Nationalities Papers, Vol. 30, No. 2, 2002

Carfax Publishing
Taylor & Francis Group

HISTORY, MEMORY AND NATION BUILDING IN THE POST-SOVIET COLONIAL SPACE

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The disintegration of the Soviet Union in December 1991 led to the de-colonization of the world's last remaining empire. Taking this into account, this article seeks to argue two points. Firstly, many of the imperial policies imposed by the imperial core in the Soviet empire were similar in nature to those imposed by imperial powers in Ireland, Africa, and Asia. Secondly, the nation and state building policies of the post-Soviet colonial states are therefore similar to those adopted in many other post-colonial states because they also seek to remove some—or all—of the inherited colonial legacies. A central aspect of overcoming this legacy is re-claiming the past from the framework imposed by the former imperial core and thereby creating, or reviving, a national historiography that helps to consolidate the new national state. All states, including those traditionally defined as lying in the "civic West," have in the past—and continue to—use national historiography, myths, and legends as a component of their national identities.

This article is divided into three parts. The first section discusses the Soviet imperial legacy and Soviet nationality policies as they were applied in historiography. The second section places this discussion within the theoretical literature of nationalism and historical myths, surveys the inherited legacies of Soviet colonial policies and discusses how post-colonial Soviet successor states are re-claiming their national historiography. The third section surveys the manner in which four of these post-Soviet colonial states—Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova and Kazakhstan—have dealt with the colonial legacy. In three cases they are reviving national historiography as one of the spheres of their state and nation building projects while in a fourth (Belarus) Russian/Soviet historiography is being maintained to buttress a pan-eastern Slavic ideology. In Moldova the communist victory in parliamentary elections in 2001 and election of communist leader Vladimir Voronin has led to the re-introduction of Soviet historiography.

Soviet Nationality Policies: The Role of History and Memory

The USSR as a Colonial Empire

This article argues that the former USSR fits the definition of an empire with a defined core (Moscow and the Russian SFSR) and peripheries (the non-Russian

ISSN 0090-5992 print; ISSN 1465-3923 online/02/020241-24 © 2002 Association for the Study of Nationalities
DOI: 10.1080/0090599022014064 9

republics). The core contained the imperial state and the ruling elites with the peripheries composed of state administrators. Interaction between the peripheries only took place via the core.[1] Michael Doyle defines an empire as, "a relationship, formal or informal, in which one state controls the effective political sovereignty of another political society."[2] Such a definition clearly fits the Soviet experience.

The imperial core contained elites who ruled, and the peripheries those who were subordinated to the core. The elites in the peripheries governed on behalf of the core. The imperial core coordinated, supervised and protected the periphery. It dominated the peripheries, acted as an intermediary and channeled resources.[3]

The Soviet empire was governed by a ruling ideology that consisted of Marxism–Leninism and, more importantly for the purposes of this article, Russian imperialism. This defined Russians as the "elder brother" and the "leading nation" of the Soviet multi-national state. The Russian SFSR was the only Soviet republic that possessed no republican institutions for the bulk of the Soviet era and it, alone of the 15 republics, was never portrayed as the "homeland" for its titular nation.[4] The "homeland" for Russians was the entire USSR, a policy that deliberately confused Russian and Soviet identities.

In western empires, nation-states were created prior to the formation of their overseas empires. Disentangling England and France from their empires was therefore relatively easy because they could fall back upon established pre-imperial nation-states. The two exceptions that confused the difference between core and periphery were Ireland and Algeria, two colonies incorporated into the British and French imperial metropolis respectively.[5] Disentangling themselves from these two internal colonies took one million lives, in the case of Algeria, and a bloody conflict in Ireland that has continued to the present day in Ulster.

Ireland was a dominion from 1922 to 1947, similar to other British "white" colonies such as Canada, in the transition to full independence. The Irish Free State lost its industrialized, ethnically mixed region in the north (Ulster) to Britain whereas Ukraine inherited a similar region (the Donbas) which accounts for 20% of its population. The relationship between Ireland and the UK has always remained unusual. Irish citizens had full rights in the UK and if they lived in the UK could vote in British elections. Strong economic ties, as in the Ukrainian–Russian case, have kept Ireland–UK relations close. When the Irish Free State was created in 1922, 96% of its exports went to the UK. Since the 1950s there has been an attempt to reduce this dependency upon the British market but today it still accounts for 50% of Irish exports. The largest European foreign investor in Ireland is the UK. In Ukraine investment from Russia is seen by the ruling elites as potentially a threat to national security because it would increase Russian influence over strategic areas of the economy. The separation of Ireland from the UK has reduced only slightly the proportion of transactions (economic, human, cultural) between both states.[6]

