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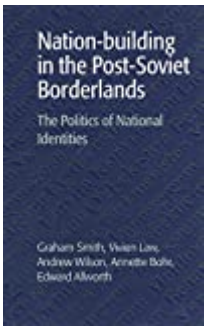

Graham Smith, Vivien Law, Andrew Wilson, Annette Bohr, Edward Allworth. *Nation-Building in the Post-Soviet Borderlands: The Politics of National Identities.* Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998. xi + 293 pp. $47.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-521-59968-9; $110.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-59045-7.

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National Identities and Identity Politics in the Post-Soviet States

Nationalism and national identities remain key features of the post-Soviet world. This volume, one of many attempts in the last decade to better understand the nature and transformation of national identities in the Soviet Union and its successor states[1], contains nine chapters written by six authors affiliated with Sidney Sussex College in 1995. As the first monograph-length collaborative effort of the Post-Soviet States Research Programme at Sidney Sussex College, this collection of essays on twelve of the fifteen post-Soviet states (the Russian Federation, Lithuania, and Tajikistan are excluded from detailed consideration) is based on the premise that identity politics in the non-Russian states have an "elusive, ever-shifting nature" and change "kaleidoscopically in the very moment when a coherent pattern seemed to be emerging...." (p. ix). Although this volume does not cover this topic as completely as the second edition of *The Nationalities Question in the Post-Soviet States*, edited by Graham Smith, the essays in this volume are new and make it a welcome addition to the literature.[2]

As the authors recognize in the Preface, "it is clearly impossible for any one individual to be conversant not only with the languages, histories and diverse political and social cultures of the fourteen new or restored borderland states, but also with the disparate academic disciplines required to arrive at a balanced picture of the changes now underway" (p. ix). Yet while the essays contained in this volume generally succeed in achieving their individual aims, overall the volume suffers from many of the problems inherent in any collection of essays: promising approaches and suggestive conclusions contained in one essay are not carried over into others; the subject matter is segmented rather than integrated; the authors vary in their knowledge and use of local languages; and individual essays diverge in their basic assumptions, style, methodology, and content. Despite these weaknesses, the volume will benefit advanced students (primarily graduate students) and specialists alike.

In his introductory essay, Graham Smith, Director of the Post-Soviet States Research Programme, addresses issues of post-colonialism in relation to what he calls "borderland identities" (a term he never fully defines). Smith challenges the notion that the Soviet Union was a simple federation or an empire; instead, he believes the USSR

was a "federal colonial" polity because "the particular nature of the Soviet federation ensured that nation-building took place at both the ethnorepublic and all-union levels" (p. 4). He argues that three main features exemplified the "federal colonial" nature of the fourteen ethnorepublics: first, the ethnorepublics lacked complete independence in internal policies yet were able to exert a significant amount of local control when nationalism was not part of the agenda; second, the Soviet Union paradoxically "provided the social space for nation-building at the ethnorepublic scale" (pp. 5-6) through programs such as *korenizatsiia*, despite its efforts to build a strong central state; and third, the fourteen ethnorepublics' relations with Moscow differed considerably based in large part on the nature and timing of their incorporation into the Soviet Union. Thus, the image of Russia as an expanding imperial state was not uniformly diffused throughout the ethnic republics, either in the 1920s, 1940s, or 1980s.

Smith also finds variations within the "nationalising regimes" that came to power as the Soviet Union fell apart. He concludes three main perspectives have shaped the way these nationalizing regimes "draw upon and bring into the public sphere of the post-colonial present the codes of colonialism…." (p. 13). De-Sovietization has been achieved by outlawing the Communist Party, purging Soviet-era government officials, creating boundaries against migrants (primarily Russian speakers) in the realms of itizenship and state employment, and employing ethnic codes to win electoral support. Boundaries have been reinvented by essentializing one trait, particularly language, rediscovering the past to invent national heroes, and totalising specific ethnic or linguistic differences into absolutes. Cultural standardization has also promoted the titular languages at the expense of Russian. Smith believes these factors can be seen in various combinations and strengths depending on whether minority groups within the fourteen post-Soviet states possess a state patron (such as Russia, Poland, or Uzbekistan) and whether minority populations are regionalized or dispersed geographically.

