

**The Empire Strikes Out:  
Imperial Russia, “National” Identity, and Theories of Empire<sup>1</sup>**

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At a time when Russian politicians have re-employed the term derzhava (Great Power) to provide a vision of a future Russia, Western writers have resurrected the metaphor of “empire” to describe the former Soviet Union, and even post-Soviet Russia.<sup>2</sup> Earlier “empire” either referred to the external relationship between the USSR and its East European dependencies or, if used for the internal relations between Moscow and the non-Russian peoples, it usually had a highly partisan valence and signaled to the reader a conservative, anti-Soviet interpretation of nationality policy.<sup>3</sup> Consistent with Ronald Reagan’s sense of the USSR as the “Evil Empire,” empire applied to states that were considered internally repressive and externally expansionist. But in the late 1980s, with the rise of nationalist and separatist movements within the Soviet Union, the term was used more widely as a seemingly transparent empirical description of a particular form of multinational state.<sup>4</sup> As Mark R. Beissinger noted, “What once was routinely referred to as a state suddenly came to be universally condemned as an empire.”<sup>5</sup> Though free of any theorization at first, the concept of a “Soviet Empire” implied immediately a state that had lost its legitimacy and was destined to collapse. Rather than expansion, implosion was heightened. Beissinger continued: “The general consensus now appears to be that the Soviet Union was an empire and therefore it broke up. However, it is also routinely referred to as an empire precisely because it did break up.”<sup>6</sup> This sense of the lack of legitimacy and disposition to disintegration continues to be part of the imperial metaphor, but those examining the policies of Yel’tsin’s Russia toward the so-called “Near Abroad” in recent years have once again employed “empire” in its original expansionist meaning.

Whatever its power of explanation or prediction (or as they say in social science, robustness), the concept of empire has been the organizing metaphor for a series of conferences and projected volumes and on-going debate in the journals.<sup>7</sup> At the same moment that scholars confidently predict the end of the age of empires, they have found a new growth industry in the comparative study of the extinct species. This essay investigates empire as a problem in the internal construction of states, as in contiguous state empires, a set of states that has been far less discussed in comparative and theoretical literature than overseas colonial empires. Looking at problems of state maintenance, decay, and collapse, through the interplay of nations and empires, I argue that understanding empire requires historical contextualization since its viability is related to the operative discourses of legitimation and the international environment in which empires are located. In this chapter I, first, elaborate theories of imperial survival, decay, and collapse that I hope will give us some purchase on understanding the dynamics and the collapse of the Russian and Soviet empires. And, then, I employ ideal types of empire and nation to help understand the structure, evolution, and failure of the tsarist empire to construct a viable “national” identity. I begin with some definitions.

### **Problems of Definition: Empire, State, Nation**

Among the various kinds of political communities and units that have existed historically, empires have been among the most ubiquitous, in many ways the precursors of the modern bureaucratic state. Anthony Pagden has traced the various meanings attached to empire in European discourses. In its original meaning in classical times imperium described the executive authority of Roman magistrates and eventually came to refer to “non-subordinate power.” Such a usage can be found in the first line of Machiavelli’s The Prince: “All the states and dominions which have had and have empire over men...”<sup>8</sup> By the sixteenth century, empire took on the meaning of status, state, the political relationships that held groups of people together in an extended system, but from Roman times on it already possessed one of the modern senses of empire as an immense state, an “extended territorial dominion.”<sup>9</sup> Finally, “to claim to be an imperator

[from Augustus' time] was to claim a degree, and eventually a kind of power, denied to mere kings."<sup>10</sup> Absolute or autocratic rule was then identified with empire, along with the idea that an empire referred to "a diversity of territories under a single authority."<sup>11</sup>

Pagden emphasizes the durability of these discursive traditions. "All these three senses of the term imperium -- as limited and independent or 'perfect' rule, as a territory embracing more than one political community, and as the absolute sovereignty of a single individual -- survive into the late eighteenth century and sometimes well beyond. All three derived from the discursive practices of the Roman empire, and to a lesser extent the Athenian and Macedonian empires."<sup>12</sup> Moreover, empire was connected with "the notion of a single exclusive world domain," both in Roman times and later, and the great European overseas empires, especially that of Spain, never quite abandoned "this legacy of universalism, developed over centuries and reinforced by a powerfully articulate learned elite."<sup>13</sup>

Though sensitive to the variety of historical meanings attached to empire, social scientists have attempted a more limited understanding of empire as a political relationship. Michael W. Doyle's definition -- "Empire...is a relationship, formal or informal, in which one state controls the effective political sovereignty of another political society" -- is extremely useful, even though he is concerned almost exclusively with non-contiguous empires.<sup>14</sup> Elaborating further he argues that empire is "a system of interaction between two political entities, one of which, the dominant metropole, exerts political control over the internal and external policy -- the effective sovereignty -- of the other, the subordinate periphery."<sup>15</sup> John A. Armstrong, as well, speaks of empire as "a compound polity that has incorporated lesser ones."<sup>16</sup> For my purposes, looking at contiguous empire-states that do not necessarily have states within them, political society must be defined more loosely than as state.<sup>17</sup>

Borrowing from Armstrong and Doyle, I define empire as a particular form of domination or control, between two units set apart in a hierarchical, inequitable relationship, more precisely a composite state in which a metropole dominates a

periphery to the disadvantage of the periphery. Rather than limit empires and imperialism (the building and maintaining of empires) to relations between polities, I extend the definition of imperialism to the deliberate act or policy that furthers a state's extension or maintenance for the purpose of aggrandizement of that kind of direct or indirect political or economic control over any other inhabited territory which involves the inequitable treatment of those inhabitants in comparison with its own citizens or subjects. Like Doyle I emphasize that an imperial state differs from the broader category of multinational states, confederations, or federations in that it "is not organized on the basis of political equality among societies or individuals. The domain of empire is a people subject to unequal rule."<sup>18</sup> Not all multinational, multicultural, or multireligious states are necessarily empires, but where distinctions remain and treatment is unequal, as in areas that remain ethnically distinct, then the relationship continues to be imperial. Inequitable treatment might involve forms of cultural or linguistic discrimination or disadvantageous redistributive practices from the periphery to the metropole (but not necessarily, as, for example, in the Soviet empire). This ideal type of empire, then, is fundamentally different from the ideal type of the nation-state. While empire is inequitable rule over something different, nation-state rule is, at least in theory if not always in practice, the same for all members of the nation. Citizens of the nation have a different relationship with their state than do the subjects of empire.

Besides inequality and subordination, the relationship of the metropole to the periphery is marked by difference -- by ethnicity, geographic separation, administrative distinction.<sup>19</sup> If peripheries are fully integrated into the metropole, as various appanage principalities were into Muscovy, and treated as well or badly as the metropolitan provinces, then the relationship is not imperial. Very importantly, the metropole need not be defined ethnically or geographically. It is the ruling institution. In several empires, rather than a geographic or ethnic distinction from the periphery, the ruling institution had a status or class character, a specially endowed nobility or political class, like the Osmanli in the Ottoman Empire, or the imperial family and upper layers of the landed gentry and

bureaucracy in the Russian Empire, or, analogously, the Communist nomenklatura in the Soviet Union. In my understanding, neither tsarist Russia nor the Soviet Union was an ethnically “Russian Empire” with the metropole completely identified with a ruling Russian nationality. Rather, the ruling institution -- nobility in one case, the Communist Party elite in the other -- was multinational, though primarily Russian and ruled imperially over Russian and non-Russian subjects alike. In empire, unlike nations, the distance and difference of the rulers was part of the ideological justification for the superordination of the ruling institution. The right to rule in empire resides with the ruling institution, not in the consent of the governed.

All states have centers, capital cities and central elites, which in some ways are superior to the other parts of the state, but in empires the metropole is uniquely sovereign, able to override routinely the desires and decisions of peripheral units.<sup>20</sup> The flow of goods, information, and power runs from periphery to metropole and back to periphery but seldom from periphery to periphery. The degree of dependence of periphery on metropole is far greater and more encompassing than in other kinds of states. Roads and railroads run to the capital; elaborate architectural and monumental displays mark the imperial center off from other centers; and the central imperial elite distinguishes itself in a variety of ways from both peripheral elites, often their servants and agents, and the ruled population.<sup>21</sup> The metropole benefits from the periphery in an inequitable way; there is “exploitation,” at least there is the perception of such exploitation. That, indeed, is the essence of what being colonized means.

While subordination, inequitable treatment, and exploitation might be measured in a variety of ways, they are always inflected subjectively and normatively. As Beissinger has suggested:

Any attempt to define empire in ‘objective’ terms -- as a system of stratification, as a policy based on force, as a system of exploitation -- fails in the end to capture what is undoubtedly the most important dimension of any imperial situation: perception.... Empires and states are set apart

not primarily by exploitation, nor even by the use of force, but essentially by whether politics and policies are accepted as ‘ours’ or are rejected as ‘theirs’.<sup>22</sup>

To this should be added that the perception of empire is not only about the attitude of peripheries but of metropolises as well. Empire exists even if peripheral populations are convinced that the result of their association with the empire is beneficial rather than exploitative, as long as the two conditions of distinction and subordination obtain. Indeed, much of the “post-colonialism” literature has dealt precisely with the ways in which hegemonic cultures of difference and development have sanctioned imperial relations and mediated resistance.

To sum up, empire is a composite state structure in which the metropole is distinct in some way from the periphery and the relationship between the two is conceived or perceived by metropolitan or peripheral actors as one of justifiable or unjustifiable inequity, subordination, and/or exploitation. “Empire” is not merely a form of polity but also a value-laden appellation that as late as the nineteenth century (and even in some usages well into our own) was thought of as the sublime form of political existence (think of New York as the “empire state”) but which in the late twentieth century casts doubts about the legitimacy of a polity and even predicts its eventual, indeed inevitable, demise.<sup>23</sup> Thus, the Soviet Union, which a quarter of a century ago would have been described by most social scientists as a state and only occasionally, and usually by quite conservative analysts, as an empire, is almost universally described after its demise as an empire, since it now appears to have been an illegitimate, composite polity unable to contain the rising nations within it.

Recognizing that forms of the state as well as concepts of the state have changed over time, I adopt a fairly basic definition of “state” as a set of common political institutions capable of monopolizing legitimate violence and distributing some goods and services within a demarcated territory. As Rogers Brubaker has noted, the generation of modern statehood meant a movement from what was essentially “a network of persons”

in the medieval sense to “territorialization of rule,” as the world was transformed into a set of bounded and mutually exclusive citizenries.<sup>24</sup> The modern “state” (basically post fifteenth century) is characterized by relatively fixed territorial boundaries, a single sovereignty over its territory and a permanent bureaucratic and military apparatus. As states homogenized their territories in the late medieval and early modern periods, eliminating competing sovereignties and standardizing administration, a number of states that at first looked a lot like the empires described above consolidated a relatively coherent internal community, either on linguistic, ethnocultural, or religious lines, that made an idea of “nation” conceivable with the coming of the late eighteenth-century revolutions and the subsequent “age of nationalism.”<sup>25</sup> At the same time less homogeneous states, those that emerged into the modern period as contiguous empires, tightened their internal interconnections in order to be competitive in the new international environment but without achieving the degree of internal homogeneity of proto-nation-states like Portugal or France.

In his study of “internal colonialism,” Michael Hechter argues that it is only after the fact that one can determine whether (nation)-state-building or empire-building has occurred. If the core has been successful in integrating the population of its expanding territory into accepting the legitimacy of the central authority, then (nation)-state-building has occurred, but if the population rejects or resists that authority, then the center has only succeeded in creating an empire.<sup>26</sup> Many, if not most, of the oldest nation-states of our own time began their historic evolution as heterogeneous dynastic conglomerates with the characteristics of imperial relationships between metropole and periphery, and only after the hard work of nationalizing homogenization by state authorities were hierarchical empires transformed into relatively egalitarian nation-states based on a horizontal notion of equal citizenship. Yet in the age of nationalism, that very process of nationalization stimulated the ethnonational consciousness of some populations able to distinguish themselves (or having been distinguished by others) who then resisted assimilation into the ruling nationality, became defined as a “minority,” and ended up in a colonial

relationship with the metropolitan nation. In these cases “nation-making” laid bare the underlying imperialism of the state.

Following the lead of recent theorists of the nation, I define a nation as a group of people who imagines itself to be a political community that is distinct from the rest of humankind, believes that it shares characteristics, perhaps origins, values, historical experiences, language, territory, or any of many other elements, and on the basis of their defined culture deserves self-determination, which usually entails control of its own territory (the “homeland”) and a state of its own.<sup>27</sup> Neither natural nor primordial but the result of hard constitutive intellectual and political work of elites and masses, nations exist in particular understandings of history, stories in which the nation is seen as the subject moving continuously through time, coming to self-awareness over many centuries.<sup>28</sup> Though there may be examples of political communities in the distant past that approach our notions of modern nations, in the modern era political communities exist within a discourse that came together in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries around the notion of bounded territorial sovereignties in which the “people” constituted as a nation provide the legitimacy to the political order. From roughly the late eighteenth century to the present the state merged with the “nation,” and almost all modern states claimed to be nation-states, either in an ethnic or civic sense, with governments deriving power from and exercising it in the interest of the nation. Modern states legitimized themselves in reference to the nation and the claims to popular sovereignty implicit in the discourse of the nation.<sup>29</sup>

Though the discourse of the nation began as an expression of state patriotism, through the nineteenth century it increasingly became ethnicized until the “national community” was understood to be a cultural community of shared language, religion, and/or other characteristics with a durable, antique past, shared kinship, common origins and narratives of progress through time. Lost to time was the ways in which notions of shared pasts and common origins were constructed and reimagined, how primary languages themselves were selected from dialects and elevated to dominance through print



and schooling, and how history itself was employed to justify claims to the world's real estate. Nationalists strove to make the nation and the state congruent, an almost utopian goal, and it is not a great stretch to argue that much of modern history has been about making nations and states fit together in a world where the two almost never match.

By the twentieth century such imagined communities were the most legitimate basis for the constitution of states, displacing dynastic, religious, and class discourses -- and coincidentally challenging alternative formulas for legitimation, like those underpinning empires. Once-viable imperial states became increasingly vulnerable to nationalist movements that in turn gained strength from the new understanding that states ought to represent, if not coincide, with nations. The simultaneous rise of notions of democratic representation of subaltern interests accentuated the fundamental tension between inequitable imperial relationships and horizontal conceptions of national citizenship. Though liberal states with representative institutions, styling themselves as democracies, could be (and were) effective imperial powers in the overseas empires of Great Britain, France, Belgium, and the Netherlands, the great contiguous empires resisted democratization that would have undermined the right to rule of the dominant imperial elite and the very hierarchical and inequitable relationship between metropole and periphery in the empire. While empires were among the most ubiquitous and long-lived polities in premodern history, they were progressively subverted in modern times by the powerful combination of nationalism and democracy.<sup>30</sup>

### **Modernizing Empires**

Some macrohistorical accounts of state and nation development argue that there has been a universal process of territorial consolidation, homogenization of population and institutions, and concentration of power and sovereignty that laid the groundwork for the modern nation-state. While such accounts certainly capture a principal pattern of state formation in the early modern period, that powerful metanarrative neglects the persistence and durability under certain conditions of less "modern" political forms such as empires. The question arises, why did the last empires of Europe not evolve into

nation-states by the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? How did the practices and preferences of imperial elites prevent nation-making, even when becoming a nation might have made their state more competitive in the international arena? In several contiguous empires state authorities in fact attempted to homogenize the differences within the state in order to achieve the kinds of efficiencies that accompanied the more homogeneous nation-states, but for a variety of reasons they ultimately failed. What was once possible in medieval and early modern times when quite heterogeneous populations assimilated into relatively homogeneous proto-nations, perhaps around common religious or dynastic loyalties, became in the “age of nationalism” far more difficult, for now the available discourse of the nation with all its attendant attractions of progress, representation, and statehood became available for anyone to claim. At the same time the appeals of popular sovereignty and democracy implied in the nation-form challenged the inequity, hierarchy, and discrimination inherent in empire, undermining their very *raison d’être*. Modern empires were caught between maintaining the privileges and distinctions that kept the traditional elites in power or considering reforms along liberal lines that would have undermined the old ruling classes. While the great “bourgeois” overseas empires of the nineteenth century were able to liberalize, even democratize in the metropolises, at the same time maintaining harsh repressive regimes in the colonies, pursuing different policies in core and periphery was far more difficult in contiguous empires than in non-contiguous ones. While it was possible to have a democratic metropole and colonized peripheries in overseas empires, as the examples of Britain, France, and Belgium show, it was potentially destabilizing to have constitutionalism or liberal democracy in only part of a contiguous empire. In Russia the privileges enjoyed by the Grand Duchy of Finland, or even the constitution granted to Bulgaria, an independent state outside the empire, were constant reminders to the tsar’s educated subjects of his refusal to allow them similar institutions. Here is a major tension of contiguous empires. Some kind of separation, apartheid, is essential to maintain a democratic and non-democratic political order in a

single state. But this is a highly unstable compromise as the governments of South Africa and Israel discovered in the twentieth century.

