cultures was celebrated and nurtured, particularly in the 1920s but continuing to a lesser degree up to the end of the USSR. On the other hand, when local communist elites (e.g. Belarusian, Uzbek, Karelian, etc.) seemed to be pursuing interests that diverged from those of Moscow, punishment was not slow in coming. Thus the national-communist elites nurtured by Moscow in the 1920s were to a great extent destroyed by the purges of the late 1930s.

▲ 15

Sovietization was much more than nationality policy: it envisaged the creation of an entirely new kind of human being. When we look at the portrayals of this new Soviet person in Soviet writing or imagery, he (and sometimes she) is usually portrayed as a modern individual with European features. While exotic Soviet citizens in colorful garb also figure in this iconography, it is precisely as exotic, colorful, exceptional individuals. The "standard", or norm which emerges from these depictions is clearly European and Russian. This is illustrated by a 1938 poster showing a line of individuals representing different national groups marching forward holding high banners proclaiming "Greetings to Great Stalin" in several languages. Only the man holding the Russian-language banner, however, corresponds to classic depictions of the worker with his cloth cap and jacket.¹⁷ (→ Media Link #ak) Communists had very definite ideas of right and wrong, progressive and reactionary. Following Marx, they privileged urban, industrial development and thus saw traditional agrarian cultures – and even more so nomadic societies – as condemned by history to extinction. The question was, what aspects of these cultures could be "salvaged"? Official Soviet policy asserted that certain cultural traits, language, folk tales, dances, and such would be actively preserved. The actual historical record shows that the influence of Soviet rule on the cultures of smaller and "less developed" – i.e., non-industrial, rural, and pre-literate – ethnicities was less benign.¹⁸

▲ 16

The chaos of the first years of Soviet rule precluded the development of any coherent policy regarding nationality. While the People's Commissariat of Nationalities (*Narkomnats*) had been established already in 1917, the creation of the USSR as an overtly multinational state occurred only in December 1922. The country's name lacked any ethnic designation and promised to be a union of equal nationalities bound together by socialist ideology. There were "union republics" for the largest national groups, and autonomous republics, regions, and districts for smaller ethnicities. Each union republic had its own capital, parliament, and with one exception, its own communist party. The exception was the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR). By far the largest of the union republics with 72 percent of the population and 90 percent of the territory of the USSR in 1923, the republic lacked its own communist party but, of course, central organs of the all-union Communist Party of the Soviet Union were located in Moscow.¹⁹

▲ 17

The revolution and building socialism – and later communism – took precedence in all policy considerations. At the same time, Lenin was very conscious of the need to avoid overt "Great Russian chauvinism", of which he accused Stalin (1879–1953) (→ Media Link #al) primarily for tactical reasons. Non-Russians had to be convinced that the USSR was not simply a "red version" of the Russian Empire. In fact, it was not. The continued existence of diverse nationalities, languages, and cultures was not only tolerated, but even encouraged and subsidized by the Soviet state. The "national cultures" developed by the communists had to be progressive, more-or-less atheistic, and, especially from the 1930s, not anti-Russian.²⁰

▲ 18

Even when drawing administrative boundaries according to ethnicity ran contrary to economic logic, ethnicity generally trumped economic considerations. Borrowing a metaphor from the Lithuanian communist Juozas Vareikis (1894–1939), the Russian-American historian Yuri Slezkine has described the USSR as a "communal apartment" in which each na-

tional group had its own "room".²¹ To be sure, not all "rooms" were of the same size or importance. It should be noted, however, that to the very end of its existence the USSR remained at least rhetorically, but also in many practical ways, committed to the idea of cultural diversity. Russian culture was certainly *primus inter pares*, but a certain space was always granted to non-Russian language and culture.