The closest comparison is over policies designed to deal with the colonial legacy. The Irish Free State and post-1947 Eire sought to revive the Gaeltacht (Irish Gaelic

speakers) but this has failed. Today, only 2% of the population use Irish as a daily means of communication. A majority of Irish can tune into British TV and radio, a similar situation to Ukraine where Russian TV remains popular. In both cases the colonial legacy of Anglicization and Russification is entrenched further by the power and influence of a hegemonic, neighboring language.

Both Ireland and Ukraine inherited populations with divided loyalties, the Anglo-Irish and Sovietophiles and Russophones. The Anglo-Irish were proud of both their Irishness while not denying their links to a "higher" English culture and heritage.[7] Theirs was a territorial patriotism, much in the same way as Sovietophiles/Russophones do not negate a territorial attachment to Ukraine. Were they "true Irishmen/women" though? Similarly, are Sovietophiles/Russophones "true Ukrainians" if they do not speak Ukrainian?[8] This territorial patriotism was opposed by an ethno-cultural view of the nation propounded by the Gaelic League and Ukrainian Language Society/Rukh in Ireland and Ukraine, respectively. National liberation from imperial rule relied upon defensive cultural nationalism against hegemonic English and Russian culture and language which was translated into calls to reverse centuries of Anglicization and Russification in independent Ireland and Ukraine. The inability to establish an Irish or Ukrainian ethno-cultural hegemony in Ireland or Ukraine slows the evolution of nationalism towards a civic variant, which is only possible when the ruling elites feel secure, a situation similar to the Basque region of Spain. In Finland, Scotland, and Catalonia[9] the domination of the Finnish, English, and Catalan languages has made the elites secure because they are not challenged by those disgruntled at the weak state of language and culture, a factor which encourages a more civic nationalism.[10]

The legacy of dealing with the perceived colonial injustice is still not completed in the Irish–British case. We should not expect Ukrainian–Russian relations to be fully normalized for decades either; after all, Polish–Ukrainian reconciliation began after 1945 and was assisted by the Solidarity movement and a Polish Pope who finally visited Ukraine in June 2001. The Irish–English relationship closely resembles the Ukrainian–Russian. Ireland lost its language (Ukraine nearly did), Ireland and Ukraine were colonized by English/Scots and Russians, respectively. The Catholic religion was persecuted in both Ireland and Ukraine and Catholics were given the right to vote much later than Protestants. The Irish parliament was closed and united with the British. The upper classes were assimilated in both countries. Both the Irish and Ukrainians became "non-historical" peasant peoples with no ruling classes. Thousands were killed in the Irish and millions in the Ukrainian case, and both suffered famines which were partly man-made in the Irish and completely artificial in the Ukrainian case. Millions of Irish and Ukrainians emigrated to North America and (in the Ukrainian case) to Siberia and the Russian Far East.[11]

In both Ireland and Ukraine the colonial legacies have stunted their population growth at a time when the metropolis greatly increased its population. In 1654, when Muscovy and Cossack Ruthenia (Ukraine) signed the Periaslav Treaty, both

countries had similar populations. Today, Russia's is three times as large. In a comparison of Finland and Ireland, Bill Kissane points out that whereas Finland's population increased three fold in the nineteenth century, Ireland's dropped by half. If the Irish population had grown at the same speed as Finland's it would have been 13 million by the turn of the century.

This legacy of mistrust has translated into a complicated perception of "Otherness" in both relationships that historiography, new myths, and legends will deal with.[12] As Edward Said has pointed out, the Irish have for centuries been castigated as lower culturally, its inhabitants barbarians and degenerate.[13] Gaelic and Ukrainian language and culture were castigated by English and Russian/Soviet nationality policies as "peasant" and unfit for the modern world. The Scots, who were never conquered, and the Irish and Welsh, were all described as "barbarians" from the Middle Ages.[14] The unconquered Scots fared better because they converted to Protestantism, the lowland Scots were respected as industrious and signed a treaty of equals with England in 1707.[15]

The former USSR was more akin to the Ottoman than the western European empires. Neither Turkey nor Russia created nation-states before they created empires and both empires were linked to the imperial core by land. Tsarist Russia, the USSR, and the Ottoman empire did not promote Russian or Turkish nation building. Instead, all three states blurred the distinction between the core, imperial nation (those who would constitute Russians or Turks), and the empire. An imperial Tsarist/Soviet or Ottoman identity prevailed over a narrower ethnic one in both cases.