In contiguous empires, where the distinction between the nation and the empire is more easily muddled than in overseas empires, ruling elites may attempt to construct hybrid notions of an empire-nation, as in tsarist Russia or the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century.<sup>31</sup> Responding to the challenges presented by the efficiencies of the new national states, imperial elites promoted a transition from “ancien regime” empires to “modern” empires, from a more polycentric and differentiated polity in which regions maintained quite different legal, economic, and even political structures, to a more centralized, bureaucratized state in which laws, economic practices, even customs and dialects, were homogenized by state elites. The more modern empires adopted a number of strategies to restabilize their rule. In Russia the monarchy became more “national” in its self-image and public representation, drawing it closer to the people it ruled. In Austro-Hungary the central state devolved power to several of the non-ruling peoples, moving the empire toward becoming a more egalitarian multinational state. In the Ottoman Empire modernizing bureaucrats abandoned certain traditional hierarchical practices that privileged Muslims over non-Muslims, and in the reforming era known as Tanzimat they attempted to create a civic nation of all peoples of the empire, an Ottomanist idea of a new imperial community. In the last two decades of the nineteenth century the tsarist government attempted yet another strategy, a policy of administrative and cultural Russification that privileged a single nationality. The Young Turks after 1908 experimented with everything from an Ottomanist liberalism to Pan-Islamic, Pan-Turkic, and increasingly nationalist reconfigurations of their empire.<sup>32</sup> But modernizing imperialists were caught between these new projects of homogenization and rationalization, and policies and structures that maintained distance and difference from their subjects as well as differentiations and disadvantages among the peoples of the empire. Modernizing empires searched for new legitimation formulas that softened

rhetorics of conquest and divine sanction and emphasized the civilizing mission of the imperial metropole, its essential competence in a new project of development.

Given the unevenness of the economic transformations of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, all within a highly competitive international environment, most states, even quite conservative imperial states like the Ottoman and Romanov empires, undertook state programs of economic and social “modernization.” Developmentalism was soon deeply embedded both in national and imperial state policies. Needing to justify the rule of foreigners over peoples who were constituting themselves as nations, the idea of developing inferior or uncivilized peoples became a dominant source of imperial legitimation and continued well into the twentieth century.<sup>33</sup>

There is a subversive dialectic in developmentalism, however. Its successes create the conditions for imperial failure. If the developmentalist program succeeds among the colonized people, realizing material well-being and intellectual sophistication, urbanism and industrialism, social mobility and knowledge of the world, the justification for foreign imperial rule over a “backward” people evaporates. Indeed, rather than suppressing nation-making and nationalism, imperialism far more often provides conditions and stimulation for the construction of new nations. Populations are ethnographically described, statistically enumerated, ascribed characteristics and functions, and reconceive themselves in ways that qualify them as “nations.” Not accidentally the map of the world at the end of the twentieth century is marked by dozens of states with boundaries drawn by imperialism. And if clearly defined and articulated nations do not exist within these states by the moment of independence, then state elites busily set about creating national political communities to fill out the fledgling state.

Developmentalism, of course, was not the project of “bourgeois” nation-states and empires alone, but of self-styled socialist ones as well. The problem grew when empires, which justified their rule as agents of modernity and modernization, as instruments of development and progress, achieved their stated task too well, supplied their subordinated populations with languages of aspiration and resistance (as Cooper and

Packard put it, “What at one level appears like a discourse of control is at another a discourse of entitlement.”<sup>34</sup>), and indeed created subjects that no longer required empire in the way the colonizers claimed. This dialectical reversal of the justification for empire, embedded in the theory and practice of modernization, was, in my view, also at the very core of the progressive decay of the Soviet Empire. In a real sense the Communist Party effectively made itself irrelevant. Who needed a “vanguard” when you now had an urban, educated, mobile, self-motivated society? Who needed imperial control from Moscow when national elites and their constituents were able to articulate their own interests in terms sanctioned by Marxism-Leninism in the idea of national self-determination?

### **Maintaining Empires**

Earlier in this century, when the problem of imperialism gripped scholars and theorists as well as politicians, their attention focused on the causes and dynamics of empire-making -- expansion and conquest, incorporation and annexation.<sup>35</sup> More recently, theorists have elaborated the conditions under which empires successfully maintain themselves. Following a suggestion by the classical historian M. I. Finley, Doyle looks at a series of premodern empires -- Athens, Rome, Spain, England, and the Ottoman -- and argues that among the factors that make empire possible, sustainable, and, more dynamically, expansionist are: a differential of power, greater in the metropole, less in the peripheries; political unity of the imperial or hegemonic metropole, which involves not only a strong, united central government but a broader sense of legitimacy and community among the imperial elite; and some form of transnational connection -- forces or actors, religion, ideology, economy, a form of society based in the metropole and capable of extending itself to subject societies. Athens had such a transnational society and became imperial, while Sparta did not have one and could exercise only hegemony over other states.<sup>36</sup>

The greater “power” of the unified metropole over the peripheries ought to be understood not merely as greater coercive power but discursive power as well. Recently scholars have moved beyond material and structural analyses to investigate how empires

maintained themselves, not only by the obvious means of physical force, but also through a kind of manufactured consent. “Colonial” and “post-colonial” scholars have explored the ways in which coercive power was supplemented and sanctioned by discursive power. “Colonialism,” one recent collection asserts, “(like its counterpart, racism), then, is an operation of discourse, and as an operation of discourse it interpellates colonial subjects by incorporating them in a system of representation. They are always already written by that system of representation.”<sup>37</sup> Whether it was the story of The Water Babies, the adventure stories of Robert Dixon or Rudyard Kipling, or the tales of Babar the Elephant, the fantasies elaborated contained naturalized images of superior and inferior races and nations. One of the most telling sets of arguments from colonial studies has been the way in which colonialism and its attendant racism not only inscribed the position of the colonized but also fundamentally shaped the self-representation of the colonizer. The problem for imperialism was creating and maintaining difference and distance between ruler and ruled. In a discussion that began with Edward Said’s seminal work, Orientalism, and continued with his more recent Culture and Imperialism, scholars have investigated the ways in which Europe understood itself in terms of what it was not, the colonized world.<sup>38</sup> In their collection of essays on Tensions of Empire, Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper reverse the usual way of looking at influences: “Europe was made by its imperial projects, as much as colonial encounters were shaped by conflicts within Europe itself.”<sup>39</sup> Yet at the base of European self-understandings lay the underlying problem of constructing and reproducing the categories of the colonized and the colonizer, keeping them distinct, one inferior to the other. The great nineteenth-century European overseas empires were “bourgeois” empires in which “ruling elites trying to claim power on the basis of generalized citizenship and inclusive social rights were forced to confront a basic question: whether those principles were applicable -- and to whom -- in old overseas empires and in newly conquered territory that were now becoming the dependencies of nation-states.”<sup>40</sup> European ideas of citizenship were about membership in the nation, but that membership implied culture and learning. Attitudes

toward both domestic lower classes and subject peoples in the colonies were bound up in serious questions of the boundaries of the nation -- who should be included, and on what basis, and who should be excluded. European notions of egalitarianism clashed with imposed hierarchies; notions of democratic participation with authoritarian exclusion from decision-making; ideas of universal reason with “native” understanding. To reinforce European authority, power, and privilege, difference between ruler and ruled had to be maintained, protected, and policed. Race was the most powerful inscription of difference, related to the language of class within Europe, which already “drew on a range of images and metaphors that were racialized to the core.”<sup>41</sup> Ruling classes had to reaffirm their difference from the ruled, which became ever more difficult as the extension of democracy opened the way for the popular classes to enter politics. In the nineteenth century discourses of civility and respectability distinguished those with the cultural competence to govern from those who merely needed to be represented. As Stoler and Cooper point out, “the most basic tension of empire” lies in the fact that “the otherness of colonized persons was neither inherent nor stable; his or her difference had to be defined and maintained.... Social boundaries that were at one point clear would not necessarily remain so.”<sup>42</sup>

No polity exists forever, and many historians and social scientists have been most interested in why empires decline and collapse. Several have concluded that crisis and collapse of empires is written into their very nature.<sup>43</sup> Alexander J. Motyl concludes that “imperial decay appears to be inevitable.... Empires, in a word, are inherently contradictory political relationships; they self-destruct, and they do so in a very particular, by no means accidental and distinctly political, manner.” Collapse stems “from the policies that the imperial elites adopt in order to halt state decline.” Whether it was war, in the case of the Habsburgs, the Romanovs, and the Ottomans, that crushed the central state, or the revolution from above, as in the case of Gorbachev’s Soviet Union, the implosion of the center allowed the subordinate peripheries to “search for independent solutions to their problems.”<sup>44</sup> Yet unless one sees an inevitable tendency in

empires to enter losing wars, something that can happen to any state, or one believes that events like the selection of Gorbachev as party leader or the adoption of his particular form of reform was unavoidable rather than contingent, then there is no inevitability in the collapse of empires based on policy choices. Rather the likelihood of collapse stems, as I have tried to suggest, from two factors: the delegitimizing power of nationalism and democracy that severely undermines imperial justifications; and the subversive effect of other legitimizing formulas, like developmentalism, that produce precisely the conditions under which imperial hierarchies and discriminations are no longer required.

Decolonization is far more difficult for a contiguous empire than for an overseas empire, for it changes the very shape of the state itself. Downsizing the state means abandoning certain ideas of the very enterprise that had maintained that state and searching for new sources of legitimation. Contiguous empires, like the Habsburg, Ottoman, tsarist Russian, and Soviet, did not have hard borders within the empire, and therefore migration created a mixed population, a highly integrated economy, and shared historical experiences and cultural features -- all of which make extrication of the core or any of the peripheries from the empire extremely difficult without complete state collapse. Understandably in three of the four cases at hand -- the Habsburg, Ottoman and tsarist -- defeat in war preceded the end of the empire. And while secession of peripheries weakened these empires, in two of the four cases -- the Ottoman and the Soviet -- it was the secession of the core from the empire -- Kemal's nationalist Turkey in Anatolia and Yel'tsin's Russia -- that dealt the final blow to the old imperial state.<sup>45</sup>

To conclude this theoretical discussion, I am arguing that the collapse of empires in our own times can only be understood in the context of the institutional and discursive shifts that have taken place with the rise of the nation-state. Historically many of the most successful states began as empires, with dynastic cores extending outward by marriage or conquest to incorporate peripheries that over time were gradually assimilated into a single, relatively homogeneous polity. By the late nineteenth century empires were those polities that had were either uninterested or failed in the project of creating a nation-



state. The fragility of twentieth-century empires was related to the particular development of nationalism, the way it shifted from civil to ethnic in the nineteenth century, and the making of nations, which in time fused with the state, so that in the last two centuries the general project of most modern states has been a nationalizing one, that is, the making of a nation within the state and the achievement of the fusion of nation and state, the creation of a nation-state. As the discourse of the nation became the dominant universe of political legitimation, its claims of popular sovereignty with its inherently democratic thrust and its call for a cultural rootedness alien to the transnational cosmopolitanism, such as those practiced earlier by European aristocracies, acted like a “time bomb” placed at the feet of empire.

As it spread from France, nationalism carried with it the claim that a cultural community possessed political rights over a specific territory that justified independence from alien rulers. Whether a monarch or a nobility was of the same nationality or not as the people, they could be defined as part of the nation or alien to it. As nationalism shifted from state patriotism to identification with ethnic communities, themselves the product of long historical and cultural evolutions, the seeming longevity, indeed, antiquity of ethnicity provided an argument for the naturalness, the primordially, of the nation, against which the artificial claims of dynasties or religious institutions paled. Over time any state that wished to survive had to become a nationalizing state, to link itself with a nation in order to acquire legitimacy in the new universal discourse of the nation. In the age of nationalism, certainly by the First World War, the term empire had in many cases (though hardly all; think of where the sun never set) gained the opprobrium of which Beissinger speaks. The Wilsonian and Leninist promotion of national self-determination powerfully subverted the legitimacy of empires, even as each of the states which Wilson and Lenin headed managed empires of one kind or another through another half century.

This leads us, finally, to consider the ways in which the international context contributes to the stability and fragility of empires, not only in the sense that a highly competitive international environment presents empires with difficult challenges

economically and militarily but also at the level of dominant understandings of what constitutes legitimacy for states. In our century when the nation gives legitimacy to states, international law and international organizations, such as the United Nations, have established new norms that have sanctioned national self-determination, non-intervention into the affairs of other states, and the sovereign equality of states. After both world wars new states and former colonies quickly were accepted as fully independent actors in the international arena. This acceptance set the stage for 1991, when the former Soviet republics -- but no political units below them -- were quickly recognized as independent states with all the rights and privileges appertaining. In the post-1945 period particularly, the wave of decolonizations constructed empires as antiquated forms of government, justifiable only as transitory arrangements that might aid in the development of full nation-states. This justification of empires was read back into the retrospective histories of empires. As Miles Kahler puts it, "The empire-dominated system of the early twentieth century swiftly tipped toward a nation-state dominated system after World War II; in dramatic contrast to the 1920s and 1930s empires were quickly defined as beleaguered and outdated institutional forms."<sup>46</sup> Kahler notes that the two dominant powers of the post-World War II period, the USA and USSR, were both "rhetorically anti-colonial, despite their own imperial legacies," and American economic dominance, with its liberal, free trade approach, "reduced the advantages of empires as large-scale economic units."<sup>47</sup> Thus, both on the level of discourse and on the level of international politics and economics, the late twentieth century appeared to be a most inhospitable time both for formal external empires and contiguous empire-states.

### **Russia, Empire and Identity**

Until quite recently historians of imperial Russia concentrated much of their attention on Russian state-building, either eliding altogether the question of nation or collapsing it into a concept of state. Neither much empirical nor theoretical work was done on the nature of tsarism as empire, or of Russia as a nation. This may in part have been the consequence of the early identification of Russia more as a dynastic realm than

as an ethnonational or religious community. As Paul Bushkovitch points out, the earliest Russian histories are tales of the deeds of the ruling princes and the foundation legends are about the dynasty. Russia was understood, from the end of the fifteenth century until the reign of Aleksei Mikhailovich in the mid-seventeenth century, to be the territories controlled by the Riurikid and later Romanov dynasties.<sup>48</sup> In his study of the rites, rituals, and myths generated by and about the Russian monarchy, Richard S. Wortman argues that the imagery of the monarchy from the fifteenth to the late nineteenth century was of foreignness, separation of the ruler and the elite from the common people.<sup>49</sup> The origin of the rulers was said to be foreign (the Varangians were from beyond the Baltic Sea), and they were likened to foreign rulers of the West. “In expressing the political and cultural preeminence of the ruler, foreign traits carried a positive valuation, native traits a neutral or negative one.”<sup>50</sup> Even the models of rulership were foreign -- Byzantium and the Mongol khans -- and foreignness conveyed superiority. Later, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the myth of the ruler as conqueror was used to express the monarchy’s bringing to Russia the benefits of civilization and progress, and the ruler was portrayed as a selfless hero who saved Russia from despotism and ruin.