Three essays appear in the volume's Part I, entitled "Rediscovering National Histories": National history and National identity in Ukraine and Belarus" by Andrew Wilson, "National identity and myths of ethnogenesis in Transcaucasia" by Viktor Shnirelman (who visited Sidney Sussex College for one term), and "History and group identity in Central Asia" by Edward Allworth (who spent a sabbatical year at the College, visiting from Columbia University).

Wilson's essay on Ukrainian and Belarusian historiography is the one essay here that ought to be required reading in all undergraduate history courses on Muscovy and Imperial Russia. Wilson provides wide-ranging analysis of seven historical myths perpetuated by Ukrainian and Belarusian historians which challenge Russophile claims to the medieval kingdom of Kievan Rus' as the forerunner of Muscovy and the Romanov empire. In Wilson's parlance, these seven include myths of origins, foundation myths, myths of descent, homeland myths, myths of national character and of the 'other,' myths of empire and colonialism, and myths of resistance and revival. Wilson contrasts these with Russophile myths that claim Kievan Rus' as their own. The author rightly argues that Ukrainian historiography has been more successful than its Belarusian counterpart in supporting these myths on a factual basis, although Belarusian historians have made significant strides in their efforts.

According to Wilson's very readable summary, Ukrainophile historiography now asserts that the Ukrainian people were the first inhabitants of the lands of the middle Dnieper (meaning the Russians came later), although their recordable history begins with the Kievan Rus' state. Belarusophiles have likewise argued for a homeland on their current lands, contending that the east Slavic tribes were highly differentiated before the founding of the Kievan state.

Both historiographies assert that Russian speakers played only a marginal role in Kievan Rus', while Belarusian historians claim that an independent state of Polatskaia-Rus' existed even before Kiev and flourished throughout the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Both also propose that the Tatar invasions of the thirteenth century had limited impact on Ukrainian and Belarusian territories, which were later taken over by the Kingdom of Lithuania, in which they enjoyed significant linguistic and cultural influence until the Union of Lublin of 1569. Thanks to their resistance under Poland-Lithuania, the independence of the Cossack Hetmanate of the eighteenth century, the formation of independent states in 1917-18, and their resistance to Bolshevik conquest, both nations could rightly claim the independence they gained in 1991 was not a fluke but the result of firmly rooted historical developments.

Viktor Shnirelman's essay on Transcaucasia also studies historical myths, yet in contrast to Wilson, Shnirelman's focus includes the use of such myths by politicians. Shnirelman chooses to use a set of myths which do not correspond with Wilson's straight-forward

typology. The author frames his analysis around the "three large-scale wars…fought in the region since the late 1980s: between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh, between Georgia and Abkhazia, and between Georgia and South Ossetia" (p. 48). Shnirelman asserts that "the revisionist historians who began to appear on both sides in the 1960s and 1970s tended to be more junior and less careful, albeit ambitious, scholars" (p. 51). This revisionism allowed both sides in all three conflicts to assert historical claims to each specific region.

Unfortunately for the reader, Shnirelman divides local historians into rough camps yet fails to provide sufficient description of those camps or more clearly periodize their work. More could be done to link historical revisionism in the Soviet era and period of transition to other political trends of the time–for example, what contributed to the politicization of Vladislav Ardzinba (a professional historian who became Abkhazia's president in the early 1990s) and Georgian historian Marika Lordkipanidze.

Edward Allworth's essay on the role of history in group identities in Central Asia stresses the persistence of older, multiethnic trends in the region, in contrast to the ethnic polarization in the Caucasus region. The author argues that due to "the traditional urge for interethnic symbiosis, … officials with monoethnic preoccupations have failed to overcome the influence of the rich indivisible heritage bolstering the resistance of the cultural elites against persistent manipulation and distortion of the area's history" (p. 68). Allworth discusses the multicultural precedent of Jadidism in the early twentieth century, the Soviet-era search for "harmless heroes," and the efforts of a few academic rebels in the 1960s and 1970s to rediscover Temur (Tamerlane) as a local hero (albeit a descendent of Chinggis Khan, not an Uzbek).

Yet official efforts to dictate which historical myths were acceptable and which were not persisted in the 1990s, and Allworth confesses that "the historiography produced in the post-communist era resembles the Soviet version in most respects" (p. 73). One explanation for this comes from the active role Central Asian leaders have played in offering acceptable interpretations of the past: "In the 1990s, the presidents of Kazakstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan (all former Communist Party first secretaries of their respective republics) increasingly offer themselves, like Stalin before them, as the leading thinkers in their countries, thus attempting to transfuse their politics into the realm of thought" (p. 77). Although dissent has continued and new meanings of dynasty have developed as reformist scholars have gradually begun exploring the past, particularly the prerevolutionary Jadid reforms, politicians have retained a significant influence over historical myths and interpretations in Central Asia in the 1990s.