▲ 19

Soviet nationality policy in the 1920s was described at the time with the term *korenizatsiia*, or "indigenization". This policy had two main aspects. On the one hand, it aimed to make Soviet power attractive to non-Russians by presenting it in their own language and by giving them incentives to participate in the new political system. On the other hand, it sought to speed up the cultural, economic, and political development of non-Russian peoples. The historian Terry Martin has described the USSR in this period as the world's first "affirmative action empire", expending considerable government resources to bring non-Russians into the socialist mainstream.²² Ambitious Soviet programs codified ethnic distinctions, created written versions of Central Asian languages, and set up individual administrative units along ethno-linguistic lines, i.e., the union and autonomous republics, *oblasti* and *okrugi* mentioned above.

▲ 20

Korenizatsiia operated on several levels. On the local level, it meant that native languages were used in schools, courts, and local communist party units. In many cases, however, this required the writing of new textbooks, the training of teachers in Tatar, Kazakh, or Belarusian, or even the establishment of a written form of a language. Because Russians and Russian-speaking Jews made up such a large percentage of communists throughout the USSR, special preference was to be given to non-Russians interested in joining the party. These preferences extended also to the filling of positions within the republican communist hierarchy, communist party jobs, and to employment in general, including the heads of factories, schools, and other institutions. The fact that members of the "titular nationality" (i.e., Ukrainians in the Ukrainian SSR, Kazakhs in the Kazakh SSR, etc.) were privileged unavoidably meant that equally-qualified Russian speakers would be passed over for promotions, employment, and the like. This fact was freely noted and acknowledged, but Russian-speaking communists were urged to accept this sacrifice for the party. In any event, they had little choice. With Russians making up the majority of communist party members in nearly all republics, there was the danger that Russian communists would appear to the local population as simply a new version of pre-1917 Russian administrators.

▲ 21

Encouraging ethnic particularism also revealed the fundamental contradiction, or mistaken assumption, of *korenizatsiia*. The policy assumed that minority nationalities, as long as they were given considerable freedom to develop their languages, culture, and national elites, would be incorporated into the Soviet system and recognize the progressive and positive nature of Soviet socialism. The idea that national cultural development and the building of socialism could in some cases be conflicting or contradictory processes was either not considered at all or dismissed as a misunderstanding of "proper" cultural development. Already in 1923, however, the important Tatar communist, Mirza Sultan-Galiev (c. 1892–c. 1939) (→ Media Link #am), had been arrested for "national deviance", that is, putting the interests of one's own national group before that of the party and USSR as a whole. In subsequent years, the accusation of "Sultangalievism" was leveled against a number of non-Russian communists, usually ending their career and often their life as well. While the general party line of *korenizatsiia* and promoting national cultures remained in place for another decade, Sultan-Galiev's fate indicated that there could indeed be a conflict of interests between Moscow and non-Russian communists.

▲ 22

By the end of the 1920s, especially in the context of Stalin's almost total take-over of power in the party, several cases arose demonstrating a divergence of interests between Moscow and local elites. Stalin recognized that the encouragement of local elites and local cultures could easily provide a space for challenging central authority – i.e., his own authority – and he reacted harshly against "bourgeois nationalists" in various republics of the USSR. In the 1930s, non-Russian communists were among the most likely to be arrested or executed.

▲ 23

The policy of *korenizatsiia* was never officially ended, but in practice it was superseded by a more overtly centralizing and more openly russifying program in the 1930s. The collectivization campaign of the early 1930s hit non-Russians,

namely Ukrainians and Kazakhs, especially hard. In Ukraine it is generally believed that the "terror famine" of 1932 and 1933 was engineered by Moscow as genocide against the Ukrainian people. Few western historians can accept this thesis without reservation. Kazakhs, for example, were even more likely to perish during 1932/1933. Similar famine conditions also prevailed in ethnic Russian regions in the Urals and North Caucasus. It does, however, seem clear that the famine was exacerbated – though not entirely created – by Moscow and that it was used as a tool against those regions which had resisted collectivization. In general, the 1930s must be seen as a crucial period in sovietization. The crushing of the peasantry which collectivization involved meant that, despite their large numbers, rural citizens of the Soviet Union were always second-class citizens who did not quite fit into the Soviet project. This fact also meant that largely peasant nationalities – like the Belarusians, for example – had a much more difficult time defending and perpetuating their culture than national groups who possessed strong urban elites.²³