What kind of early identity, or identities, formed among “Russians?” From the earliest records the peoples of what became Russia were culturally and linguistically diverse.<sup>51</sup> The Primary Chronicle notes that Slavs, Balts, Turkic and Finnic peoples lived in the region and that the Slavs were divided into distinct groups. As the Chronicle tells the tale, the various Eastern Slavic peoples drew together only after the Varangians, called Rus’, came to “Russia.” Those few scholars who have asked this question generally agree that from the adoption and spread of Orthodox Christianity in 988 (traditional date) through the next few centuries, Russians constituted a community that fused the notions of Orthodoxy and Russianness and saw themselves as distinct from both the Catholics of Poland and Lithuania and the non-Christian nomadic peoples of the Volga region and Siberia.<sup>52</sup> Affiliation with a dynastic lord was important, but this should not be confused with loyalty to a state. Indeed, the word “realm” might be preferred instead of ‘state,’

for in these early times the people as community was not conceived of separately from political authority. As Valerie Kivelson notes,

The grand princes of Kiev appear to have had little or no conception of a state as a bounded territorial unit governed by a single sovereign entity, aspiring to administer, tax and control its people. Rather, the territory of the Kievan polity remained amorphous and fluid. The concept and title of ‘grand prince’ of a unitary Kievan realm entered Kievan vocabulary and political consciousness slowly, as an import from Byzantium. The polity itself (if there was one) was constituted imprecisely around a loosely defined people (‘the Rus’) and was ruled piecemeal by interconnected competing and conflicting branches of the princely line. Grand princely deathbed testaments demonstrate that the goal of princely politics remained personal, familial, rather than encompassing any broader aspirations toward unified sovereignty or territorial rule.<sup>53</sup>

Identity was formed both internally by the consolidation of religion, the church, and eventually by a single Muscovite state (from roughly the fifteenth century), and at the frontiers in the struggles with peoples seen to be different. From its beginning, then, Russian identity was bound up with the supranational world of belief, the political world loosely defined by the ruling dynasty, and was contrasted to “others” at the periphery.<sup>54</sup> Religion served in those pre- and early-modern times much as ethnicity does today, as the available vocabulary of identity. It was within the realm of religion and the polity that contestations over what constituted membership and what behavior was proper or improper took place.<sup>55</sup> As Richard Hellie puts it, “The Muscovites defined themselves as pravoslavnye (Orthodox) more frequently than as russkie, which of course many of them were not.”<sup>56</sup> Even as the realm became increasingly heterogeneous ethnically and religiously, the “test” for belonging in Muscovy was profession of Orthodoxy. Yet for all its isolation and oft-touted xenophobia, Russia was surprisingly ecumenical in its

attitudes toward foreigners. “The conversion to orthodoxy by any foreigner automatically made him a Muscovite, fully accepted by the central authorities and seemingly the native populace as well.”<sup>57</sup>

If not from the very beginning, then in the next few centuries Russian identity became closely tied with religion, a shifting, expanding territory, and the state. When Ivan III the Great took on the titles tsar and samoderzhets (autocrat) in the mid-fifteenth century, he was making a claim to be the sovereign ruler of Russia. Moscow, which had often been favored among Russian principalities, even promoted, by the Mongols in the previous century, now “replaced the Golden Horde as the sovereign power within the Rus’ lands” and adopted the “mantle of Chingisid imperial legitimacy.”<sup>58</sup> “Imperial sovereignty,” writes Wortman, “was the only true sovereignty” in Russian understanding.<sup>59</sup> At the same time, appropriating and modifying the double-headed eagle of Byzantium and the Holy Roman Empire, Ivan claimed parity with the monarchs of the West. Tracing their ancestry back to Riurik, the Muscovite princes took on foreign roots, separating themselves from the Russian people. Their allies, the Orthodox clergy, collaborated in the construction of an imperial myth, which was elaborately visualized in the coronation rites. “Ceremony turned the fiction of imperial succession into sacred truth.”<sup>60</sup> Michael Cherniavsky saw this ideological amalgam of khan and basileus as a playful, somewhat inconsistent synthesizing of various traditions. “Hence, the Russian grand prince as khan, as Roman emperor, as the Orthodox sovereign, and as descendant of the dynasty of Ivan I (a loyal subject of the khan) were concepts that existed simultaneously, not contradicting but reinforcing each other.”<sup>61</sup>

With Ivan IV’s conquests of Kazan and Astrakhan in the the mid-sixteenth century, the Muscovite state incorporated ethnically compact non-Russian territories, indeed an alien polity, and transformed a relatively homogenized Russia into a multinational empire. The tsars adopted the designation Rossiia for their realm instead of Rus’, which referred to the core Russian areas. But unlike the Byzantine Emperor or the Mongol khan, the Russian tsar was ruler, not of the whole universe but only the absolute

and sovereign ruler of all of Russia (tsar' vseia Rusi).<sup>62</sup> Yet as conqueror of Kazan and Astrakhan, the Muscovite tsar acquired some of the prestige of the Mongol khans, and as he pushed further south and east he sought the allegiance and subordination of the lesser rulers of Siberia and the North Caucasus. As Michael Khodarkovsky has shown, when the Shamkhal of Daghestan or the Kabardinian princes made an agreement with the tsar, they believed they had concluded a treaty between equals, but the Russians uniformly mistranslated the agreement as one of a inferior's supplication to the Russian sovereign.<sup>63</sup>

Russian imperial power went into the frontier world as a sovereign superior to whatever lesser lords and peoples it encountered. Conquest and annexation of the frontier lands was the extension of the tsar's sovereignty, exercised through his household or the court and conceived as another stage in the "gathering of the Russian lands." The non-Russian elites were generally coopted into the Russian nobility, as were the Kazan and Astrakhan notables, but part of the obligations of the peasantry were now diverted to Moscow. Once a region was brought into the empire, the tsarist state was prepared to use brutal force to prevent its loss. Rebellion was suppressed mercilessly. But when the problem of security was settled, Moscow allowed local elites, though no longer sovereign, to rule and traditional customs and laws to continue in force. As these frontier regions became integrated in some ways into the empire as borderlands, many of them remained distinct administratively, though always subordinate to the center.<sup>64</sup>

Russian expansion was overdetermined, driven by economic, ideological, and security interests. The lure of furs in Siberia and mineral wealth in the Urals, the threats from nomadic incursions along the Volga or the southern steppe, the peasants' hunger for agricultural land, and the pull of freedom in the frontier regions stimulated appetites for expansion. Missionary zeal, however, was not a primary motivation, though after conquest missionaries followed. When in the east and south Russians engaged in trade that brought them into contact with the myriad peoples of Siberia, the Kalmyks of the southern steppe, and the Caucasians of the mountains, differences of religion, custom, foods, smells were duly noted. Though some, like the Cossack traders on the eastern

frontier, were largely indifferent to what was foreign, others, particularly clerics, sought to spread Orthodox among the heathen.<sup>65</sup> Once converted, foreigners were easily assimilated into the Russian community. “Slaves, wives, or state servitors, the new Christians seem to have been accepted as Christians and Russians.... Thus, the tribute-paying foreigners who wished to remain foreigners were welcome to stay in the woods and pay tribute, whereas those who were convinced or compelled to become Russian could do so if they played by the rules.”<sup>66</sup>

At the same time that peoples with different religions and ways of life remained distinct from and subordinate to the imperial power, the tsar’s ruling institution also distinguished itself from the people (narod) of the empire. With the internal collapse of Russia in the Time of Troubles of the early seventeenth century, some people reconceived of Russia not simply as the possession of the Muscovite tsar but as a state ruled by the tsar and including the people. But the newly-chosen Romanov dynasty did not adopt this new conception after 1613, and rather than emphasizing election by a popular assembly, the new rulers depicted the election as divinely inspired. Again, the dynasty distanced itself from the people, claiming descent from Riurik and St. Vladimir, prince of Kievan Rus’.<sup>67</sup>

With the annexation of Ukraine (1654) and Vilnius (1656), the imperial claims were bolstered, and the monarch was proclaimed “tsar of all Great, Little, and White Russia.”<sup>68</sup> The state seal of Aleksei Mikhailovich, adopted in 1667, depicted an eagle with raised wings, topped with three crowns symbolizing Kazan, Astrakhan, and Siberia, and bordered by three sets of columns, representing Great, Little, and White Russia. The tsar, now also called sviatoi (holy), further distanced himself from his subjects “by appearing as the supreme worshipper of the realm, whose piety exceeded theirs.”<sup>69</sup> Finally, toward the end of the century, Tsar Fedor referred to the “Great Russian Tsardom” (Velikorossiiskoe tsarstvie), “a term denoting an imperial, absolutist state, subordinating Russian as well as non-Russian territories.”<sup>70</sup> In this late seventeenth-century vision of empire Great Russia, the tsar and state, were all merged in a single

conception of sovereignty and absolutism. State, empire, and autocratic tsar were combined in an elaborate system of reinforcing legitimations. In Russia, according to Wortman,

The word empire carried several interrelated though distinct meanings. First, it meant imperial dominion or supreme power unencumbered by other authority. Second, it implied imperial expansion, extensive conquests, encompassing non-Russian lands. Third, it referred to the Christian Empire, the heritage of the Byzantine emperor as the defender of Orthodoxy. These meanings were conflated and served to reinforce one another.<sup>71</sup>

But the tsar was not only the holy ruler, a Christian monarch, the most pious head of the Church, but also a powerful secular ruler of a burgeoning bureaucratic state, a conqueror, and the commander of nobles and armies. With Peter the Great the Christian Emperor and Christian Empire gave way to a much more secular “Western myth of conquest and power.”<sup>72</sup> “Peter’s advents gave notice that the Russian tsar owed his power to his exploits on the battlefield, not to divinely ordained traditions of succession.... The image of conqueror disposed of the old fictions of descent.”<sup>73</sup> Peter carried the image of foreignness to new extremes, imposing on Russia his preference for beardlessness, foreign dress, Baroque architecture, Dutch, German, and English technology, a new capital as a “window on the West.” He created a new polite society for Russia, bringing women out of seclusion into public life, culminating in the coronation of his second wife, the commoner Katerina, as empress of Russia. He took on the title imperator in 1721 and made Russia an imperiia. “Peter’s ideology was very much of the age of rationalism, his contribution to the ‘general welfare’ of Russia legitimating his rule.”<sup>74</sup> The emperor was “father of the fatherland” (Otets otechestva), and “now the relationship between sovereign and subjects was to be based not on hereditary right and personal obligation, but on the obligation to serve the state.”<sup>75</sup>



Some historians have read national consciousness back into the Russian seventeenth century or at least to the time of Peter. Michael Cherniavsky, for example, argued that a dual consciousness emerged with the Church schism of the late seventeenth century and the reforms of Peter I: that of the Europeanizing gentry, which identified themselves with “Russia” and considered what they were doing as “by definition, Russian;” and the consciousness of the Old Believers and peasants in general who “began to insist on beards, traditional clothes, and old rituals -- creating, in reaction, their own Russian identity.”<sup>76</sup> In this view “national consciousness emerged as a popular reaction to the self-identity of the absolutist state, with the threat that those things which challenged it -- the absolutist consciousness of tsar, empire, and Orthodoxy -- could be excluded from Russian self-identity.”<sup>77</sup> But in a useful corrective James Cracraft points out that much of the reaction to the Nikonian and Petrine reforms, rather than constituting xenophobia or national consciousness, was in large part “an anguished opposition to a pattern of behavior which did great violence to a world view that was still essentially religious.”<sup>78</sup> Undoubtedly, ideas about what constituted Russia and Russians existed, and identities competed between and within social groups in a confused, shifting, unsystematized discursive space in which religious and ethnocultural distinctions overlapped and reinforced one another. Russian was closely identified with being Orthodox Christian but also with living in the tsar’s realm, and as the state moved away from the more traditional ethnoreligious sense of community toward a non-ethnic, cosmopolitan, European sense of political civilization, people were pulled between these two understandings of the “Russian” community.

By the eighteenth century Russia was an empire in the multiple senses of a great state whose ruler exercised full, absolute sovereign power over its diverse territory and subjects. Its theorists consciously identified this polity with the language and imagery of past empires. “Peter the Great bequeathed to his successors a daunting image of emperor as hero and god, ” benefactors who “subdued the forces working for personal interests against the welfare of all.”<sup>79</sup> His successors, four of whom were women, were backed by

guards regiments who decided struggles for the throne. “The guards’ regiments and the court elite advanced the interests of the entire nobility in defending an alliance with the crown that lasted until the accession of Paul I in 1796.”<sup>80</sup> “In this system, the term general welfare came to mean the advancement of noble interests.”<sup>81</sup> The eighteenth-century monarchs combined aspects of the conqueror and renovator “while they maintained and reinforced the stability that would preserve the predominance of the serfholding nobility. The conqueror was also the conserver, who helped defend and extend the elite’s authority.”<sup>82</sup>

Though a number of specialists, most notably Hans Rogger, have written about national consciousness in eighteenth-century Russia, identification with Russia, at least among nobles and the educated population, was largely contained in a sense of state patriotism, that is identification with the state and its ruler rather than with a broader political community conceived separately from the state, namely the nation. As Cynthia Hyla Whittaker demonstrates, the forty-five amateur historians of eighteenth-century Russia were principally concerned with replacing religious with new secular justifications for autocracy, based either on dynastic continuity, dynamism of the ruler, his/her concern for the welfare of the people, or the superiority of autocracy over alternative forms of government.<sup>83</sup> And though some historians, like Vasilii Tatishchev (1686-1750), argued that an originary contract had been forged between people and tsar, even they believed that once that agreement had been made it could “be destroyed by no one.”<sup>84</sup> Historians were commissioned by the rulers to counteract the “lies” and “falsehoods” spread by foreigners. Russians of every social level probably had a sense of identity that either positively or negatively contrasted things Russian with those German or Polish or French. Russian writers shared in the general European practice of distinguishing national distinctions, or what would be called “national character,” something in which Enlightenment figures from Voltaire and Montesquieu to Johann Gottfried Von Herder and Johann Blumenbach engaged. This sensitivity to difference was evidenced by the resistance and resentment of “Russian” nobles to “foreigners” advancing too high in state

service. When this principle was breached during the reign of Anna, Russian nobles protested the visibility of the German barons surrounding the empress. Here patriotism was a way not only of protecting privilege and discouraging competition for power but also more positively the construction of solidarities within one group against another. In conscious reaction against the Germanophilia of Anna or Peter III, the coronations of Elizabeth and Catherine II were conceived as acts of restoration, bringing back the glories of Peter the Great. In the view of these monarchs Peter now represented the authentic Russia, and Elizabeth made the most of being the daughter of Peter and Catherine I. The German princess who became Catherine II may have been a usurper with no legitimate right to rule, yet her seizure of power was sanctioned as an act of deliverance from a tyrant with foreign airs. Besides being portrayed as Minerva, the embodiment of enlightenment, she was seen as one who loved Russia and respected its Orthodox religion. Enveloped in a cosmopolitan culture that preferred speaking French to Russian, the noble elite was not above sentimental attachments to elements of Russian ethnic culture. “Imperial patriotism with a Great Russian coloration was a theme of late-eighteenth-century history and literature.”<sup>85</sup> At Catherine’s court nobles of various ethnic backgrounds wore the same dress, and the empress introduced a “Russian dress” with native features for the women.

Russia followed a particular logic of empire-building. After acquiring territory, usually by conquest, often by expanding settlement, the agents of the tsar coopted local elites into the service of the empire.<sup>86</sup> But in many peripheries, like the Volga, Siberia, Transcaucasia and Central Asia, integration stopped with the elites (and only partially) and did not include the basic peasant or nomadic populations which retained their tribal, ethnic, and religious identities. Some elites, like the Tatar and Ukrainian nobles, dissolved into the Russian *dvoriantsvo*, but others, like the German barons of the Baltic or the Swedish aristocrats of Finland, retained privileges and separate identities. “Nationalizing,” homogenizing policies, integrating disparate peoples into a common “Russian” community (particularly among the nobles) coexisted with policies of discrimination and

distinction. After subduing their khanate, Russia gave the Bashkirs rights as a military host in the Volga region. Some peoples, like the Georgians, were allowed to keep their customary laws; German barons, Greek and Armenian merchants enjoyed economic and legal benefits, while Jews were restricted from migrating out of the Pale of Settlement. The religious and social life of Muslims was regulated by the state.