The collapse of the Ottoman empire led to the establishment of a Turkish nation-state through the efforts of the "Young Turk" nationalist, Kemal Ataturk. Russians did not go on to form their own independent state after the collapse of the Tsarist empire. They instead were one of three eastern Slavic founders of the USSR in 1922, which after 1934 continued Tsarist policies that conflated Soviet imperial-territorial and Russian ethnic identities.

The non-Russian republics seceded from the USSR after declaring independence between August and December 1991. The Russian SFSR had to reluctantly agree to this; it was the only Soviet republic not to declare independence from the USSR. Russian leaders wished to maintain a confederal union of sovereign states without the old Soviet center where they would still dominate the post-Soviet space. This vision of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) was very different to the "civilized divorce" promoted by Ukraine that regarded independence in more absolute terms. Throughout the 1990s the Russian Federation oscillated between building a new nation-state and creating a new union with Belarus. This union is perceived as submission, not equal integration, and is therefore not supported by other former Soviet and Russophile states, such as Armenia and Kazakhstan.

In the three European post-colonial states of Ukraine, Moldova, and Belarus colonial policies sought to either fully assimilate two peoples who were defined as regional branches of Russians (Ukrainians and Belarusians) or create a new nation by

artificially separating Bessarabians (Moldovans) from Romanians. The imperial power, whether Tsarist or Soviet, defined and dealt with Kazakhstan in a more typically colonial manner than with Ukraine and Belarus who were defined as "Russian" (i.e. eastern Slavic) and therefore not really "foreign." Nevertheless, of the five Central Asian states, Kazakhstan has the longest historical relationship with Russia and, together with Kirgizia and Tajikistan, has continued to maintain a Russophile stance within the CIS.[16]

Ukraine and Belarus's inherited post-colonial legacy is profound and unlikely to be ever completely removed. The language of modernity (urbanization and industrialization) and Soviet power was Russian, with the Ukrainian and Belarusian languages defined as regional, parochial dialects that would be replaced by Russian when both of these eastern Slavic peoples were assimilated into the Russian nation. World culture was digested by Ukrainians through the medium of the Russian language and the Ukrainian language became a low status language with no future role, left to die out in rural villages.

Soviet Historiography and Nation Building

Soviet historiography after 1934 largely returned to the Tsarist Russian imperial scheme of history. It was a historiography, "which could, for the most part, be read with approval by the Tsars themselves," Lowell Tillet has commented.[17] This historiography served the goals of the Communist Party's imperial nationalities policies in the elaboration and inculcation of new myths and legends to unify the non-Russians around the Russian "elder brother."

The myths and legends formulated within Soviet historiography had gone full circle by the early 1950s. By the time of Stalin's death further revisions of Soviet historiography, "made the Soviet interpretation of Ukrainian–Russian relations into a near replica of the official Tsarist interpretation."[18] The 1954 "Thesis on Re-Union," to mark the 300th anniversary of the Ukrainian–Muscovite 1654 Periaslav Treaty, replicated and updated much of the schema originally formulated within Nicholas I's "Official Nationality" policy of the 1830s (Nikolai Ustrialov's 1837 *Russkaia Istoriia* played an important role in this policy).

Crucial elements of this "elaborate historical myth" which Soviet historiography aimed to propagate included:[19]

- rehabilitation of the Tsarist imperial past;
- superiority of "Great Russians" as natural leaders and the "elder brothers;"
- the lack of ethnic hostility between Russians and non-Russians, both now or in the past;
- these myths would help in the creation of a new Soviet (Russian) patriotism;
- the non-Russians were not conquered territories, and they had joined the Tsarist or Soviet empires only through "unions" and "re-unions;"

- these "unions" and "re-unions" brought only positive benefits or, at a minimum, were the "lesser of two evils" (i.e. it was "better" for Central Asia to have been "reunited" with Russia than conquered by Britain);
- greater centralization was a positive development;
- nationalist agitation by the non-Russians against the empire was against the wishes of the non-Russian peoples who only desired unity with the Russian "elder brother;"
- non-Russians were incapable of creating their own independent states;
- the Russian *mission civilisatrice* was beneficial;
- Moldovans were not ethnic Romanians;
- Russian control over Ukraine and Belarus was never perceived as "annexation," merely the recovery of the Tsar's patrimony.