▲ 24

The momentous events of World War II (1939–1945) had a profound effect also on relations between Russian and non-Russian nationalities. Initially, while the USSR was still an ally of Nazi Germany, (→ Media Link #an) the Baltic republics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, along with some territory from Romania which later became part of the Moldovan SSR, were annexed by the Soviet Union. In the aftermath of the launching of the invasion of the Soviet Union by Nazi Germany in June 1941, a number of nationalities deemed suspect by Moscow were rounded up and deported east, mainly to Kazakhstan. Among these groups were Germans, Chechens, and Crimean Tatars.²⁴ Soviet propaganda during World War II was remarkably free of communist ideology. Probably the most famous poster of the period shows a motherly Slavic woman dressed in red, standing before a background of bayonets, holding in her right hand a document labeled "Military Oath" and beckoning, with the caption "The Mother-Homeland Calls!" (→ Media Link #ao) The artist was not, however, a Russian but a Georgian: Iraklii Toidze (1902–1985) (→ Media Link #ap). During the war against Germany it became fashionable for Soviet writers and artists to celebrate the Russian past. Suddenly military leaders like Mikhail Kutuzov (1745–1813) (→ Media Link #aq) and Aleksandr Nevskii (c. 1220–1263) (→ Media Link #ar), and even autocrats like Peter I (1672–1725) (→ Media Link #as) and Ivan the Terrible (1530–1584) (→ Media Link #at) were re-interpreted in a positive way. In ways subtle and not so subtle, the period witnessed considerable progress in the rehabilitation of the pre-Soviet Russian imperialist past, which was now portrayed in a more progressive light.²⁵

▲ 25

After victory had been secured, Stalin famously proposed a toast on May 24 1945 to "the health of our Soviet people and above all the Russian people". While a generation earlier sovietization had stressed the multiplicity of cultures, such claims now amounted to hollow lip service or applied only to the local level. Anyone wishing to succeed at the all-union level could certainly retain a non-Russian identity, but had to also be entirely at home in Russian culture. There was now also an almost total reluctance to criticize – in public, at least – any aspect of Russian culture or of Kremlin rule. More than a generation after Stalin's death, a statement by Eduard Shevardnadze (*1928) (→ Media Link #au), a high-ranking party official from Georgia who would later become famous as Gorbachev's foreign minister, was symptomatic of this Russo-centrism: "Comrades, Georgia is called the land of the sun. But for us, the true sun does not rise in the east, but in the north, in Russia: that is the sun of Lenin's ideas."²⁶

▲ 26

Russo-centrism went far beyond words, however. Ethnicities suspected of collaboration with the Germans were brutally expelled from their homelands soon after the Germans left. There was no effort made to seek out actual collaborators; all members of the suspected national group were rounded up and deported. In the Baltic republics and Ukraine, where many locals had in fact collaborated with the Germans – often out of anti-Soviet sentiment, but sometimes simply to survive – hundreds of thousands were arrested and deported. In all of these cases, a high percentage of those deported died on the way east due to the brutal conditions of deportation. While these arrests were not based exclusively on nationality, the simple fact of mass arrests of Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanians, and Ukrainians did much to terrorize the entire population and discourage any overt signs of anti-Soviet patriotic sentiment.²⁷