Religion remained the principal marker of difference between Russians and non-Russians, and religious identity was believed to reveal essential qualities that helped to predict behavior. Orthodox Christians were expected to be more loyal than the duplicitous Muslims. Not infrequently “enlightened” state officials argued that conversion to Orthodox Christianity would strengthen the empire as well as bring civilization to the benighted populations of the borderlands.<sup>87</sup> Though efforts at such religious “Russification” were haphazard, they reinforced the perceptual connection between Russianness and Orthodoxy. Beginning with Peter’s efforts to modernize Russia, the state and church intensified the previously sporadic attempts to bring the benefits of Orthodoxy and western learning to the benighted non-Russians of the east and south.<sup>88</sup>

As Europe went through the fallout from 1789, Russia represented “the most imperial of nations, comprising more peoples than any other. The academician Heinrich Storch boasted of the ethnographic variety of Russia in 1797, commenting that ‘no other state on earth contains such a variety of inhabitants.’”<sup>89</sup> In its own imagery Russia was the Roman Empire reborn. As the discourse of the nation took shape in and after the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars, as concepts of “the people” and popular sovereignty spread through Europe, the traditional monarchical concepts of the foreign tsar held at bay any concession to the new national populism. Russian resistance to Napoleon, as well as the expansion of the empire into the Caucasus and Finland, only accentuated the imperial image of irresistible power, displayed physically on both battlefield and parade ground by the martinet tsars of the early nineteenth century.<sup>90</sup> At the moment of the French invasion of Russia in 1812, Alexander I issued a rescript that

concluded, “I will not lay down arms while the last enemy soldier remains in my empire.”<sup>91</sup> No mention was made to the Russian people, and the empire was presented as a possession of the emperor. Even as the French moved toward Moscow, Alexander had to be convinced by advisors to go to Moscow and take on the role of national leader. His manifestos, written by the conservative poet Admiral A. S. Shishkov, “appealed to the people’s patriotic and religious feelings.”<sup>92</sup> The tsar was depicted by writers of the time as the “Angel of God,” “Our Father,” loved by his subject people to whom he feels great love, and after the French had retreated from Russia, both the “powerful valor of the people entrusted to Us by God” and Divine Providence were seen as responsible for ridding Russia of its enemies.<sup>93</sup> Russian authorities resisted portraying the great victory as a popular triumph and instead projected it as a divinely-ordained triumph of autocracy supported by a devoted people. As Wortman puts it,

The people’s involvement in the imperial scenario threatened the tsar’s image as a superordinate force, whose title came from outside or from above, from divine mandate, or the emanations of reason. In social terms it was impossible to present the people as a historical agent in a scenario that glorified the monarch’s authority as the idealization of the ruling elite.<sup>94</sup>

Russia emerged from the Napoleonic wars even more imperial than it had been in the eighteenth century. Now the possessor of the Grand Duchy of Finland, the emperor served there as a constitutional monarch and was to observe the public law of the Grand Duchy, and in the Kingdom of Poland (1815-1832), he served as Tsar’ Polskii, the constitutional king of Poland. According to the Fundamental Laws codified in 1832, “the Emperor of Russia is an autocratic (samoderzhavnyi) and unlimited (neogranichennyi) monarch,” but his realm was governed by laws, a Rechtsstaat, and was distinct from the despotisms of the East.<sup>95</sup> The tsar stood apart and above his people; his people remained diverse not only ethnically but in terms of the institutions through which they were ruled. Victorious Russia, the conservative bulwark against the principles of the

French Revolution, was in many ways the antithesis of nationalism. Alexander I expressed this personally in his scheme for a Holy Alliance in which various states would consider themselves members “of a single Christian nation” ruled over by the “Autocrat of the Christian People,” Jesus Christ.<sup>96</sup>

Four reasons for the failure to create a Russian nation might be suggested. One was deeply rooted in the vast geography, limited resources, lack of population and communication density of tsarist Russia.<sup>97</sup> There was no thickening web of economic, legal, and cultural links on the scale of those, say, in early modern France, of which Jonathan Dewald speaks of having “involved an enlargement of social space and a quickening of exchanges within that space.”<sup>98</sup> Russia was so large, its road system so poor, its urban settlements so few and far between that it was extraordinarily difficult for the state to exercise its will on its subjects very frequently. Peasants largely ran their own affairs, dealt with local lords or more likely their stewards instead of state authorities, and felt the state’s weight only when the military recruiter appeared or they failed to pay taxes or dues. Indirect rule over non-Russians was often the norm, and little effort was made until very late in the nineteenth century to interfere with the culture of the non-Russians.

This leads to the second reason for the failure to form a nation in the empire -- the misfortune of timing. By the early nineteenth century, with the emergence of the discourse of the nation, subaltern elites could conceptualize of their peoples as “nations,” with all the attendant claims to cultural recognition, political rights, territory, and even statehood. With the legitimation of nationalism, the process of assimilating other peoples into the dominant nationality became progressively more difficult.

The third reason was that imperial state structures and practices, from the autocratic concentration of power to the estate hierarchy and built-in ideas of social and ethnic superiority and inferiority, worked as forces of resistance against horizontal, egalitarian nation-making. As much of the recent literature on nation-formation and

nationalism suggests, the making of nations is the social and cultural construction of a new kind of space. Not only are nations usually spatially and conceptually larger than older polities, most notably the fractured and particularized spaces of the ancien regime in Western Europe, but they are consciously and deliberately emptied of particularization, traditional or customary divisions, certain older forms of hierarchy and vested privilege, and turned into what William H. Sewell, Jr. calls “homogeneous empty space,” paraphrasing Benedict Anderson’s use of Walter Benjamin’s notion of “homogeneous empty time.”<sup>99</sup> What the French Revolution did to ancien regime France, ridding it of provincial and local privileges, abolishing internal duties and tariffs, standardizing weights and measures over a broader space, was only in part accomplished under tsarism.

The “modernizing” practices of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Russian emperors and bureaucrats that homogenized disparate economic and legal practices were certainly significant, but they must be placed against programs and policies that moved in another direction, creating new or reinforcing old differences, distinctions, privileges, disadvantages based on social class, region, ethnicity, or religion. Among Russians the literary elite developed a sense of national distinction in the eighteenth century, but through the first half of the next century there was very little sense of nation in the developing Western conception of a political community in which the people were the source of legitimacy and even sovereignty. Russia was a state and an empire in which its population was divided horizontally among dozens of ethnicities and religions and vertically between ruling and privileged estates and the great mass of the peasant population. These divisions were formalized in the law and fixed most people and peoples in positions of discrimination and disadvantage. Such hierarchies and separations inhibited the development of the kinds of horizontal bonds of fraternity and solidarity that already marked the rhetoric of the nation in the West. To the very last days of the empire the Romanov regime remained imperial in this sense, a complex, differentiated, hierarchical, traditional ancient regime, with structures and laws that restricted efforts at equalization and homogenization. The horizontal, fraternal ties that ideally mark

citizenship in the nation-form could not be established in a system so embedded in hierarchy and distinction, disdain and distance from the great mass of the population.

And finally the fourth reason was the failure of Russian elites to articulate a clear idea of the Russian nation, to elaborate an identity distinct from a religious (orthodox), imperial, state, or narrowly ethnic identity. Russia was never equated with ethnic Russia; almost from the beginning it was something larger, a multinational “Russian” state with vaguely conceived commonalities -- religion, perhaps, or loyalty to the tsar -- but the debate among intellectuals and state actors failed to develop a convincing, attractive notion of Russianness separate from the ethnic, on the one hand, and the imperial state, on the other. Notions of nation dissolved into religion and the state and did not take on a powerful presence as a community separate from the state or the orthodox community.

### **Imagining the Russian “Nation”**

The sources for discerning popular identities are elusive indeed, but looking at what ordinary Russians read confirms many of the points made about Russian identities. As Jeffrey Brooks points out, “We know little about the popular conception of what it meant to be Russian in premodern Russia, but,” he goes on,

the early lubok tales suggest that the Orthodox Church, and, to a lesser extent, the tsar were the foremost emblems of Russianness throughout the nineteenth century. These two symbols of nationality recur in the early stories and their treatment by the authors implies that to be Russian was to be loyal to the tsar and faithful to the Orthodox Church.<sup>100</sup>

Brooks’ reading of popular literature confirms that “the concept of a nation of peoples with shared loyalties was not well developed.”<sup>101</sup> Yet there were several hints to “national” identity indicated in the lubok tales. Conversion to Orthodoxy and allegiance to the tsar signaled inclusion within the Russian community and permitted intermarriage. At the same time there was a sense of the empire as a vast geographical space with diverse landscapes and peoples in which Russians were contrasted with the other peoples



within the empire. Difference from and fear of the “other,” particularly the Islamic other, was emphasized in portrayals of Turks and Tatars and in popular captivity tales.<sup>102</sup>

With the emergence of an autonomous intelligentsia in the second third of the nineteenth century an intense discussion developed on the nature of Russia, its relation with the West and with Asia, as well as with its internal “others,” the non-ethnic Russians within the empire. As with other peoples and states of Europe in the post-revolutionary period, intellectuals, particularly historians, were in a sense thinking nations into existence or at least elaborating and propagating the contours, characteristics, symbols and signs that would make the nation familiar to a broader public. From Nikolai Karamzin’s Istoriia gosudarstva rossiiskogo (1816-1826) through the great synthetic works of Sergei Solov’ev and Vasilii Kliuchevskii, historians treated Russia as something like a nation-state, in many ways reflected in the West European models but uniquely multiethnic in its composition. Karamzin’s contribution was particularly significant, for his work was extremely popular among educated readers, and it provided a colorful, patriotic narrative of Russia’s past up to the Time of Troubles. As he also emphasized in his secret memorandum to Alexander I, Memoir on Ancient and Modern Russia (1811), Karamzin believed that autocracy and a powerful state were responsible for Russia’s greatness.<sup>103</sup> Though an adequate discussion of Russian historiography’s contribution to the national imaginary cannot be elaborated at length in this essay, one should note that it coincided with the development of an ideology of imperialism, in journals like Vestnik Evropy and Russkii vestnik, the emergence of a Russian schools of ethnography and geography, and was refracted through poetry, novels and short stories, music, and the visual arts.<sup>104</sup> Convinced of their cultural, not to mention material, superiority over the southern and eastern peoples of their empire, Russian intellectuals and statesmen evolved a modernist program of developing, civilizing, categorizing, and rationalizing through regulations, laws, statistical surveys and censuses the non-Russian peoples of the borderlands. Whatever sense of inferiority Russians might have felt toward Europeans, particularly the Germans and the English, they more than made up for in their

condescension toward their own colonized peoples. And Russians frequently mentioned that they were much better imperialists than the British or the French.<sup>105</sup> Occasionally, however, the immensity of the civilizing mission impressed even the most enthusiastic advocates of expansion. Mikhail Orlov, for example, wearily (and prophetically) remarked, “It is just as hard to subjugate the Chechens and other peoples of this region as to level the Caucasian range. This is something to achieve not with bayonets but with time and enlightenment, in such short supply in our country.”<sup>106</sup>

The early nineteenth century was a moment of imperial expansion to the south, into Caucasia. As Russian soldiers moved over the mountains into the Georgian principalities, the Muslim khanates, and Armenia, Russian writers created their own “literary Caucasus” that contributed to the Russian discourses of empire and national identity that shaped perceptions and self-understandings of the Russian nineteenth-century elite. Pushkin’s evocative poem, “The Prisoner of the Caucasus,” was at one and the same time travelogue, ethnography, geography, and even war correspondence. In Pushkin’s imaginative geography the communion with nature “averted the eye from military conquest” and largely disregarded the native peoples of the Caucasus, who represented a vague menace to the Russian’s lyrical relationship with the wilderness. His epilogue to the poem celebrated the military conquest of the Caucasus and introduced a dissonant note into his celebration of the purity, generosity, and liberty of the mountaineers. To paraphrase Viazemskii’s telling rebuke, here poetry became an ally of butchers.<sup>107</sup>

The Russian colonial encounter with the Caucasus coincided with an intense phase of the intelligentsia’s discussion of Russia’s place between Europe and Asia. In the first decades of the nineteenth century scholars laid the foundations of Russian orientalism, and through their perception of the Asian “other” Russians conceptualized ideas of themselves. Russian “civilization,” usually taken to be inferior to the West, was at least superior to the “savagery” of the Caucasian mountaineers or Central Asian nomads. A compensatory pride marked the complex and contradictory attitudes toward and images

of the Caucasian Orient. Emotional intensity and primitive poetry mixed with macho violence. For some the “civilizing mission” of Russia in the south and east was paramount; for others, like military volunteers, adventure and a “license to kill” was what they sought. In the young Mikhail Lermontov’s “Izmail-Bey” and Elizaveta Gan’s oriental tales the mountaineers also become the sexual aggressor, “real men” both terrifying and seductive, a threat to the wounded masculine pride of the more restrained Russian. For Belinskii “a woman is created by nature for love,” but the Caucasians go too far, making them exclusively objects of passion. Russian writers treated Georgia as a dangerous woman, capable of murder, who had to be dominated for her own good.<sup>108</sup> While Muslim tribesmen were featured as heroes, Christian Georgian men played no role in Russian literature except as the impotent or absent opposites of virile Russian empire-builders. History seemed to reinforce the vulnerability felt by Russian men. When the historic leader of the mountain people’s war against Russia, Shamil, married an Armenian captive, she converted to Islam and stayed with him in a loving relationship for life. The eroticism that companioned imperialism was contained in the Russian fear of the physical prowess of the Caucasians that extended from the battlefield to the bedroom.

In more popular hack literature of the 1830s the ambiguities of Russia’s colonial encounters were lost, and an unabashedly celebratory account of imperialism contended with earlier visions until the young Lev Tolstoi challenged the dominant literary tradition of romanticizing and sentimentalizing the Russian-Caucasian encounter. Yet his stories of the 1850s-1870s -- “The Raid,” “The Wood-felling,” “The Cossacks,” and his own “Prisoner of the Caucasus” -- along with the developing Caucasian scholarship of regional specialists that criticized the “romance of noble primitivity” did not have the impact of the still-popular Romantic writers.<sup>109</sup> The public feted the defeated Shamil, who made a triumphal tour of Russia and was treated nostalgically as a noble warrior.

While expanding in territory and upholding the traditional principles of autocracy and orthodoxy, the Russian monarchy, at least up to the time of Nicholas I, imagined Russia as a modern Western state. But the “West” had changed since Peter’s time. No

longer embracing the ideal of absolutism, Europe increasingly embodied the principles of nationality and popular sovereignty, industrialism and free labor, constitutionalism and representative government. The task for the ideologists of empire in mid-century was to reconceive Russia as “modern” and rethink its relationship to its own imagined “West.” Setting out the terms of what would become an interminable debate, the conservative Moscow university professor, S. Shevyrev, wrote in 1841, “The West and Russia, Russia and the West -- here is the result that follows from the entire past; here is the last word of history; here are the two facts for the future.”<sup>110</sup> As attractive at times as European ideas and practices were for reforming monarchs and intellectuals, in the last years of Catherine II’s reign and again in the period after 1815 the emperors and their advisers saw foreign influences as alien, dangerous, and subversive. The threat presented by innovative ideas to absolutism became palpable with the Decembrist rebellion, and state officials themselves attempted to construct their own Russian idea of nation, one that differed from the dominant discourse of the nation in the West.

Nicholas’s ideological formulation, known as “Official Nationality,” was summed up in the official slogan “Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationality [narodnost].” Elaborated by the conservative minister of education, Sergei Uvarov, Official Nationality emphasized the close ties between the tsar and the people, a bond said to go back to Muscovy. Russians, it was claimed, had chosen their foreign rulers, the Varangians, and worshipped their successors. Russia was distinct in the love of the people for the Westernized autocracy and their devotion to the church. The link of autocracy, Orthodoxy, and the people was present at Russia’s creation, claimed the journalist Fedor Bulgarin:

Faith and autocracy created the Russian state and the one common fatherland for the Russian Slavs.... This immense colossus, Russia, almost a separate continent, which contains within itself all the climates and all the tribes of mankind, can be held in balance only by faith and autocracy. That is why in Russia there could never and cannot exist any other

nationality, except the nationality founded on Orthodoxy and on autocracy.<sup>111</sup>

At the heart of Official Nationality lay the image of Russia as “a single family in which the ruler is the father and the subjects the children. The father retains complete authority over the children while he allows them to have full freedom. Between the father and the children there can be no suspicion, no treason; their fate, their happiness and their peace they share in common.”<sup>112</sup> “Nationality,” the most obscure and contested of the official trinity, was intimately linked with ideas of obedience, submission, and loyalty. As an authentically Christian people, Russians were said to be marked by renunciation and sacrifice, calm and contemplation, a deep affection for their sovereign, and dedicated resistance to revolution. At his coronation, which was delayed because of the Decembrist mutiny of progressive nobles, Nicholas bowed three times to the people, inventing a new tradition that continued until the dynasty’s fall. At the same time he nationalized the monarchy more intensively. At the ball that followed the coronation nobles danced in national costumes surrounded by Muscovite decor. Russian was to be used at court; Russian language and history became required subjects at university; churches were built in a Russo-Byzantine style; a national anthem “God Save the Tsar” was composed, under the emperor’s supervision, as well as a national opera, A Life for the Tsar, by Mikhail Glinka, which incorporated folk music to tell the tale of a patriotic peasant, Ivan Susanin, who leads a band of Poles astray rather than reveal the hiding place of the future tsar.<sup>113</sup>

“Official Nationality” was an attempt to make an end run around the Western discourse of the nation and to resuture nation to state, to the monarch and the state religion at the moment when in Western Europe the political community known as nation was becoming separable from the state, at least conceptually, and was fast gaining an independent potency as the source of legitimacy.<sup>114</sup> In contrast to the discourse of the nation tsarist ideology resisted the challenge to the ancien regime sense of political community (and sovereignty) being identified with the ruler or contained within the state. Generalizing from the Russian case, Benedict Anderson sees “official nationalisms” as a

category of nationalisms that appear after popular linguistic-nationalisms, “*responses* by power-groups -- primarily, but not exclusively, dynastic and aristocratic -- threatened with exclusion from, or marginalization in, popular imagined communities.” Official nationalism “concealed a discrepancy between nation and dynastic realm” and was connected to the efforts of aristocracies and monarchies to maintain their empires.<sup>115</sup> Certainly the official tsarist view of what was national was deeply conservative in the sense of preserving a given state form that was being questioned by rival conceptions in the West. Looking back to an idealized past of harmony between people and ruler, Nicholas’ notion of Holy Rus’ was contrasted to godless, revolutionary Europe. At the same time the monarchy, which was uneasily both Russian and European, resisted those domestic nationalists, like the Slavophile Konstantin Aksakov, who identified with the simple people (narod) by wearing a beard and Russian national dress. “In Nicholas’ Western frame of mind, beards signified not Russians but Jews and radicals. The official view identified the nation with the ruling Western elite,” and not with the mass of the people.<sup>116</sup> In the official scenario the people adored the tsar but did not sanction or legitimize his right to rule. That was conferred by God, by conquest, by hereditary right, the inherent superiority of the hereditary elite, and the natural affection of the Russian people for the autocratic foreigner whose rule benefited them.