In 1947 and 1954 new policies codified the east Slavs as historically belonging to one Russian people (*Rus'kiy narod*).[20] Ukrainians and Belarusians were no longer defined as separate peoples, but as regional Russians. Therefore, it was a contradiction in terms for them to possess their own independent states, which could only be "temporary" until they "re-united" with Russia (as Belarus has been seeking to do since 1994).[21]

Soviet historiography restricted the collective memory and identity of each nation within the former USSR to that of an *ethnie* and geographical unit through a Russocentric bias. Within eastern Russia and Ukraine this Tsarist and Soviet historiography, "reinforced a strong 'all-Russian' component already part of popular consciousness. It channeled the collective historical memory and national awareness generated by modernization into an ethnographic regionalism compatible with Soviet Russian loyalty."[22]

History and Identity in the Post-Soviet Space

Historiography and Nation Building: Theoretical Reflections

Jonathan Friedman talks of a "false intellectual objectivism" because history can never be truly objective. This is "because the politics of identity consists in anchoring the present in a viable past. The past is, thus, constructed according to the conditions and desires of those who produce historical textbooks in the present."[23] Therefore, "all history including modern historiography is mythology" because "history is an imprinting of the present on to the past."[24]

The formation of a new national identity that unites populations is impossible without recourse to some myth making.[25] Myths arouse an awareness of the group's common fate, "stressing individual solidarity against an alien force, that is, by enhancing the salience of boundary perceptions."[26] Nationalists look to the past to regenerate and invent the new "imagined community." Anthony D. Smith writes that,

"without myths, memories and symbols by which to mark off group members from 'strangers,' and without the cultural elites to interpret and elaborate them, there can be no real ethnie."[27] "Myths gave meaning and purpose to cultural entities, and a sense of attachment and belonging to mobilized populations," he continues.[28]

Colonizers attempt to erase historical memory, a process that leads to a loss of national identity and makes them easier to assimilate into the imperial core. Therefore, the revival of memory and national historiography is closely tied to the re-assertion of identity vis-à-vis the former imperial "Other."[29] This is because, "the question of who 'owns' or appropriates the past is a question of who is able to identify him or herself and the other at any given time and place."[30] This reinterpretation and re-claiming of the past to suit the needs of the post-colonial state will be welcomed by the majority but may, "generate a sense of betrayal amongst the national minority."[31] Russians are finding it difficult to come to terms with being defined as a "national minority" in Ukraine, Moldova, and Kazakhstan (in Belarus they are joint ruling titulars), let alone that their past policies are no longer seen in a positive light by the newly independent post-Soviet colonial states.

Post-colonial elites, whether in the developing world or the former USSR, seek to re-gain their self-esteem after being taught by their former rulers that they were unable to run their own affairs without the assistance of the "elder brother." The re-gaining of self-esteem requires the removal of racial discrimination and inferiority complexes imposed by the former ruling imperial powers.[32]

A central aspect of re-gaining this self-esteem is re-claiming the right to a national historiography.[33] Homi Bhabha argues that, "The objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction." Domination of the "subject nations" history is one aspect whereby the colonizer, "appropriates, directs and dominates its various spheres of activity."[34]

If the former colony, as in the case of Belarus, believe that they were not a colony in the Soviet era, then there is *no* reason to replace traditional Soviet historiography which lauded the Russian "elder brother" and, like its Tsarist counterpart upon which it drew, denied any right to Belarusians or Ukrainians to a separate existence. As Jan Janmaat and Pal Kolsto have both pointed out, in building an independent state Ukraine could not continue to use such a Soviet historiography. If the state's aim is re-union—not statehood (i.e. Belarus under President Alyaksandr Lukashenka)—then it still can continue to use Soviet historiography.[35]

In post-colonial states historians are tasked by the ruling elites to claim the right of the indigenous population the privilege of possessing a separate history. Without such a national history they will be merely passive subjects of history whose identity will continue to be molded by their former imperial rulers.[36] Distorting and perverting the history of the colonized was an important aspect of colonial policy that applied as much to Africa and Asia as it did to the former USSR: "By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it …