▲ 27

It is difficult to overstate the brutality of the years between 1939 and 1945 in the USSR and in particular in its western regions. To begin with, the Jewish population of this area, numbering in the hundreds of thousands, was either deported or – in the vast majority of cases – murdered in the Nazi death camps. A much smaller, but also significant ethnic German population had either been "called home" by the Nazis in late 1939, some returning after the Nazi invasion in 1941,

or had fled before the Red Army. The western frontier of the USSR was significantly altered, pushing the Soviet border around one to two hundred miles to the west. The ethnic mix among the population of this region changed even more dramatically. In the north, where the border with Finland was pushed around one hundred miles to the west, one million Finns fled rather than live under Soviet rule. In the Baltic countries mass emigration to the west combined with mass arrests deprived these nations of a badly needed educated leadership. In western Belarus and Ukraine, which had been taken from interwar Poland, the Polish land-holding class and *intelligentsia* resident there for centuries was arrested, deported, and in thousands of cases murdered by their Ukrainian neighbors. In 1944, agreements were signed between the Belarusian, Ukrainian, and Lithuanian SSRs and Poland for voluntary population exchanges. Millions of Poles left their homes in what was now the USSR; hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians had to resettle from Poland to the Ukrainian SSR. While these population transfers were ostensibly "voluntary", they were carried out in an atmosphere of fear and violence that makes it difficult to speak of genuine free choice.²⁸

▲ 28

The period during and immediately after World War II also witnessed the appearance of an increasingly negative attitude towards Jews, which was both tolerated and encouraged by Soviet leaders. The most notorious example of this was the so-called "Doctors' Plot" launched in 1951, which saw the public denunciation of a group of physicians, many with Jewish names, for supposedly having murdered Andrei Zhdanov (1896–1948) (→ Media Link #av) and other high-ranking Soviet officials.²⁹ Increasingly, Jews were seen as suspect, possibly harboring sympathies for the newly-independent Israel and/or for the USSR's archrival, the USA. While Jews remained very important in Soviet culture, economy, and administration, being a Jew became a liability for those with ambitions of reaching the top of their profession or the highest positions in the party.³⁰

▲ 29

With the arrival of the Red Army in 1944/1945, sovietization was also spread to East-Central Europe. For many Poles, Hungarians, Czechs, Romanians, and others, it appeared that one brutal occupation had been exchanged for another. By 1948 it was everywhere clear that Moscow would not permit the continued existence of a free press, political parties, or any kind of anti-Soviet (or anti-Russian) movements. In the late 1940s, efforts were made, with predictably disastrous consequences, to carry out the collectivization of agriculture in these countries. (→ Media Link #aw) A planned economy, a thoroughgoing sovietization of culture, and educational reforms on the Soviet model made their appearance in the decade after "liberation", along with statues to the Red Army and to Stalin. (→ Media Link #ax) However, this period of crash sovietization on the Stalinist model did not last long. The 1953 and 1956 uprisings in Berlin and Budapest (→ Media Link #ay) as well as unrest in Poland convinced the post-Stalinist leadership in the Kremlin that the mechanical transfer of Soviet models to Eastern Europe would not work.

▲ 30

Thus, for example, collectivization in Poland was cancelled and private agriculture became once again the norm. In Hungary, especially from the 1960s, considerable latitude was given to small private businesses to a degree that would have been impossible in the USSR. On the other hand, even the cautious attempt to reform socialism in Czechoslovakia in 1968 led to a Soviet invasion, demonstrating that deviations from the Soviet model could only go so far. The Russian language continued to be a required subject in most East-Central European countries, (→ Media Link #az) though it must be admitted that even those speaking other Slavic languages like Polish or Slovak rarely learned Russian well. Thus sovietization in Eastern Europe mainly amounted in practice to hollow lip service and the pro-Moscow one-party system maintained by the Kremlin until the late 1980s, when the entire system imploded.