In many ways the appearance of the intelligentsia in the 1830s implied a social dialogue about what constituted “the nation.” Made up of members from various classes, the intelligentsia lived apart from society and the people, isolated from and alien to official Russia, questioning fundamentals about the political order and religion, yet deeply desirous of becoming close to the people and serving it. As Alan Pollard suggests, “Herein lay the intelligentsia’s dilemma. The elements which created consciousness tended to be products of the West, so that the very qualities which endowed the intelligentsia with understanding, and thus with its very essence, also alienated it from national life, to represent which was its vital function. Therefore, the intelligentsia’s central problem was to establish a liaison with the people.”<sup>117</sup> Young Russian intellectuals

moved from the 1830s to the 1860s from contemplating the world to attempting to transform it through action. The opening event in the intelligentsia dialogue was the 1836 “Philosophical Letter” by Petr Chaadaev that Aleksandr Herzen reported had an effect like “a pistol shot in the dark night.” Radically anti-nationalist, the Letter proclaimed that Russia was unique in that it had no history or traditions, a tabula rasa on which new ideas and forms could be written. This extreme Westernizer position was diametrically opposed to Official Nationality that contrasted Russia’s healthy wholeness to the rottenness of the West. After he was condemned as insane and placed under house arrest, Chaadaev published an Apology of a Madman, in which he argued that Russia’s backwardness presented a unique opportunity for his country “to resolve the greater part of the social problems, to perfect the greater part of the ideas which have arisen in older societies.”<sup>118</sup>

The ensuing discussion divided the intelligentsia into those who subscribed to a more rationalist, Enlightenment agenda for Russia -- reform in a generally modernist European direction -- and a more conservative reconstruction of what made up the Russian or Slavic tradition. While some liberals appeared to be indifferent or even hostile to issues of national identity, Ivan Kireevskii, Aleksei Khomiakov, and other Slavophiles followed the European Romantics and looked to the narod, which was largely identified with the peasantry, for narodnost’, the essential character of the Russian or Slav. National character was for Khomiakov contained in religion or a certain form of religiosity.<sup>119</sup> Slavs were the most highly spiritual, the most artistic and talented of the peoples of the Earth. Peace-loving and fraternal, spontaneous, loving, and valuing freedom, they realized their fullness in an organic unity of all in love and freedom which he called sobornost’. Russians were the greatest of the Slavs and possessed an abundance of vital, organic energy, humility and brotherly love. In the pre-Petrine past they had lived free and harmoniously, but Peter the Great introduced alien Western notions of rationalism, legalism, and formalism to Russia and destroyed the organic harmony of the nation. For Konstantin Aksakov and other Slavophiles, not only was Orthodox

Christianity the essential heart of Slavic nature, but the peasant commune was envisioned as “a union of the people who have renounced their egoism, their individuality, and who express their common accord.” Critical of the newly-triumphant capitalism of the West, they feared the depersonalization of human relations, the dominance of things over men, that came with private property. In Andrzej Walicki’s telling analysis, Slavophilism was a “conservative utopianism” that defended community against the fragmenting effects of society.<sup>120</sup>

Both the state authorities and the westernizer intellectuals rejected the Slavophile vision. For the autocracy the repudiation of the Petrine reforms was an unacceptable challenge, while for the Westernizers the Slavophile reading of the Russian past was a narcissistic fiction. Though Slavophilism was in its origins primarily “a cultivation of the native and primarily Slavic elements in the social life and culture of ancient Russia,” this conservative nationalism” later blended into a larger concern with the whole of Slavdom (Pan-Slavism), rather than a focused development of Russian national character.<sup>121</sup> In both official and unofficial presentations Russia was submerged either into an identification with the state, the monarchy, and the empire or with Orthodoxy and Slavdom. “The Slavophiles,” writes Bushkovitch, “though they moved in that direction, failed to fully establish a tradition of ethnic, rather than statist, identity for Russia.”<sup>122</sup> Yet their contribution to Russian political and social thought was profound. From Herzen’s “Russian socialism” and the celebration of the peasant commune to the revolutionary populism of the 1870s, ideas of Russian exceptionalism, of overcoming the burdens of Western capitalism and moving straight on to a new communitarianism, dominated the left wing of the Russian intelligentsia. Likewise, their influence was felt on more conservative figures like Dostoevskii and Solov’ev.

The westernizer Vissarion Belinskii was critical both of the Slavophiles’ celebration of the folk and the views of “humanist cosmopolitans,” like Valerian Maikov, who believed that modernity would eliminate the specificities of nationality. Belinskii argued, instead, that nation must not be confused with the ethnic but was the result of a



progressive civilizing development that came about when the people were raised to the level of society and not, as the Slavophiles suggested, when society was lowered to the level of the people.<sup>123</sup> Rather than condemn Peter's reforms for dividing people from society, Belinskii praised the tsar for turning Russians from a narod into a natsiia by breaking with instinctive nationality and allowing national consciousness to arise.

Turning to literature, the critic claimed that national art was not to be confused with folk production but must refer to the new social and cultural amalgam that came with contact with universal values. For Russia "truly national works should undoubtedly be sought among those depicting the social groups that emerged after the reforms of Peter the Great and adopted a civilized way of life."<sup>124</sup> Reflecting the early nineteenth-century discussions in Europe about nationality, Belinskii agreed that "nationalities are the individualities of mankind. Without nations mankind would be a lifeless abstraction, a word without content, a meaningless sound."<sup>125</sup>

Historians entered the debate over the nature of the Russian nation and the effects of Peter the Great's intervention, usually in opposition to the Slavophile interpretation. In a series of lectures in 1843-1844, Timofei Granovskii attacked the Slavophile idealization of the people. But more long-lasting was the work of the so-called "statist" school of Russian historians -- Konstantin Kavelin, Boris Chicherin, and Sergei Solov'ev - - who by proposing that the Russian state was the principal agent of progress in Russia's history assured that state rather than nation would dominate the subsequent historical discussion. Russian "nationalist" thought, such as it was, usually centered either on the state or a religious conception of identity and community and in the minds of its more conservative representatives included in that community all Slavs. The "nation," while always present as a palimpsest, was overlaid by other more pressing social and political themes, and occupation with problems of the narod and its relationship to obshchestvo (society) indicates the conceptual difficulties of imagining a nation that cut across estate boundaries and included the whole of "national" community.

The tsarist empire tried to extend official nationalism, first bureaucratic then cultural Russification, to suppress non-Russian nationalisms and separatisms, and to identify the dynasty and the monarchy with a Russian “nation.” But all of these various and often contradictory attempts foundered before opposing tendencies, most significantly the powerful countervailing pull of supranational identifications of Russia with empire, Orthodoxy, and Slavdom. Even the conservative nationalist Mikhail Katkov (1818-1887) conceived of Russian identity as basically state-centered. Since the state was not ethnically homogeneous, that condition had to be changed. Russification would provide the state with the ethnic nation below. Though his newspaper, Moskovskie Vedomosti, was the most popular on the Right, his nationalist views had only limited appeal to the broader population. The idea of a Pan-Slavic unity, perhaps headed by “the tsar of all the Slavs” and not just Russia (an idea expressed by the poet Fedor Tiuchev among others), was continually undermined by the resistance of other Slavic peoples, most importantly the Poles, who not only did not share Orthodoxy with the Russians but whose whole self-identity was bound up in resistance to Russian domination. Closer to home both Pan-Slavism and the more modest concept of the Russian people including both “Little Russians” (Ukrainians) and “White Russians” (Belorussians) as well as “Great Russians” was dealt a severe blow by an emerging separate national identity among Ukrainians. After the government suppressed the Ukrainian Brotherhood of Cyril and Methodius, a radical Pan-Slavic group, in 1847, it not only reversed its Ukrainophilic policy (directed against Polish influences) but officially condemned Pan-Slavism as a dangerous and subversive doctrine.<sup>126</sup>

### **Expansion and Collapse**

The articulation by intellectuals and government officials of a special character of the Russian people as something different from and inherently superior to the chaotic amoralism of the West provided Russian policymakers with motivation and justification for imperial expansion to the east and colonization of the “empty spaces” of Siberia and Central Asia. The voluminous writings of a conservative nationalist like Mikhail Pogodin,

an historian who worshipped Karamzin and held the first chair in Russian history at Moscow University, contained all of these themes -- Russian exceptionalism, Pan-Slavism, and a civilizing mission in the east.<sup>127</sup> Whereas in the west Russia met resistance to its expansion -- the Crimean War (1853-1856), the Treaty of Berlin (1878) -- and rebellion (the Polish insurrections of 1831 and 1863), the east offered opportunities. With the defeat of Imam Shamil, battle-hardened troops were available to be deployed further east. While Russia's cautious foreign minister, Prince A. M. Gorchakov, opposed annexing the khanate of Khokand, even after General Cherniaev had seized Tashkent in 1865, the energetic general's policy of abolishing the khanate's autonomy eventually gained powerful supporters in the government. Russia's principal concern in Central Asia was neither economic nor religious but was largely strategic at first -- directed against the expansion of Bukhara and later of the British -- and concerned with trade and settlement only later. After General Konstantin Von Kaufman defeated Bukhara and Khiva, they were made dependencies of the Russian tsar but allowed to keep their autonomy. Where Russians ruled directly, the military remained in charge, with all of its rigidity and authoritarianism. Even after civilians became more influential after 1886, the administration, manned by petty and ill-educated officials, was marked by callous and arbitrary treatment of the local peoples and pervasive corruption. In Central Asia a cultural and class chasm separated Russian administrators and settlers from the Muslim peoples. Educated Muslims either entered the Islamic clergy or accepted the benefits of European knowledge, mediated through Russian. The Muslim reformers, known as Jadidists (followers of the "new method"), attempted to bring Western learning to Central Asia but found themselves caught between suspicious Russians on one side and hostile Muslim clerics on the other.

Though tsarist Russia was not a "bourgeois" empire (in the sense used by Stoler and Cooper) and did not have an inherent conflict between universal rights and liberties and the forms of its imperial rule, it nevertheless existed within a bourgeois European world and adopted a modernizing agenda in the late nineteenth century that undermined

some of the earlier stabilities in the relationship of colonizer to colonized. Russian colonizers adopted the notion of “civility” (grazhdanstvennost’) as a way of expressing both the civilizing mission of the empire and a sense of the civic virtues that would bring “the other” into a multinational Russian world.<sup>128</sup> But even as they acculturated to imperial society, many educated, upwardly mobile, Russian-speaking non-Russian subjects found their access to the civil service and upper ranks of society blocked to a degree. One of the most telling arguments for the growth of nationalism among peripheral elites is precisely this frustrated mobility -- what Benedict Anderson refers to as “cramped” or “vertically barred” “pilgrimages of Creole functionaries”<sup>129</sup> -- that encourages them to consider reshaping the political and economic arena in which they can operate. In conditions of multinationality nationalism often becomes an argument for privileged access, both on the part of majority peoples and minorities, to state positions.

As an imperial polity, engaged in both discriminating as well as nationalizing policies in the nineteenth century, the Russian state maintained vital distinctions between Russians and non-Russians, in their differential treatment of various non-Russian and non-Orthodox peoples, as well as between social estates. Whole peoples, designated inorodtsy, continued to be subject to special laws, among them Jews, peoples of the North Caucasus, Kalmyks, nomads, Samoeds and other peoples of Siberia. The Great Reforms of the 1860s did not extend zemstva (local assemblies) to non-Russian areas. While distinctions and discriminations were maintained between parts of the empire and the constituent peoples, more concerted efforts were made to Russify some parts of the population. The government considered all Slavs potential or actual Russians, and officials restricted Polish higher education and the use of Ukrainian.<sup>130</sup> The Polish university in Vilno was closed after the rebellion of 1830-1831, only to be reopened later in Kiev as a Russian university. Alexander III’s advisors, Dmitrii Tolstoi and Konstantin Pobedonostev, equated Russianness and Orthodoxy and were particularly hostile to Catholics and Jews. All Orthodox students were to be educated in Russian, even if they considered themselves Ukrainian, Belorussian, Georgian, or Bessarabian. At the same

time, however, the government was concerned that people have access to religious instruction in their own faith. Therefore, it permitted the establishment of Catholic, Protestant, Armenian, Muslim, and Jewish schools and occasionally allowed non-Orthodox education in languages other than Russian. Non-Christian confessional schools were also allowed to have instruction in other languages, while non-Christian state schools had to use Russian. The Church's own educational reformer, N. I. Il'minskii, argued persuasively that the heathen had to hear the Gospel in their own language, and in 1870 the so-called "Il'minskii system" establishing a network of missionary schools in local languages became official policy.<sup>131</sup>

The most conventional image of late tsarism's "nationality policy" is that it was dedicated to Russification. But this image, in which every action from administrative systematization to repression of national movements is homogenized into a seemingly consistent program, is sorely deficient. In Russia Russification had at least three distinct meanings. For Catherine the Great and Nicholas I, obruset' or obruševanie was a state policy of unifying and making uniform the administrative practices of the empire. Second, there was a spontaneous process of self-adaptation of people to the norms of life and language in the Russian empire, an unplanned obrušenie (again the verb obruset' was employed) that was quite successful among the peoples of the Volga region and the western Slavic peoples and continued to be particularly powerful in the middle decades of the nineteenth century when the empire was inclusive, relatively tolerant (except toward Poles and Ukrainians), and appealed to non-Russians as an available path to European enlightenment and progress. The third form of Russification is the one conventionally referred to, the effort to obrusit', to make Russian in a cultural sense. Cultural Russification was a latecomer to the arsenal of tsarist state-building and was a reaction to the nationalisms of non-Russians that the governments of Alexander III and Nicholas II in their panic exaggerated beyond their actual strength.<sup>132</sup>

One of the fields where nationality began to emerge as a significant marker of difference in Russia was in education, and here as elsewhere this emergence of nationality

as a politically salient category was the unintended consequence of state religious policy. As John Slocum suggests, “a state policy aimed at language rationalization, when pursued simultaneously with the implementation of a system of public education, induces a politics of nationality when the state encounters entrenched societal actors (in this case, non-Orthodox religious hierarchies) with a vested interest in upholding alternative world-views.”<sup>133</sup> As elementary school enrollment in Russia increased five fold from 1856 to 1885 and another four fold by 1914, the issue of language of instruction became a major concern of the government. Non-Russianness was associated more and more with language, and the government intervened more frequently in favor of Russian education. In 1887, for example, elementary schools in the Baltic region, which were allowed to teach in Russian, Estonian, or Latvian for the first two years, were required to teach exclusively in Russian in the last year, except for religion and church singing. “By about 1910,” Slocum argues, “‘nationality’ had become a politically salient category within imperial Russia.... Language-based nationality achieved the status of the primary criterion for distinguishing Russians from non-Russians (and one group of non-Russians from another) by overturning an earlier official definition of the situation, according to which religion was the primary criterion for determining Russianness and non-Russianness.”<sup>134</sup> From a politics of difference based primarily, but not entirely, on religion Russia passed to a politics in which nationality counted as never before.