The total result looked for by colonial domination was indeed to convince the natives that colonialism came to lighten their darkness."[37]

Post-Soviet states are in the throes of a struggle as to who will be culturally dominant in the newly independent states—"nativists" or "assimilados?" Or will the "nativists" be forced to compromise with the "assimilados" with both sharing power where neither the "nativists" or "assimilados" are culturally hegemonic. Ukraine may resemble such a compromise between Ukrainphones ("nativsts") and Russophones ("assimilados").[38] Both groups have different views about the nation building project and the content of national historiography and myths. "Nativists" will adopt a more hard line view and see the colonial past in negative terms. The "assimilados," on the other hand, will tend to only selectively criticize the colonial past or, in the case of the communists, will not criticize it at all and see it as a "golden era."

Re-claiming the Past: Nation Building in the Former USSR

The former USSR imparted a legacy of confused and shared identities to its 15 successor states. Ukrainians and Belarusians suffered the most from Russification and de-nationalization because they were targeted for full assimilation into the imperial Soviet Russian core. Only four of these 15 states—the three Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania) and Armenia—inherited consolidated titular groups and nations.[39] The remaining states inherited peoples who had not yet acquired the attributes of what would be defined by political scientists and anthropologists as consolidated identities.

Civic-nation and state-institution building are therefore central to the post-Soviet "imperial transition." As Beverly Crawford and Arend Liphart point out, the legacy of incomplete nations "is perhaps the most important threat to the project of economic and political liberalism in Eastern Europe."[40] States need to be capable of implementing policies and nations need to command the loyalty of their citizens.[41] Post-Soviet states therefore combine elements of uneasy stalemate between "imperial remnants," "truncated democracy," and "limited nations."[42]

In the post-Soviet era these inherited Soviet identities have not simply vanished, but are under a process of re-evaluation. Beissinger points out that, "the deconstruction of the former USSR remains an ongoing and potentially endless process, even after the USSR formally ceased to exist."[43]

The Soviet legacy is, therefore, profound for its successor states and determines the trajectory, speed and content of their state and nation building projects. Cultural identities are "inherently contested, embedded, and overlapping ..." Beissinger believes, because state boundaries are often not co-terminous with identities. States are often "incomplete entities replete with overlapping sovereignties."[44]

The content of the "national idea" is not always clear in many post-Soviet colonial states and its outcome will decide who will be culturally hegemonic in the state. Sovereignty in post-colonial states, such as those which emerged from the USSR, is

"insecure and subject to question."[45] The Russian Federation is the successor state to the USSR and therefore by definition the successor to the empire. Moreover, "the former occupier constitutes the central antagonist in the national myths that provide the foundation and coherence of the state itself."[46]

As Will Kymlicka has long argued, all states are biased to varying degrees in the manner in which they define their core, titular cultures (i.e. "cultural hegemony"), state/official language, symbols and historiography. All the former Soviet states inherited ethnocultural definitions of nationhood as a legacy of Soviet nationality policy. All of these republics, apart from the Russian SFSR, were defined as the ethnic homeland where its titular ethnic group and language should be theoretically dominant.[47] In the same manner as in all other civic states, post-Soviet states cannot be objective when deciding questions such as how will the political community be defined (by the titular nation or by the titular nation and Russians), what national historiography will be used, should the former metropolis be defined as the "Other," will the state have one titular or two (the titular nation and Russian) state languages and what state symbols (flag, national anthem, symbol) will be chosen.

Post-Soviet states are in the process of searching for their "lost" history in the pre-imperial era in order to confirm that they possess "golden eras" and a workable past that can be used to legitimize their newly independent states.[48] This is particularly important where territory remains contested between the former imperial metropolis and the post-colonial state. All nations require elements of common descent where contemporary unity is transported back in time.[49]

In India, national history harks back to a united country where the Hindus were the indigenous people prior to the arrival of the British colonists.[50] Post-Soviet states are likewise placing greater emphasis upon their pre-Tsarist and pre-communist pasts as the basis for new national histories. French colonial subjects were taught (and still are in French Polynesia) that they are "descendants of the Gauls." In the USSR the non-Russians were taught that they had never desired independence but only unity with the Russian "elder brother." Past attempts at regaining independence were therefore defined as "treason" because they would have led to a rupture of this unity with the Russian "elder brother."