▲ 31

After Stalin's death, the overt persecution of minority nationalities in the USSR declined. It cannot be said, however, that either Nikita Khrushchev (1894–1971) (→ Media Link #b0) or Leonid Brezhnev (1906–1982) (→ Media Link #b1) introduced any radically new concepts or policies regarding non-Russians. An official policy of bilingualism in the union republics meant that, for example, street signs in Vilnius, Erevan, or Frunze were in both the local language – Lithuanian, Armenian, and Kyrgyz, respectively – as well as Russian. The reform of language teaching in Soviet schools in 1958 aimed to make Russian a "second native language" for non-Russians. The British historian Geoffrey Hosking has claimed that the aim of this law was "not in order to Russify [sic] but in order to Sovietize".³¹ It seems difficult, however, to clearly differentiate between these two concepts in the late-Soviet period when the image of the ideal Soviet person had become so closely identified with Russian culture. The spread of the Russian language from the 1960s onward was mainly the result of practical individual choices, i.e., Belarusian parents sending their children to Russian-language

schools in the knowledge that attendance at a Belarusian school would hamper their future advancement. Perhaps ironically, even as knowledge of Russian expanded and Russian-language television and radio programs were beamed throughout the union, resistance to Soviet power became increasingly identified with the use of non-Russian languages. Thus while a considerable degree of linguistic russification ultimately occurred with many non-Russians becoming fluent in Russian, this russification did not lead to sovietization as many non-Russians who adopted the Russian language came to see it as the instrument of an oppressive power.

▲ 32

Conclusions

Neither the Russian Empire nor the USSR was a nation-state. Yet, in the case of both, the largest national group frequently overlooked the other ethnic groups and viewed the state as its state. By including the Belarusians and Ukrainians, the Russian Empire was able to claim that nearly two-thirds of its population was Russian. The USSR discarded this claim and attempted to build state-loyalty – this is what "sovietization" effectively was – on the basis of tolerance of diverse cultures and a shared belief in socialism. Both before and after 1917, the issues of nationality and language were inextricably linked to other issues. Difficult social, economic, and political issues at all times impinged on "nationality policy". Post-1863 russification aimed primarily to prevent future uprisings against Russian power but hoped at the same time to spread the Russian language among the inhabitants of the empire's western borderlands, while almost nothing was done to russify Central Asians in this period.

▲ 33

During the early Soviet period, the preeminence of Russian culture was rejected as an ugly remnant of a bygone era. To be Soviet meant loyalty to the socialist ideal, no matter what language used to express this loyalty. *Korenizatsiia*, or indigenization, was the slogan of the first decade of the USSR. Before long, however, Moscow and Stalin came to suspect that the strengthening of national identity could introduce a contradiction which would hamper the building of socialism. The central Soviet authorities reacted to some attempts to assert non-Russian culture with accusations of "bourgeois nationalism" and Russian culture increasingly came to be defined and viewed as the all-union standard. This process was solidified by the experience of World War II. After 1945, non-Russian Soviet citizens were not deprived of their right to speak their own languages and nurture their own cultures, but they had to acknowledge the important, over-arching role of Russian culture. Thus from the 1960s sovietization involved fluency in Russian as well as any other indigenous language that an individual might speak. Unfortunately for Soviet power, the spread of Russian culture did not translate into acceptance of Soviet rule, and in the late 1980s and early 1990s anti-Moscow slogans in the Baltic, Transcaucasia, and Central Asia were frequently shouted in excellent, if accented, Russian.

▲ 34

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Appendix

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Notes

1. ^ Miller, *Romanov Empire* 2008, pp. 139–159.
2. ^ Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I* 1967; idem, *Russian Identities* 2005, pp. 130–166.
3. ^ The best overview of Russia as a multiethnic empire, including russification, remains Kappeler, *Russland als Vielvölkerreich* 1992.
4. ^ On the Great Reforms, see Lincoln, *Great Reforms* 1990; and Eklof et al. (eds.), *Russia's Great Reforms* 1994. Neither of these books considers the impact of the Great Reforms on non-Russians.
5. ^ I have developed these ideas further in Weeks, *Nation and State* 1996; and idem, *Russification* 2004.
6. ^ Dolbilov, *Russification* 2004; idem et al. (eds.), *Zapadnye okrainy Rossiiskoi Imperii* 2006.
7. ^ Staliūnas, *Making Russians* 2007; Komzolova, *Politika samoderzhavii* 2005; Rodkiewicz, *Russian Nationality Policy* 1998.
8. ^ Miller, *Ukrainian Question* 2003. See also Vulpus, *Nationalisierung der Religion* 2005.
9. ^ Lindner, *Historiker und Herrschaft* 1999.
10. ^ Lundin, *Finland* 1981; Polvinen, *Imperial Borderland* 1995.