Part II of the volume is entitled "Ethnopolitics and the Construction of Group Boundaries." It contains three essays: "Nation re-building and political discourses of identity politics in the Baltic states" by Graham Smith, "Redefining ethnic and linguistic boundaries in Ukraine: indigenes, settlers and Russophone Ukrainians" by Andrew Wilson, and "The Central Asian states as nationalising regimes" by Annette Bohr.

Graham Smith's essay on the Baltic states actually covers only Estonia and Latvia; Lithuania is excluded based on the incorrect assumption that because independent Lithuania granted citizenship to all individuals resident in the country at the time of independence, ethnic concerns and relations have been solved. In fact, it is just as important to explore differing conceptions of identity politics, modes of political discourse, and the identity politics of the settler communities in Lithuania as it is in Estonia and Latvia.

Smith's analysis of nationalism and identity politics in Estonia and Latvia succeeds in identifying the contradictions contained in post-Soviet government initiatives toward Soviet-era institutions, policies, and practices. For example, both countries adopted citizenship laws (for which they have been criticized) based on pre-1940 citizenship and language exams, not residence status in the early 1990s; both have also promoted the status of the "core nation," the process of de-Sovietization, and protections for the culture of the historic homeland. Yet the author also paints the two countries' governments and parliaments in broad strokes, failing to explore the tensions between and within government and parliament. Prime Ministers and Presidents are occasionally mentioned by name, yet Estonia's former (and present) Prime Minister Mart Laar's name is misspelled twice (on pp. 102 and 109) and the term "Baltic nationalists" is used too freely.

Although Smith relies on English- and Russian-language sources for his basic information, he rightly concludes that ethnic relations in Estonia and Latvia are not as strident as one might expect; he also notes that despite expressions of alienation among ethnic minorities, most non-Estonians and non-Latvians have "acknowledged the reality of their situation and have opted to in-

tegrate themselves" into their current polity (p. 111).

In contrast to the slight but growing predominance of *indigenes* in Estonia and Latvia, Ukraine is more evenly divided. Andrew Wilson's second essay in this volume assesses the competing myths and boundaries dividing the country's 21 million Ukrainophone Ukrainians from its 17 million Russophone Ukrainians and 11 million Russians (see p. 138). The author concludes that, while "the range of identity options in Ukraine is clearly wider than in many other post-communist states" (p. 138), both ethnic Russians and Russophone Ukrainians have had difficulty in forming social movements and political parties without the relative advantages of the symbolic and institutional resources enjoyed by Ukrainophones" (p. 135). While much of Wilson's argument about historical claims and myths duplicates his earlier essay in this volume, the focus here is on popular attitudes (rather than academic debates) that typically conflate ethnicity and language. While Wilson, like Smith, too quickly uses the term "nationalist" to describe often diverse groups of people, his analysis is insightful and informative.

Annette Bohr's essay on nationalizing regimes in Central Asia does not include Tajikistan because "since the outbreak of civil war there in 1992, regional identities have become consolidated and any concept of a unified national identity has been eroded" (note 2, p. 263). Bohr contradicts Allworth's earlier essay in this volume as she concludes that all four states have implemented policies that favor the titular nationality at the expense of ethnic minorities and multi-ethnic identities alike.

Based on the work of two Kazakstani scholars, Bohr divides members of the Kazakstani (and also Central Asian) intelligentsia into three groups: "rural members of the educated classes" having a Kazak point of view; "the urban Kazak intelligentsia" which is largely Russified and "estranged from Kazak culture"; and Kazaks educated in Russian-language schools who "have assimilated both Kazak and Russian cultures to a nearly equal degree."[3] She finds that "contemporary Central Asian leaders are guided principally by the members of the first group" because it is the largest and because "It is they who fill the ranks of the state apparatus, championing the notion of a strong national state." "The primary targets of their nationalising measures are not only ethnic Russians but also their Russified co-ethnics," even though all residents of the countries could claim local citizenship after the Soviet Union collapsed. Most nationalizing efforts have been accomplished "by stealth" (p. 140).