Post-colonial states inherit populations divided by religion, region and class. Only the elites often share a state-wide conception of the "imagined community" in the making. Their citizens are often parochial and do not exhibit allegiances to the newly emerging national state.[51] A normal drawn out process of state and nation building thereby accompanies de-colonization, whether in the developing world or the former USSR.

Post-Soviet states, like their counterparts in the post-colonial world, are undergoing an "imperial transition" that attempts to build a national state out of the inherited quasi state.[52] This "imperial transition" in the post-Soviet states is different to authoritarian transitions in southern and central Europe and Latin America, where nation and state building played little, if any, role in their democratic transitions. In

contrast, post-colonial "imperial transition" consists of four aspects—nation building, state and institution building and, in some cases, democratization and marketization. Civic nationalism and national integration play an important role in overcoming the lack of societal cohesion that made them earlier vulnerable to incorporation by imperial powers.[53]

Imperial powers inflict their greatest damage on the core culture of colonies; that is the culture of the titular peoples in republics such as Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan. In all three of these countries large numbers of the titular nations became Russified or bilingual. Jerry Smolicz points out that "It is through core values that social groups can be identified as distinctive cultural communities. A groups loss of its core values results in its disintegration as a community that can perpetuate itself as an authoritative entity across generations."[54]

When these core values (language, culture, national historiography, and collective memory) are being eroded and the identity of a people is under threat, cultural life becomes increasingly important. It is around these cultural core values that people rally to oppose the imperial state. In the late Soviet era, popular movements in the three Baltic states, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Georgia, and Armenia rallied around national and democratic rights fearing that their culture and languages were under threat from policies imposed by the Soviet imperial core.

An aspect of this threat to the core culture was posed by the in-migration of Russians to the non-Russian republics of the former USSR. Large numbers of Russian settler colonists had been directed to migrate to Latvia, Estonia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, and Kazakhstan. In Kazakhstan the titular nation had sunk below 50% of the republican population; in Latvia it was also on the verge of doing so by the 1980s.

Post-colonial states, such as in the former USSR, often inherit elites and populations that are divided by culture, language, region, and foreign orientation, with some owing an allegiance to the core, titular culture and others assimilated into the imposed dominant culture of the former imperial power (i.e. Russia as the successor state to the former USSR). This ideological split between the "nativists" and "assimilados" is especially pronounced in the case of Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan where Soviet nationality and economic policies left a legacy of divided titular nations where large numbers of their populations are Russian speakers.

In the case of Belarus this post-colonial legacy is so influential that it has led President Alyaksandr Lukashenka since his election in 1994 to seek to re-integrate his country with the former imperial metropolis.[55] This is the only example of a former colony seeking to return to its former imperial ruler. In the case of President Lukashenka, the quintessential (Soviet) "Little Russian," he sees no contradiction in his policies because he does not believe there are any fundamental ethnic or national differences between Russia and Belarus.[56] Clearly Belarus is an anomaly among post-colonial states in claiming that the colonial legacy was positive.

History and National Identity in the Post-Soviet Space: Four Case Studies

Ukraine

The liberalization of the second half of the 1980s opened up debate throughout all areas of Ukrainian society, including within historiography. This led to three developments. Firstly, historical subjects that were previously painted black were often re-painted white. Secondly, historians began asking "Why?" and "Who is to Blame?"[57] Finally, the more nationally conscious western Ukraine again led the way in producing a greater proportion of historians. This, in turn, is bolstered by the predominance of western Ukrainians within the diaspora who are funding the re-printing of previously banned Ukrainian histories or themselves writing new *History's of Ukraine*. By 1990–1991 it had become preferable or essential to cite foreign scholars. The Canadian historian Orest Subtelny's *Ukraine. A History*, first published in 1989 and now in its third edition, has sold 800,000 Ukrainian and Russian-language copies and has become the most widely used history textbook in Ukraine.