In the more open political arena in the period between the two revolutions, from 1905 to 1917, the “nationality question” became an issue of extraordinary interest both to the government and the opposition. Very often those Russians living in ethnically non-Russian areas, like the western provinces, Ukraine, or Transcaucasia, were ferociously nationalist. They were represented in the Nationalist Party, which flourished in the western provinces, and chauvinist publicists like Vasili Velichko, with his anti-Armenian diatribes, became influential in Transcaucasia.<sup>135</sup> A widely-read debate in the press between the “conservative liberal” Petr Stuve and the Ukrainian activist Bohdan Kistiakivskyi exposed the statism and assimilationist nationalism that lay below much

Russian political thinking, even among the opposition to autocracy.<sup>136</sup> While Russian nationalists insisted that Ukrainians and Belorussians were lesser branches of a single Russian people, nationalists among Ukrainians claimed a nationhood based on a distinct culture. As a variety of ethnic nationalisms developed, both among conservative Russians and non-Russian peoples, the government held a series of conferences on nationality matters, one on Pan-Turkism, another interdepartmental conference on the education of inorodtsy. The organizers of the latter conference hoped to attract inorodtsy into the general educational system of the Russian-language state schools, to develop the use of Russian “as the state language,” though forcible Russification was to be avoided. This was clearly an abandonment of the “Il’minskii system,” for now instruction, except in the first and possibly the second year of primary school, was ultimately to be in Russian. The goal no longer was the development of backward peoples within their own culture along with the Orthodox religion but assimilation of non-Russians to the greatest extent possible. The conference opposed “artificial awakening of self-consciousness among separate narodnosti [peoples], which, according to their cultural development and numerical size, cannot create an independent culture.”<sup>137</sup> As the conference report concluded,

The ideal school from the point of view of state unity would be a unified school for all the narodnosti of the Empire, with the state language of instruction, not striving for the repression of individual nationalities [natsional’nosti], but cultivating in them, as in native Russians, love of Russia and consciousness of her unity, wholeness [tselost’], and indivisibility.<sup>138</sup>

The state was prepared to use its resources to gain converts to Orthodoxy and the Russian language but also seemed to realize that “the majority of the empire’s population was not and never would be truly Russian.”<sup>139</sup> Religious boundaries were real and were to be enforced, while nationalism and separatism were to be repressed. While religion continued to be the primary distinction between Russians and non-Russians, language and

nationality had become highly relevant markers of difference in the last years of tsarism, and the shift from distinctiveness based on religion to one based on language, though never complete, was, in Slocum's words, "a transformation in the discursive regime, a revolutionary break in the political conversations between Russians and non-Russians."<sup>140</sup>

In its last years the tsarist upper classes and state authorities were divided between those who no longer were willing to tamper with the traditional institutions of autocracy and nobility and those who sought to reform the state to represent the unrepresented, reduce or eliminate social and ethnic discriminations, and move toward forming a nation.<sup>141</sup> But the resistance to social egalitarianism or ethnic neutrality overwhelmed nation-making processes. The famous attempt to establish elective zemstva in the western provinces precipitated a political crisis. If the usual principle of representation by estate were observed, local power would pass into the hands of Polish landlords, but when a system of representation by ethnic curiae was proposed, the law was defeated in the conservative upper house of the *duma* because it compromised representation by estate. A law on municipal councils in Poland's cities collapsed before the resistance by anti-Semitic Poles, who feared Jewish domination of the municipal legislatures. Russian nationalists triumphed briefly in 1912 when the region of Kholm (Chelm), largely Ukrainian and Catholic in population, was removed from the historic Kingdom of Poland and made into a separate province.<sup>142</sup> In each of these three cases particularistic distinctions about nationality and class dominated the discussion and divided the participants. Universalist principles about allegiance to a common nation were largely absent.

In his forced retirement the former prime minister, Sergei Witte, an extraordinarily thoughtful analyst of the autocracy, perceptively noted the principal difficulties faced by traditional empires as they entered the twentieth century. In his Zapiski (Memoirs) Witte noted



To preserve Autocracy when the unrestricted autocrat for years shatters the State with actions not only inappropriate but fatally flawed, and when his subjects do not see any relatively realistic hopes for the future, is especially difficult [to do] in the 20th century when the self-consciousness of the popular masses has grown significantly and is nurtured, in our country, by what is called a 'liberation movement'.<sup>143</sup>

To these failures of the center and the mobilization of the masses, Witte added the threat presented by nationalism.

The borderlands ... began to avenge very real discrimination that had gone on for years, as well as measures which were entirely justified but unreconciled with the national feelings (natsional'noe chuvstvo) of conquered ethnic groups (inorodtsy) ... The big mistake of our decades-long policy is that we still today do not understand that there hasn't been a Russia from the time of Peter the Great and Catherine the Great. There has been a Russian Empire. When over 35 per cent of the population are ethnics, and Russians are divided among Great Russians, Little Russians, and White Russians, it is impossible, in the 19th and 20th centuries, to conduct a policy that ignores ... the national tendencies (natsional'nye svoistva) of other nationalities who have entered the Russian Empire, their religion (s), their languages (s), and so on. The motto of such an empire cannot be 'I will make them all true Russians' - this is not an ideal that will inspire all subjects of the Russian Emperor, unify the population, create one political spirit.<sup>144</sup>

Tsarism never created a nation within the whole empire or even a sense of nation among the core Russian population, even though what looked to others like imperialism was for the country's rulers "part of larger state-building and nation-building projects."<sup>145</sup> Tsarist Russia managed only too well in building a state and creating an empire; it failed, however, to construct a multiethnic "Russian nation" within that empire. The history of

tsarism is of an empire that at times engaged in nation-making, but that state practice was always in tension with the structures and discourses of empire. The imperial tended to thwart if not subvert the national, just as the national worked to erode the stability and legitimacy of the state. While Muscovy and imperial Russia were successful in integrating the core regions of its empire, often referred to as the vnutrennie guberniia, into a single nationality, diverse administrative practices, as well as the compactness of the local ethnicities and the effects of settlement policies, maintained and intensified differences between the Russian core and the non-Russian peripheries.<sup>146</sup> After relatively successfully conquering and assimilating the Orthodox Slavic population of central Russia (Vladimir, Novgorod, other appanage states), Muscovy set out to “recover” lands with non-Slavic, non-Orthodox populations, like Kazan. In some areas the tsarist regime managed to create loyal subjects through the transformation of cultural identities, but its policies were inconsistent and varied enormously. It neither created an effective civic national identity nor succeeded (or even tried very hard) forging an ethnic nation, even among Russians. Localism, religious identity, and a pervasive concept of Russia as tied up with tsar and state, rather than with the people as a whole, hindered the imagining of a cross-class, cross-cultural nation within the empire. The tsarist government, it might be said, even failed to turn peasants into Russians.<sup>147</sup> There was no program, as in France, to educate and affiliate millions of people around an idea of the nation. Tsarist Russia’s experience was one of incomplete nation-making. Here the parallels between England’s success in integrating Britain and failing in Ireland or France’s success in nationalizing the “hexagon” and failing in Algeria (as discussed by Ian Lustick) are suggestive in the Russian case.<sup>148</sup>

Russia was a composite state with unequal relations between a “Russian” metropole, which itself was a multiethnic though culturally Russified ruling elite, and non-Russian populations. For all the haphazard nationalizing efforts of the ruling institution, both the programs of discrimination and inequity between metropole and periphery and the resistant cultures and counter-discourses of nationalism of non-Russians prevented

the kind of homogenization and incorporation of the population into a single “imagined community” of a Russian nation. Though tsarist Russia’s collapse did not occur because of nationalisms from the peripheries, but because of the progressive weakening and disunity of the center, much of the legitimacy of the imperial enterprise had withered away by 1917. Elites withdrew support from the monarchy, and more broadly the regime was alienated from the intelligentsia and workers, strategically located in the largest cities, from the regime. Policies of industrialization and the limited reforms after 1905 had created new constituencies in tsarist society that demanded representation in the political order that the tsar refused to grant. In the new world in which discourses of civilization centered on the nation, constitutionalism, economic development (which tsarism was seen to be hindering), and (in some quarters) socialism and revolution, tsarism’s political structure (autocracy) was increasingly understood to be a fetter on further advances.

In its last years the dynasty appeared increasingly to be incompetent and even treacherous. As Russians suffered defeats and colossal losses in World War I, the fragile aura of legitimacy was stripped from the emperor and his wife, who were widely regarded as distant from, even foreign to, Russia. What the dynasty in the distant past had imagined was empowering, their difference from the people, now became a fatal liability. Elite patriotism, frustrated non-Russian nationalisms, and peasant weariness at intolerable sacrifices for a cause with which they did not identify combined lethally to undermine the monarchy. The principles of empire, of differentiation and hierarchy, were incompatible with modern ideas of democratic representation and egalitarian citizenship that gripped much of the intelligentsia and urban society. When the monarchy failed the test of war, its last sources of popular affection and legitimacy fell away, and in the crucial test of the February Days of 1917 Nicholas II was unable to find the military support to suppress the popular resistance to its rule in a single city.

## Conclusion

The conceptual universe in which I am working:

States that contain within them different ethnically or socially differentiated populations may engage in one or more of three possible practices:

-- discrimination and differentiation between a dominant and subordinate part of the state's population; this is the practice of empire.

-- differentiation between the various populations but with no subordination or inequitable dominance but equality among all parts of the population to the degree possible, and the formation of a single political community that does not coincide in all ways with the various cultural communities; this is the practice of multinational states.

-- homogenization and equality among the peoples of the state, with recognition of a single political and cultural community to which all the peoples belong; this is the practice of nation-states.

## **Empire and Nations in the Soviet Union**

The formation of the Soviet Union, certainly the most unique empire in the twentieth century, was an attempt to build and maintain a large, multinational state in an era of nation-states without either establishing a new form of imperialism or a nation-state. The original Soviet state was ideologically conceived as temporary, provisional, transitory from the era of capitalism, nationalism, and imperialism to the moment of successful international socialist revolution. That “state,” which in one sense was to be the negation of states as they had hitherto existed, was at the same time the carapace of the first socialist government, the vehicle for the Bolshevik party to carry out its program of disempowering the “bourgeoisie” and the old ruling classes, ending the imperialist war, and spreading the international civil war beyond the bounds of Russia. The Soviet Union in its own understanding was at one and the same time an anti-imperialist state, a federation of sovereign states, a voluntary union, a prefiguration of a future non-state, and it was dedicated initially, at least in Lenin’s view, to be an example of equitable, non-exploitative relations among nations, a model for further integration of the other countries and the fragments of the European empires. All these were claims that its opponents could easily dismiss as self-serving and disingenuous. Yet for the Bolshevik leaders anti-imperialism was both a model for the internal structure of the USSR and a posture to attract supporters from abroad. Like Woodrow Wilson, Lenin was a major contributor to the delegitimizing of imperialism and empires, and anti-imperialism remained until the end of the USSR a powerful element in Soviet rhetoric.

The argument here is that the Soviet Union became an empire despite the intentions of its founders. Almost from its inception, the Soviet Union replicated imperialist relations. The regathering of Russian lands was an effort carried out in conditions of civil war, foreign intervention, and state collapse by a relatively-centralized party and the Red Army. The power of the center (the metropole), as well as its demographic weight, was far greater than any of the other units of the new state.

Concessions were made to the perceived power of nationalism, which it was believed was appropriate for a certain stage of history soon to be superseded. It was assumed that political and cultural rights for non-Russians and the systematic constraint of Russian nationalism, along with the development of a socialist economy, would be sufficient to solve the “national question.” While creating national territorial units with broad cultural privileges, the new government’s overwhelming concern was that the new multinational federal state be a single integrated economy. On this point there was to be no compromise. Economic policy was statewide, and each federal unit was bound to others and to the center by economic ties and dependencies. Relations between the metropole and periphery, thus, were different on the political, cultural, and economic levels. Politically, certainly most pronouncedly in the first decade of Soviet rule, power was somewhat defused, with bargaining taking place between the center and the republics and autonomies. Culturally, the policy of korenizatsiia stressed indigenization of the local culture and the local elites. The new state attempted to incorporate elites that were not hostile to Soviet Power and to allow the development of “nations” within the Soviet federation, but the political order, in which a single party monopolized all decision-making everywhere, undermined from the beginning local centers of power. As the regime became ever more centralized and bureaucratized in Moscow, the inequitable, imperial relations between center and peripheries became the norm until actual sovereignty existed only in the center. Economically the emphasis was on efficiencies that very often disregarded ethnocultural factors. While some attention was paid to regional and cultural particularities, at least in the 1920s, over time economic regionalization became an extraethnic practice, and party members were regularly encouraged, even in the 1920s, to consider specialization, education, and training over ethnic qualifications in cadre policy.

The USSR, as Rogers Brubaker and others have pointed out, was one of the few states (present-day Ethiopia seems to be another) that allowed national formation not at the level of the state itself but at the level of the secondary units within the state, the

union republics.<sup>1</sup> There was shockingly little effort to create a “Soviet nation.” While everyone in the USSR carried a passport inscribed with a nationality, no one was permitted to declare him or herself a Soviet by nationality. The Soviet idea of nationality was based on birth and heredity, the nationality of one’s parents, but with its almost racial finality nationality was rooted in the sub-state units. The nations of the Soviet Union were based on what were conceived as pre-existing ethnic, religious, or linguistic communities, and in some cases on earlier polities, but whatever the degree of national cohesion and consciousness in 1917 (generally fairly low), for ideological and politically expedient reasons Soviet political leaders promoted national construction among the non-Russian peoples. The effect of this dualistic policy, which at one and the same time stressed a kind of ethnically-blind modernization and promoted ethnocultural particularism and local political power within bounds, was to create increasingly coherent, compact, and conscious national populations within the republics while promising an eventually supraethnic future, full of material promise. With the agenda ultimately set in Moscow; the relationship between center and republics was one of subordination of the periphery to the metropole. In some periods local elites had considerable influence, but their effective participation in the political, economic, or cultural life of the country required a cultural competence in Russian and a loyalty to the entire Soviet project that superseded local identities and loyalties. Through generous rewards of power, prestige, and influence, along with severe punishments, the Soviet center attracted “the best and the brightest” among the national elites, many of which were created during Soviet times, to collaborate with the all-Soviet rulers. The costs of refusing to work in this way, of displaying “local nationalism,” were extraordinarily severe.

In the last several decades a gradual shift has taken place in Soviet nationality studies that in some sense has led to the formation of a new paradigm. An earlier scholarship had focused on the state’s repressive, centralizing, Russifying activities and

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<sup>1</sup> Rogers Brubaker, “Nationhood and the National Question in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Eurasia: An Institutionalist Account,” *Theory and Society*, XXIII, 1 (February 1994), pp. 47-78.

either the passive or resistant responses of particular nationalities. Nationality, which was given an ontological reality denied to class, pre-existed the Soviet experiment in socialist nationality management, and scholars divided on whether modernizing programs would dissolve nationality altogether or whether these more permanent, primordial forms of ethnic and religious affiliation would prove incompatible and ultimately subversive to Soviet state-building.<sup>2</sup> Beginning with a number of specialized studies of particular nationalities and republics in the 1970s, historians, political scientists, and sociologists began to note the persistence and growing power of national elites, the increasing national consciousness of non-Russian peoples, and the ways in which the Soviet polity had assisted in the construction of national cohesion (at least among some nationalities) since 1917.<sup>3</sup> Rather than merely nation-destroying, the USSR appeared to be, in complex ways, nation-building as well. As this perspective became more widely held, especially since the late explosion of nationalism in the USSR in the late 1980s, Western scholarship on Soviet nationalities has moved in several directions -- toward more general synthetic and theoretical studies and, using the now-available Soviet archives and working with sources in non-Russian languages, specialized studies on the peoples of the periphery.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For a review of Western writing on Soviet nationalities, see Ronald Grigor Suny, "Rethinking Soviet Studies: Bringing the Non-Russians Back In," in Daniel Orlovsky (ed.), [Beyond Soviet Studies](#) (Washington, D. C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1995), pp. 105-134.