Part III of the volume contains "Language myths and the discourse of nation-building in Georgia" by Vivien Law and "Language policy and ethnic relations in Uzbekistan" by Annette Bohr.

Law investigates the tension in Georgia between professional linguists and educated writers with no formal training in linguistics. She asserts that "Oral communication plays a more ritualised role in the functioning of society than in contemporary English-speaking countries" (p. 168), and for this reason ethnolinguistic myths abound in the country. Law concludes that language-extrinsic myths (beliefs about a language's "origins and antiquity, its genetic affiliations, its destiny, [and] its perfect match to its speakers or to Nature" [p. 175]) are much stronger in Georgia than language-intrinsic myths (beliefs about a language's "purity, its euphoniousness, the size of its vocabulary, its expressiveness and so forth" [p. 188]). She assesses the role of five specific myths that help conflate language with ethnicity: myths of primordiality, of the chosen language, of conformity to Nature, of conformity to national character, and of foreign interest. Many of these myths were created or developed by the Georgian-Scottish linguist Nikolai Marr (1864/5-1934) and were forcefully propounded by Zviad Gamsakhurdia, Georgia's first post-Soviet and strongly nationalistic president.

Annette Bohr's second essay, on language policy in Uzbekistan, repeats some of the analysis contained in her first essay. Her first section, on language legislation, investigates the impact of the 1989 law 'On the State Language' (which required of state servants knowledge of the titular language) and the 1995 revised version of that law (which abolished compulsory knowledge for public sector employees but also removed the special secondary status of the Russian language in the country). The revised law "further entrenched the hegemony of the Uzbek language within the state" yet postponed the deadline for the full use of the state language in state functions until September 2005, when full conversion to a Latin-based script is scheduled (p. 201). Uzbekistan's Russian and Tajik minorities have failed to react in cohesive ways to this and other legislation, although some "381,400 ethnic Russians [permanently emigrated to Russia] from 1989 to 1996, or 23.1 per cent of the Russian population resident in that republic in 1989" (p. 207). Tens of thousands of Ukrainians, Tatars, Belarusians, Germans and Jews have also emigrated. The "bulk of the Tajik minority in Uzbekistan has responded to the new laws with relative equanimity" (p. 211).

The most revealing section of Bohr's essay summa-

rizes the results of a survey conducted in the Tashkent, Farghana, Samarkand and Khwarazm regions of Uzbekistan in June 1996. Local residents conducted "600 structured interviews...in one of the three relevant languages" (p. 214). Although the survey's conclusions are not terribly surprising–knowledge of Uzbek was lower among Russians in Tashkent than in Khwarazm region, most Russians and Russophones opposed the repeal of the Russian language's special status while Uzbeks and Tajiks generally supported the measure, and most Russian speakers had no intention of learning the titular language– it nevertheless provides valuable data by region, ethnicity, and language group.

Overall this volume contains fascinating new essays which, although differing in content, style, methodology, focus, and use of local (non-Russian) languages, nevertheless comprise a welcome addition to the growing literature on the changing roles of language, myth, identity, and national politics in the post-Soviet states.

NOTES

[1]. Among the many edited volumes are Lubomyr Hajda and Mark Beissinger, eds., *The Nationalities Factor in Soviet Politics and Society* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990); Graham Smith, ed., *The Nationalities Question in the Post-Soviet States* (London: Longman, 1990; 2nd ed. London: Longman, 1996); Gail W. Lapidus and Victor Zaslavsky with Philip Goldman, eds., *From Union to Commonwealth: Nationalism and Separatism in the Soviet Republics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Ian Bremmer and Ray Taras, eds., *Nation and Politics in the Soviet Successor States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Roman Szporluk, ed., *National Identity and Ethnicity in Russia and the New States of Eurasia* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1994).

[2]. Smith, ed. *The Nationalities Question in the Post-Soviet States* (London: Longman, 1996), 2nd edition.

[3]. Bohr carefully uses the terms 'Kazakstani', 'Uzbekistani', 'Turkmenistani', and 'Kyrgyzstani' "to refer to citizens in those states, irrespective of their ethnic nationality. 'Kazak', 'Uzbek ', Turkmen', and '[Kyrgyz]' refer to members of those ethnic groups, irrespective of their citizenship." (See Note 4, p. 263.)

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