11. ^ There is an enormous literature on the Baltic provinces and Germans there. See, e.g., the excellent overviews on Baltic Germans, Latvians, and Estonians by Michael H. Haltzel, Andrejs Plakans and Toivo Raun (respectively) in Thaden (ed.), *Russification* 1981; and Pistohlkors (ed.), *Deutsche Geschichte im Osten Europas* 1994.
12. ^ Suny (ed.), *Transcaucasia* 1996.
13. ^ The best case study of this kind of "apartheid" between Russians and "natives" – very similar to the situation in Algiers or Calcutta – focuses on Tashkent, the largest city of the region, see Sahadeo, *Russian Colonial Society* 2007. On Central Asia, see also Morrison, *Russian Rule* 2008; and Brower, *Turkestan* 2003. On Islam in the Russian Empire, two works (at least) are indispensable: Khalid, *Politics* 1998; and Crews, *For Prophet and Tsar* 2006.
14. ^ Dohrn, *Jüdische Eliten* 2008, argues that the role of these modern Russian-speaking Jews should be interpreted more positively. The "success" of cultural russification among Jews can be seen as one factor in worsening Polish-Jewish relations in these years, see Weeks, *From Assimilation to Antisemitism* 2006.
15. ^ Among the enormous and growing literature on Jews in late imperial Russia, see Nathans, *Beyond the Pale* 2002; Murav, *Identity Theft* 2003; Petrovsky-Stern, *Jews in the Russian Army* 2009; Safran, *Rewriting the Jew* 2000.
16. ^ Smith, *Bolsheviks and National Question* 1999.
17. ^ This image appears on the cover of Hirsch, *Empire of Nations* 2005.
18. ^ Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors* 1994. On the devastation of Central Asian nomadic societies in the early years of Soviet rule, see Buttino, *Rivoluzione capovolta* 2003.
19. ^ Pipes, *Formation of the Soviet Union* 1964.
20. ^ For an overview of Soviet nationality policy, see Nahaylo / Swoboda, *Soviet Disunion* 1999.
21. ^ Slezkine, *USSR as a Communal Apartment* 1994.
22. ^ Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire* 2001.
23. ^ Pianciola, *Famine in the Steppe* 2004; Dietsch, *Making Sense of Suffering* 2006; Conquest, *Harvest of Sorrow* 1986.
24. ^ Conquest, *Nation Killers* 1970.
25. ^ The Ukrainian example shows this process very clearly: Yekelchik, *Stalin's Empire of Memory* 2004.
26. ^ When Carrère d'Encausse quoted Eduard Shevarnadze, she had of course no idea that he would later become world famous, see Carrère d'Encausse, *L'Empire éclaté* 1978, p. 5. The English translation *Decline of an Empire* 1981 inexplicably leaves this quotation out.
27. ^ Nekrich, *Punished Peoples* 1978.
28. ^ For one case study of post-war "population exchanges" see Weeks, *Population Politics* 2007.
29. ^ Brent / Naumov, *Stalin's Last Crime* 2003.
30. ^ For an idiosyncratic but stimulating view of Jews in Russia in the twentieth century, see Slezkine, *The Jewish Century* 2004; for a more sober chronological treatment, Levin, *Jews in the Soviet Union* 1988.
31. ^ Hosking, *Rulers and Victims* 2006, p. 322.

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