<sup>3</sup> For an early and influential summary of this argument, see Teresa Rakowska-Harmstone, "The Dialectics of Nationalism in the USSR," [Problems of Communism](#), XXIII, 3 (1974), pp. 1-22.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Alexander J. Motyl (ed.), [Thinking Theoretically about Soviet Nationalities: History and Comparison in the Study of the USSR](#) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992); Robert J. Kaiser, [The Geography of Nationalism in Russia and the USSR](#) (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Helene Carrere d'EnCausse, [The Great Challenge: Nationalities and the Bolshevik State, 1917-1930](#) (New York and London: Holmes & Meier, 1992); Rogers Brubaker, [Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe](#) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Suny, [The Revenge of the Past](#); Slezkine, [Arctic Mirrors](#); Bruce Grant, [In the Soviet House of Culture: A Century of Perestroikas](#) (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Terry D. Martin, "An Affirmative Action Empire: Ethnicity and the Soviet State, 1923-1938." (Ph D diss., University of



**[Since I envision this paper as an introduction to the forthcoming volume to come out of our conference, the unfinished section of this paper that will go here will include a review of recent work on Soviet nationalities, particular the contributions of our conference, and offer some provisional hypotheses on the empire-nation question.]**

There are many ironies to Soviet history. Certainly a principal one must be that a radical socialist elite that proclaimed an internationalist agenda that was to transcend the bourgeois nationalist stage of history in fact ended up by making nations within its own political body. Another irony is that the very successes of the Soviet system, not least this making of nations, but also the industrialization, urbanization, and mass education of the country, made the political system that had revolutionized society largely irrelevant. Instead of legitimizing the system, as it had done earlier, modernization undermined it at the end by creating the conditions and the actors that were able to act without the direction of the Communist Party. This might be called the “dialectic” of the Russian Revolution: whatever the intentions of the Bolsheviks they succeeded only too well in creating the conditions for their ultimate demise. Like other great empires in the modern world, the Soviet Union was a modernizing state. It was not interested in preserving but transforming social and cultural relations. But at the same time it built and then petrified a hierarchical, inequitable, non-democratic political structure that progressively became a fetter on further political -- and to a large extent, social, economic, and cultural -- development. This state structure became increasingly irrelevant, setting the stage for decay and ultimately a crisis of legitimacy. The time arrived when the political structure had to change or society and the economy would simply continue to stagnate and decline. But reform led to revolution, renewal and restructuring to collapse and disintegration. When the center weakened, the non-Russian elites (and in some cases the people as well) acted to free themselves of the metropole’s grip. In fact, nationalism did not cause the

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[Chicago, 1996](#)); and many of the articles, dissertations, and forthcoming books by participants in this conference.

collapse of the Soviet Union; the erosion of central power, dependent as it was on elite cohesion and belief in its right to use its power to maintain order (the evaporation of political will and confidence), precipitated the centrifugal forces that tore the USSR into new states. Centripetal forces remained quite strong until the August 1991 coup, but after that there was a scramble to abandon the sinking ship that seemed unable to steer a new course away from imperial practices. The Soviet empire collapsed in the context of (and because of) a failed attempt by top Soviet leaders to transform the USSR into a more “modern,” “Western-style,” “civilized” state and system. This involved economic reform, eventually marketization; political reform leading eventually to democratization; and once embarked on democratization, the end of empire and the creation of a new form of multinational state. The problems were formidable, perhaps insurmountable, yet the centripetal pull of the center remained competitive until the August 1991 coup. Gorbachev and his closest comrades by the late 1980s were convinced that the empire, which they believed had many of the cohesive characteristics of a nation, had to be transformed, but his sincere hope that the end of the empire would not also mean the end of the Soviet state was not to be realized.

### **Post-Soviet**

Doyle makes useful distinctions between formal and informal empires and international hegemony: “Formal empire signifies rule by annexation and government by colonial governors supported by metropolitan troops and local collaborators -- the Roman pattern. Informal empire involves an Athenian pattern of control exercised indirectly, by bribes and manipulation of dependent collaborating elites, over the legally independent peripheral regime’s domestic and external politics.”<sup>5</sup> While the USSR, I will argue, was a formal empire, its imperial reach over East Central Europe was an instance of informal empire.

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<sup>5</sup> Doyle, [Empires](#), p. 135.

Doyle goes on to differentiate informal empire from hegemony: “Empire is thus a relationship between a metropole and a periphery linked to the metropole by a transnational society based in the metropole; hegemony is a relationship between metropolises, one of which is more powerful than the other.”<sup>6</sup> Hegemony involves control by one metropole of “much or all of the external, but little or none of the internal, policy of other states,” whereas imperialism involves political control over both internal and external policy, what Doyle calls “the effective sovereignty” of the subordinate periphery.<sup>7</sup> If Soviet dominance over East Central Europe was informal empire, the USSR’s relationship with Finland was hegemonic.

Beissinger, who emphasizes empire as perception, also comes to quite different conclusions from Motyl. Against the grain of the common wisdom that the days of empire are over, Beissinger argues that there is a remarkable resilience to ideas of empire, that old habits and discourses have a vitality that seemed to have been drained from them, and that imperial challenges to the building of modern nation-states are likely to prove formidable in the current period of radical transformations. Nowhere is the specter of empire more visible than in the former Soviet space, in Russia and its “Near Abroad,” and in Eastern Europe, where two Russian-dominated empires have collapsed in this century, and the smaller states around Russia have twice come to be dominated by the Russian metropole. Whether a third empire will be built or the score of new polities will remain independent remains one of the great unanswered questions of the end of the century. “Empire,” Beissinger argues, will continue to live with us.

Indeed, one might be tempted to argue that change in the modern state system requires the continued existence of empires, for how else, other than on the basis of a lack of fit between polity, identity, and legitimacy, can we justify redrawing state boundaries. So deeply has the

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

state ingrained itself into the modern world that we cannot conceive of any other way of altering its contours than by reimagining states as empires.<sup>8</sup>

Beissinger is, of course, arguing for the persistence of the idea of empire, the likelihood of states being represented as empires, usually by subordinate populations, and not for the stability of states so constructed as empires. Rather than being doomed because of their very nature, Beissinger argues, empire-states are fragile and illegitimate in the discursive context of the nation-state.

September 15, 1998

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was originally given in a seminar at the Center for International Security and Arms Control at Stanford University, where I was an associate in 1995-1996. My gratitude to my colleagues at the Center, its co-director David Holloway, along with special thanks for comments and/or careful reading of various drafts to Lowell Barrington, Rogers Brubaker, Valerie Bunce, Prasenjit Duara, Lynn Eden, Barbara Engel, Matthew Evangelista, Ted Hopf, Michel Khodarkovsky, Jeremy King, Valerie Kivelson, David Laitin, Gail Lapidus, Stephen Pincus, Norman Naimark, Lewis Siegelbaum, and Katherine Verdery.

<sup>2</sup> Derzhava is the name of General Aleksandr Rutskoi's political organization, the title of a book by Gennadii Zyuganov, head of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, and General Aleksandr Lebed, the presidential candidate of one of the nationalist parties, has written a book entitled Za derzhavu obidna (Shameful for a Great Power).

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, G. P. Fedotov, "Sud'ba imperii," in Novyi grad: Sbornik statei (New York: Izdatel'stvo imeni Chekhova, 1952), pp. ; Olaf Caroe, Soviet Empire (London: Macmillan, 1953, 1967); Albert Herling, The Soviet Slave Empire (New York: W. Funk, 1951); U. S. Library of Congress. Legislative Reference Service, The Soviet Empire: Prison House of Nations and Races (Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1958); Walter Kolarz, Russia and Her Colonies (London: George Philip and Son, 1952); George Gretton (ed.), Communism and Colonialism: Essays by Walter Kolarz (London: Macmillan, 1964); Hélène Carrière d'Encausse, Decline of an Empire (New York: Newsweek Books, 1979); and Robert Conquest (ed.), The Last Empire: Nationality and the Soviet Future (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1986).

<sup>4</sup> A partial list would include: David Pryce-Jones, The Strange Death of the Soviet Empire (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1995); Kristian Gerner, The Baltic States and the End of the Soviet Empire (London: Routledge, 1993); David Remnick, Lenin's Tomb: The Last Days of the Soviet Empire (New York:

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<sup>8</sup> Beissinger, "Demise of an Empire-State," p. 110.

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Random House, 1993); Sanford R. Lieberman (ed.), The Soviet Empire Reconsidered: Essays in Honor of Adam B. Ulam (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994); Jack F. Matlock, Autopsy on an Empire: American Ambassador (New York: Random House, 1995); Robert Cullen, Twilight of Empire: Inside the Crumbling Soviet Union (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1991); John B. Dunlop, The Rise of Russia and the Fall of the Soviet Empire (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Neil Felshman, Gorbachev, Yeltsin and the Last Days of the Soviet Empire (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992); Marco Buttino (ed.), In a Collapsing Empire: Underdevelopment, Ethnic Conflicts and Nationalisms in the Soviet Union (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1993); G. R. Urban, End of Empire: The Demise of the Soviet Union (Washington: American University Press, 1993); Richard L. Rudolph and David F. Good (eds.), Nationalism and Empire: The Habsburg Empire and the Soviet Union (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992); and Ryszard Kapuscinski, Imperium (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994).

<sup>5</sup> Mark R. Beissinger, "The Persisting Ambiguity of Empire," in Post-Soviet Affairs, XI, 2 (April-June 1995), p. 155.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Among them were: "Great Power Ethnic Politics: The Habsburg Empire and the Soviet Union," held at the Center for Austrian Studies, University of Minnesota, April 26-28, 1990, which led to the Rudolph and Good volume cited above; an SSRC workshop, "The End of Empire: Causes and Consequences," at the Harriman Institute, Columbia University, November 20-21, 1994, and the subsequent publication, Karen Barkey and Mark von Hagen (eds.), After Empire: Multinational Societies and Nation-Building: The Soviet Union and the Russian, Ottoman, and Habsburg Empires (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997); and a conference on "The Disintegration and Reconstitution of Empires: The USSR and Russia in Comparative Perspective," at the University of California, San Diego, January 10-12, 1996, which has appeared as Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrott (eds.), The End of Empire? The Transformation of the USSR in Comparative Perspective (Armonk, NY and London: M. E. Sharpe, 1997). For debate, see Mark R. Beissinger, "The Persisting Ambiguity of Empire;" and the reply by Ronald Grigor Suny, "Ambiguous Categories: States, Empire and Nations," Post-Soviet Affairs, XI, 2 (April-June 1995), pp. 185-196.

<sup>8</sup> Anthony Pagden, Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain, and France, c. 1500-c. 1800 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 12.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., pp. 27-28.

<sup>14</sup> Michael W. Doyle, Empires (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), p. 45.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

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<sup>16</sup>John A. Armstrong, Nations Before Nationalism (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1982), p. 131.

<sup>17</sup> Doyle, Empires, p. 45.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>19</sup> As Alexander J. Motyl argues, the peripheries must be distinct by population -- class, ethnicity, religion, or something else -- have a distinct territory, and be either a distinct polity or a distinct society. ["From Imperial Decay to Imperial Collapse: The Fall of the Soviet Empire in Comparative Perspective," in Richard L. Rudolph and David F. Good (eds.), Nationalism and Empire: The Habsburg Empire and the Soviet Union (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), p. 18]

<sup>20</sup> Of course, as an imperial metropole grows weaker and peripheries stronger, as in the Habsburg Empire after 1848, it is forced to negotiate with powerful peripheries, as Vienna did with Budapest, and in time the empire may become a hybrid empire with various autonomous "kingdoms" and "principalities" that no longer respect the authority of the center as it had in the past.

<sup>21</sup> Fatma Müge Göçek, "The Social Construction of an Empire: Ottoman State Under Suleiman the Magnificent," in Halil Inalcik and Cemal Kafadar (eds.), Suleiman II and His Time (Istanbul: Isis Press, 1993), pp. 93-108.

<sup>22</sup> Mark R. Beissinger, "Demise of an Empire-State: Identity, Legitimacy, and the Deconstruction of Soviet Politics," in Crawford Young (ed.), The Rising Tide of Cultural Pluralism: The Nation-State at Bay? (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), pp. 98, 99.]

<sup>23</sup> A point made eloquently by Mark Beissinger.

<sup>24</sup> Rogers Brubaker, Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), p.

<sup>25</sup> This process of internal political and cultural integration, developing urban centers, and consolidation of state forms has usually been limited by analysts to Western Europe, the traditional site of the first national states, but Victor Lieberman has convincingly argued that the whole of Eurasia, from Britain to Japan, underwent similar and connected process in the early modern period, from roughly 1450 to 1830. [see his "Introduction" and "Transcending East-West Dichotomies: State and Culture Formation in Six Ostensibly Disparate Areas," Modern Asian Studies, XXXI, 3 (1997), pp. 449-461, 463-546]

<sup>26</sup> Michael Hechter, Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development, 1536-1966 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), pp. 60-64.

<sup>27</sup> The distinction between ethnic group and nationality/nation need not be territory but rather the discourse in which they operate. The discourse about ethnicity is primarily about culture, cultural rights, and some limited political recognition, while the discourse of the nation is more often about popular sovereignty, state power, and control of a territorial homeland. But this is not necessarily or exclusively so, for one can conceive of non-territorial nationalisms, like those of the Jews before Zionism, the Armenians in the nineteenth century, and the Gypsies. For another view on the problems of definitions, see Lowell W.

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Barrington, "'Nation' and 'Nationalism': The Misuse of Key Concepts in Political Science," PS: Political Science & Politics, XXX, 4 (December 1977), pp. 712-716.

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, Etienne Balibar, "The Nation Form: History and Ideology," from Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities (London: Verso, 1991), pp. 86-106; Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (London: Verso, 1983).

<sup>29</sup> Brubaker, Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany, pp. 22, 27.

<sup>30</sup> Nation-states and empires can be seen as two poles in a continuum, but rather than fixed and stable, they may flow into one another, transforming over time into the other. A nation-state may appear stable, homogeneous, coherent, and yet with the rise of ethnic, sub-ethnic, or regionalist movements be perceived by sub-altern populations as imperial. For those identifying with the dominant population in Belgium, it is a nation-state, perhaps a multinational state, but for a Flemish militant who feels the oppression of the Walloon majority, Belgium is a kind of mini-empire. The term empire has been used polemically for small states like Belgium, Georgia, and Estonia, and it may seem anomalous to refer to such nationalizing states as empires. But it is precisely with the assimilating homogenizing, or discriminating practices of the nationalizing state that relationships of difference and subordination -- here considered the ingredients of an imperial relationship -- are exposed.

<sup>31</sup> See Benedict Anderson's chapter on "Official Nationalism and Imperialism" in Imagined Communities, pp. 83-112; and Jane Burbank's unpublished essay, "The Imperial Construction of Nationality."

<sup>32</sup> On the Ottoman case, see Ronald Grigor Suny, "Religion, Ethnicity, and Nationalism: Armenians, Turks, and the End of the Ottoman Empire," in Omer Bartov and Phyllis Mack (eds.), In God's Name: Genocide and Religion in the Twentieth Century (Berghahn Press, forthcoming).

<sup>33</sup> See, Frederick Cooper and Randall Packard, "Introduction," in Cooper and Packard (eds.), International Development and the Social Sciences: Essays on the History and Politics of Knowledge (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 1-41.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>35</sup> Among the most familiar were Lenin's theory that the falling rate of profit in developed capitalist states propelled European states to build empires to absorb their surplus capital, and J. A. Hobson's, on which Lenin built, that the imbalanced distribution of wealth within capitalist societies leads to underconsumption by the masses, oversaving by the wealthy, and a need to find new markets in underdeveloped countries. Historians critical of economic explanations, like Carleton J. H. Hayes, countered that rather than the imperatives of capitalism, the metropole's national interests or nationalism drove states toward colonization of the non-European world.

<sup>36</sup> Doyle, Empires, pp. 71-72.

<sup>37</sup> Chris Tiffin and Alan Lawson (eds.), De-scribing Empire: Post-Colonialism and Textuality (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p.3.

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<sup>38</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978); *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993).

<sup>39</sup> Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, “Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda,” in their *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), p. 1.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>43</sup> One of these “inevitablists,” Alexander J. Motyl, makes a useful distinction between imperial decay and imperial collapse and highlights the place of crisis in the final collapse. Decay occurs “when the absolute power of the center over the periphery can no longer be effectively maintained and the periphery can, and does, act contrary to the will of the center.”<sup>43</sup> A second form of decay, according to Motyl, involves the loss of the absolute quality of the emperor’s rule. But rather than accept Motyl’s notion that “the power of emperors must be relatively absolute for their decision-making capacity to be considered imperial,” which runs in the face of the experience of those nineteenth-century empires that were parliamentary monarchies or republics, it is enough to follow Doyle’s formulation, that in order to remain effective the metropole must maintain internal political unity able to overcome the actual or potential resistance of the periphery. Shifts in metropolitan polities from absolutism to shared power arrangements do not necessarily lead to imperial decay, as long as elites remain united in their imperial policies.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 40, 36-37.

<sup>45</sup> Jeremy King suggested to me that a similar process occurred in the Austro-Hungarian Empire where the German, Czech, and Hungarian urban bourgeoisies had withdrawn their support from the monarchy at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries.

<sup>46</sup> Miles Kahler, “Empires, Neo-Empires, and Political Change: The British and French Experience,” in Dawisha and Parrott (eds.), *The End of Empire? The Transformation of the USSR in Comparative Perspective*, p. 288. This delegitimizing of empires seems to have occurred at several historical conjunctures, not only after the two world wars but, for example, in the second half of the eighteenth century as the French, Spanish, and British empires in the Americas began to break down. See Pagden, *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain, and France, c. 1500-c. 1800*.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Paul Bushkovitch, “What is Russia? Russian National Consciousness and the State 1500-1917,” unpublished paper, p. 3.

<sup>49</sup> Richard Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy, Vol. I, From Peter the Great to the Death of Nicholas I* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.



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- <sup>51</sup> This is a point well made by Andreas Kappeler, Russland als Vielvolkerreich: Entstehung, Geschichte, Zerfall (Munich: C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1992). I have used the French translation by Guy Imart: La Russie, Empire multiethnique (Paris: Institut d'Études Slaves, 1994), pp. 25-30.
- <sup>52</sup> Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, "Historical Consciousness and National Identity: Some Considerations on the History of Russian Nationalism" (New Orleans: The Graduate School of Tulane University, 1991), pp. 2-3; Omeljan Pritsak, "The Origin of Rus'", Russian Review XXXVI, 3 (July 1977), pp.249-273.
- <sup>53</sup> Valerie Kivelson, "Merciful Father, Impersonal State: Russian Autocracy in Comparative Perspective," Modern Asian Studies, XXXI, 3 (1997), pp. 637-638.
- <sup>54</sup> Michael Cherniavsky, "Russia," in Orest Ranum (ed.), National Consciousness, History, and Political Culture in Early-Modern Europe (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), pp. 119-121.
- <sup>55</sup> Gregory Guroff and Alexander Guroff, "The Paradox of Russian National Identity," a paper presented at the Russian Littoral Project Conference, "The Influence of Ethnicity on Russian Foreign Policy," May 1993, no. 16, pp. 7-9.
- <sup>56</sup> Richard Hellie, Slavery in Russia (1982), p. 392.
- <sup>57</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>58</sup> Kivelson, "Merciful Father, Impersonal State," p. 643.
- <sup>59</sup> Wortman, Scenarios of Power, p. 25.
- <sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 28.
- <sup>61</sup> Cherniavsky, "Russia," p. 123; see also his "Khan or Basileus: An Aspect of Russian Medieval Political Theory," Journal of the History of Ideas, XX (October-December 1959), pp. 459-476; reprinted in Cherniavsky (ed.), The Structure of Russian History: Interpretive Essays (New York: Random House, 1970), pp. 65-79; and Tsar and People. Studies in Russian Myths (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961).
- <sup>62</sup> Paul Bushkovitch, "The Formation of a National Consciousness in Early Modern Russia," Harvard Ukrainian Studies, X, 3/4 (December 1986), pp. 363.
- <sup>63</sup> Michael Khodarkovsky, "From Frontier to Empire: The Concept of the Frontier in Russia, Sixteenth-Eighteenth Centuries," Russian History, XIX, 1-4 (1992), pp. 115-128; Where Two Worlds Met: The Russian State and the Kalmyk Nomads, 1600-1771 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992); and his forthcoming, "Of Christianity, Enlightenment and Colonialism: Russia in the North Caucasus Before the Nineteenth Century."
- <sup>64</sup> Marc Raeff, "Patterns of Russian Imperial Policy Toward the Nationalities," in Edward Allworth (ed.), Soviet Nationality Problems (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), pp. 22-42.
- <sup>65</sup> Yuri Slezkine, Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. 41-45.
- <sup>66</sup> Ibid., pp. 44-45.

<sup>67</sup> Bushkovitch notes a little recognized development in the seventeenth century, the arrival of what he calls “Renaissance slavism,” the idea developed in Poland, Croatia, and elsewhere that the Slavs in general have an ancient and distinguished origin. Polish writers linked them back to the ancient Sarmatians, and scholars like Simeon Polotskii brought the idea that Russians were a Sarmatian tribe into Russian circles. In the 18th century the idea found its way into the writings of Tatishchev and Lomonosov, who attached it to their state-centered histories. But it died out with the elevation of a more imperial ideology with the importation of Enlightenment ideas and is not found in Karamzin’s early nineteenth-century history. [Bushkovitch, “What is Russia?” pp. 4-7]

<sup>68</sup> James Cracraft, “Empire Versus Nation: Russian Political Theory Under Peter I,” Harvard Ukrainian Studies, X, 3/4 (December 1986), pp. 524-540; reprinted in Cracraft (ed.), Major Problems in the History of Imperial Russia (Lexington and Toronto: D. C. Heath, 1994), pp. 224-234. Citations hereafter are from the latter publication.

<sup>69</sup> Wortman, Scenarios of Power, p. 33.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>76</sup> Cherniavsky, “Russia,” p. 141.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140.

<sup>78</sup> Cracraft, “Empire Versus Nation,” p. 225.

<sup>79</sup> Wortman, Scenarios of Power, p. 81.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82; for a discussion of the state as defender of noble interests, see Ronald Grigor Suny, “Rehabilitating Tsarism: The Imperial State and its Historians,” Comparative Studies in Society and History, XXXI, 1 (January 1989), pp. 168-179..

<sup>82</sup> Wortman, Scenarios of Power, pp. 82-83.

<sup>83</sup> Cynthia Hyla Whittaker, “The Idea of Autocracy Among Eighteenth-Century Russian Historians,” in Jane Burbank and David Ransel (eds.), Imperial Russia: New Histories for the Empire (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998), pp. 32-59.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>85</sup> Wortman, Scenarios of Power, p. 136.

<sup>86</sup> Marc Raeff, “Patterns of Russian Imperial policy Toward the Nationalities;” “In the Imperial Manner,” in Marc Raeff (ed.), Catherine the Great: A Profile (New York: Hill & Wang, 1972), pp. 197-246; S.

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Frederick Starr, "Tsarist Government: The Imperial Dimension," in Jeremy Azrael (ed.), Soviet Nationality Policies and Practices (New York: Praeger, 1978), pp. 3-38.

<sup>87</sup> Michael Khodarkovsky, "'Not by Word Alone': Missionary Policies and Religious Conversion in Early Modern Russia," Comparative Study of Society and History, XXXVIII, 2 (April 1996), pp. 267-293.

<sup>88</sup> Slezkine, Arctic Mirrors, pp. 47-71; Kappeler, La Russie, p. 47.

<sup>89</sup> Quoted in Kappeler, Russland als Vielvolkerreich, p. 121; Wortman, Scenarios of Power, pp. 136-137.

<sup>90</sup> Wortman, Scenarios of Power, p. 170.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 217.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 218.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 221.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 222.

<sup>95</sup> Marc Szeftel, "The Form of Government of the Russian Empire Prior to the Constitutional Reforms of 1905-06," in John Shelton Curtiss (ed.), Essays in Russian and Soviet History in Honor of Geroid Tanquary Robinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), pp. 105-119.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 230.

<sup>97</sup> Victor Lieberman, "Transcending East-West Dichotomies."

<sup>98</sup> Jonathan Dewald, Pont-St-Pierre 1398-1789: Lordship, Community, and Capitalism in Early Modern France (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1987), p. 284.

<sup>99</sup> William H. Sewell, Jr., "The French Revolution and the Emergence of the Nation Form," unpublished paper presented at the Purdue University conference on the Trans-Atlantic revolutionary tradition; and at the Nations and Nationalism Workshop, University of Chicago, January 14, 1998, p. 13.

<sup>100</sup> Jeffrey Brooks, When Russia Learned to Read: Literacy and Popular Literature, 1861-1917 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), p. 214.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 215.

<sup>102</sup> To my mind there is a serious methodological problem in reading popular literature as a window into the peasant mind, as if the willingness to buy a book implies agreement or identity with the views in that book. Representations in print may not even reflect the views of the authors but idealizations of what they conceived to be the desires of peasant readers. Artistry and skill in presentation, appeals to emotion, not to mention the constraints of form, genre, literary convention, and the censorship must be considered. The market should not be seen as a perfect medium through which sovereign consumers express their desires in an unmediated way by freely choosing among available choices.

<sup>103</sup> Memoir on Ancient and Modern Russia, translated, edited, and introduced by Richard Pipes (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1959).

<sup>104</sup> See, for example, Susan Layton, Russian Literature and Empire: Conquest of the Caucasus from Pushkin to Tolstoy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); and Austin Jersild, Colonizing the Caucasus: Muslims, Mountaineers, and Russification, 1845-1917 (forthcoming).

<sup>105</sup> A point made to me by Kenneth Church and illustrated in his work on Russian rule in Western Georgia. See his unpublished paper, "Production of Culture in Georgia for a Culture of Production." (1996).

<sup>106</sup> Quoted in Layton, Russian Literature and Empire, p. 108.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>108</sup> Kenneth Church suggests that while Susan Layton is certainly correct that the Russian image of the Georgian woman as a dangerous woman is suggested by the literary texts she explores, a wider acquaintance with travel literature reveals a counter image of the Georgian woman, not only as the quintessence of feminine beauty, but also "as attractive victims in the history of Islamic conquests" and "victims to the categorically deceitful, lazy, and impotent Georgian male characters of these works." (p. 4) Rather than just being depicted as Oriental others they were often seen "as fallen Christians, debauched and uncultivated to be sure, but redeemable." (p. 5) ("Conjuring 'the Most Beautiful Women in the World' in Nineteenth-Century Descriptions of Georgian Women," paper delivered at the AAASS annual convention, Boca Raton, Florida, September 26, 1998).

<sup>109</sup> Layton, Russian Literature and Empire, p. 254.

<sup>110</sup> S. Shevyrev, "Vzglyad russkogo na sovremennoe obrazovanie Evropy," Moskvitianin, no. 1, p. 219; cited in Nicholas Riasanovsky, Nicholas I and Official Nationality in Russia, 1825-1855 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), p. 134.

<sup>111</sup> Cited in Riasanovsky, Nicholas I and Official Nationality, p. 77.

<sup>112</sup> Mikhail Pogodin, cited in *ibid.*, pp. 118-119.

<sup>113</sup> In Western Europe after the French Revolution a new image of monarchy, one in which the ruler was less like a God and more like a human with conventional family values, developed. Monarchs "became exemplars of human conduct, of modest virtue, to be admired by their subjects." The idealization of the monarch's family elevated the ruling dynasty as the historical embodiment of the nation." This move toward family lessened the distance between monarch and his people, as now all were part of a common nation. This ideal of bourgeois monarchy took on a distinctive shape in tsarist Russia. Nicholas I identified his dynasty with the historical destinies of the Russian state and people. "His scenario....portrayed the emperor as exemplifying the attributes of Western monarchy, but now as a member of his family, as a human being elevated by heredity and his belonging to a ruling family that embodied the highest values of humanity.... The private life of the tsar was lavishly staged to portray a Western ideal before the Russian public." (Wortman, Scenarios of Power, p. 402; see also, George Mosse, Nationalism and Sexuality: Middle-Class Morality and Sexual Norms in Modern Europe (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), *passim*.)

<sup>114</sup> Anderson, Imagined Communities, pp. 86-87, 110.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 109-110.

<sup>116</sup> Wortman, Scenarios of Power, p. 402.

- <sup>117</sup> Alan P. Pollard, "The Russian Intelligentsia: The Mind of Russia," California Slavic Studies, III (1964), p. 15.
- <sup>118</sup> P. Chaadaev, Philosophical Letters and Apology of a Madman, trans. and introduced by Mary-Barbara Zeldin (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1969), p. 174.
- <sup>119</sup> See, Austin Jersild's unpublished paper, "Khomiakov and Empire: Faith and Custom in the Borderlands," presented at the AAASS annual convention, Boca Raton, Florida, September 26, 1998.
- <sup>120</sup> Andrzej Walicki, The Slavophile Controversy: History of a Conservative Utopia in Nineteenth-Century Russian Thought, trans. by Hilda Andrews-Rusiecka (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975).
- <sup>121</sup> Andrzej Walicki, A History of Russian Thought From the Enlightenment to Marxism, trans. by Hilda Andrews-Rusiecka (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1979), p. 92.
- <sup>122</sup> Bushkovitch, "What is Russia?" p. 12.
- <sup>123</sup> Walicki, A History of Russian Thought, p. 137.
- <sup>124</sup> V. G. Belinskii, Polnoe sobranie sochineniia (Moscow, 1953-1959), VII, p. 435; Walicki, A History of Russian Thought, p. 140.
- <sup>125</sup> Belinskii, Polnoe sobranie sochineniia, X, p. 29; Walicki, A History of Russian Thought, p. 143.
- <sup>126</sup> P. A. Zionchkovskii, Kirilo-Mefodievskoe obshchestvo (1846-1847) (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Moskovskogo universiteta, 1959).
- <sup>127</sup> Pogodin's writings are scattered but can be sampled in N. Barsukov, Zhizn' i trudy M. P. Pogodina, 22 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1888-1910; Bor'ba ne na zhivot, a na smert s novymi istoricheskimi eresiami (Moscow, 1874); Sobranie statei, pisem i rechei po povodu slavianskogo voprosa (Moscow, 1978). Riasanovsky, Nicholas I and Official Nationality, passim., discusses Pogodin at length.
- <sup>128</sup> On grazhdanstvennost', see the essays by Dov Yaroshevski and Austin Lee Jersild in Daniel R. Brower and Edward J. Lazzarini (eds.), Russia's Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700-1917 ((Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), pp. 58-79, 101-114.
- <sup>129</sup> Anderson, Imagined Communities, p. 57.
- <sup>130</sup> Theodore R. Weeks, Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia: Nationalism and Russification on the Western Frontier, 1863-1914 (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996), pp. 70-91.
- <sup>131</sup> Isabelle Kreindler, "A Neglected Source of Lenin's Nationality Policy," Slavic Review, XXXVI, 1 (March 1977), pp. 86-100.
- <sup>132</sup> For a fascinating treatment of the varieties of Russification, see Edward C. Thaden (ed.), Russification in the Baltic Provinces and Finland, 1855-1914 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981, pp. 7-9, passim.
- <sup>133</sup> John Willard Slocum, "The Boundaries of National Identity: Religion, Language, and Nationality Politics in Late Imperial Russia" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1993), p.10.
- <sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

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<sup>135</sup> Robert Edelman, Gentry Politics on the Eve of the Russian Revolution: The Nationalist Party (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1980); Ronald Grigor Suny, The Making of the Georgian Nation (Bloomington, IN. and Stanford, CA.: Indiana University Press in association with the Hoover Institution Press: 1988; second edition: Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 142.

<sup>136</sup> Susan Heuman, Kistiakovsky: The Struggle for National and Constitutional Rights in the Last Years of Tsarism (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, 1998), pp. 130-146.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 214.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 216.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 256.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 258.

<sup>141</sup> This conflict between rival views of how to construct a modern Russian political community is worked out in Joshua A. Sanborn, "Drafting the Nation: Military Conscription and the Formation of a Modern Polity in Tsarist and Soviet Russia, 1905-1925" (Ph. D. diss., University of Chicago, 1998).

<sup>142</sup> Weeks, Nation and State, pp. 131-192.

<sup>143</sup> Francis C. Wcislo, "Witte, Memory, and the 1905 Revolution: A Reinterpretation of the Witte Memoirs," Revolutionary Russia, VIII, 2 (December 1995), p. 175.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 176.

<sup>145</sup> Beissinger, "The Persisting Ambiguity," p. 2.

<sup>146</sup> This point particularly was a contribution by Kenneth Church, who gave a careful and critical reading to an earlier paper from which this is taken.

<sup>147</sup> An idea suggested to me by Roman Szporluk.

<sup>148</sup> Ian Lustick, State-Building Failure in British Ireland and French Algeria (Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 1985).

^ "The Empire Strikes Out: Imperial Russia, "National" Identity, and Theories of Empire" (PDF). ^ "Finns Worried About Russian Border".  
^ a b c. Zubok, Vladislav M. A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev (2007) excerpt and text  
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Russia, "National" Identity, and Theories of Empire," in his Empire and Nation-Making in the Soviet Union, 1917-1953.  
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deep past shapes the future. Noah Snieder. This is the precipice that the world is teetering on is about identity and memory and  
deep, deep history. This is a story about the Russian Empire. In late February, I set out for Ukraine from my home in Moscow. They  
explained how the Soviet empire had been built on the ashes of the imperial empire, and the imperial empire in turn on the ashes of  
Kievan Rus. They explained how Russian thinkers put forth the idea that all the eastern Slavic peoples - Russians, Ukrainians, and  
Belorussians - descend from the same common Kievan core. And they explained how that idea has been used to prop up  
Russia's imperial claims for centuries. The Empire Strikes Out: Imperial Russia, "National" Identity, and Theories of Empire 1.  
Ronald Grigor Suny The University of Chicago. In this chapter I, first, elaborate theories of imperial survival, decay, and collapse that I  
hope will give us some purchase on understanding the dynamics and the collapse of the Russian and Soviet empires. And, then, I  
employ ideal types of empire and nation to help understand the structure, evolution, and failure of the tsarist empire to construct a viable  
"national" identity. I begin with some definitions. Problems of Definition: Empire, State, Nation. In my understanding, neither  
tsarist Russia nor the Soviet Union was a ethnically "Russian Empire" with the metropole completely identified with a ruling  
Russian nationality. The problem of identity in modern Russia is commonly framed in terms of the elemental tension between the  
country's alternative embodiments as empire or nation. This chapter explores identity in pre-revolutionary Russia by examining three  
configurations of the imperial vision: as a European empire, as an anti-European empire, and as a national empire. The Europeanisation  
of Russia's imperial image involved many things including the need for a basic perceptual rebounding and rebranding of its domestic  
geographical space. The most important element of the ideological inversion proved to be the c