The scale of the damage done to Ukrainian historiography could be seen in the explosion of interest in the late Soviet era in banned subjects and figures. During the late 1980s and early 1990s Ukrainian writers, literati, political, and historical figures were rehabilitated. A commission to investigate Ukraine's historical "blank spots" was organized by the Writer's Union and led by Dmytro Pavlychko.[58] Calls to improve the study of, research into, and writing about Ukrainian history echoed throughout the Soviet Ukrainian media,[59] calls which were not at first warmly received by the conservative Communist Party of Ukraine (KPU).[60]

But the KPU could not hold back the tide. Ukrainian historians and writers pointed to their colleagues in the Russian SFSR who had been allowed to rehabilitate their historians earlier and return to a more pronounced Russian imperial historiography.[61] Karamzin's 12 volume *Istoriya Gosudarstvo Rossiiskogo* (*History of the Russian State*), which provided a Russian imperialist survey of the Russian state that treated Ukrainians and Belarusians as branches of a single *Rus'kiy* (*Russian*) *narod*, was re-published from 1988 in a 100,000 edition.

Informal groups, political parties, and popular fronts all began to challenge from the outside the Soviet and Russian historical myths which the literati and national communists increasingly exposed to criticism on the inside. The Memorial Society, established in Ukraine in March 1989, sought to influence national consciousness by exposing the blank spots of the Soviet era in a bid to revive historical memory. Soviet anniversaries were challenged and re-interpreted for the first time.

Between 1986 and 1991 the Kyiv-based Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences increased its study of Ukraine from 57 to 90% of its research and included within its remit Kyiv Rus', a historical epoch previously reserved only for Russian historians. But, the revival of Ukrainian national historiography only began to reach a wide audience after 1990–1991 when the state and mass media began to sing the

same tune as opposition groups.[62] This promotion of, and return to, national historiography developed rapidly after Ukraine became an independent state in January 1992.

Ukraine claims it is building its state on the basis of a "1000-year tradition" of statehood, implying that the medieval Kyivan Rus' state should be regarded as the first proto-Ukrainian state. This is, of course, problematical for Russian and western historians who have traditionally followed the eighteenth and nineteenth century imperialist framework, which described "Kievan Russia" as the first "Russian" state.[63] Without links to Kyivan Rus', Russia is therefore a younger nation than Ukraine.

History is not only for historians, museums or academic journals. On the contrary, "We must be conscientious students of history," President Leonid Kuchma believes. "They must be woven into the live fabric of contemporary society with an obligation that they are put into practice. Therefore, we must soberly and objectively assess achievements and miscalculations on the road which we had been following."[64]

The importance of history in the case of post-colonial Ukraine is underscored by the anthropologist Catherine Wanner:

> History supplies a vast reservoir of raw materials from which to craft a post-Soviet national culture and underscore the legitimacy of a state. New historical myths and a revised historiography encapsulated in historical reports are now the cornerstone of the new Ukrainian state's efforts to expand a sense of nation based on common historical experience among an otherwise highly diverse and disenfranchised population.[65]

Ukraine's new myths and legends portray it as a "European" country, peaceful, a victim of past foreign incursions, different in political culture to Russia, with a tradition of democratic institutions, and a long history that legitimizes its independent statehood.[66] The key lesson being drawn from Ukrainian history is that tragedies such as the artificial Soviet famine of 1932–1933, that claimed seven million lives, or the Chernobyl nuclear accident in 1986, could only occur because Ukraine was not at the time an independent state.[67] Independence is therefore a better "norm" and is glorified by Ukraine's elites and intellectuals as the only possible outcome to prevent a re-occurrence of Ukraine's past tragedies. History is also useful in defending historical title to Ukrainian territory when title to it is claimed by a foreign power (principally Russia).[68]

The teaching and popularization of Ukrainian history is part of the state and nation building project. It not only links them with their ancestors but also attempts to unite the community of people (Ukrainians) together into one polity while facilitating the revival of links to "world history" and "European civilization." Ukraine's independence day (24 August) is celebrated annually in Kyiv by a military parade and costume drama that link the new state to a thousand years of history that is being reclaimed from Russia and the former Soviet Union.

The rehabilitation of the early twentieth century historian Mykhailo Hrushevs'kyi, the doyen of Ukrainian history, was of primary concern after five decades of denunciation as a "German agent" and "bourgeois nationalist." Since Ukraine

became an independent state the Hrushevs'kyi scheme has to all intents and purposes become the official line.[69] Hrushevs'kyi's significance lay in his devotion to Ukraine's "national revival," "the revival of its genetic memory, a deep understanding of its own history," President Kuchma believed. Hrushevs'kyi, "developed a concept of the historical development of the Ukrainian people, he proved that our people has its own core origins," he continued. Therefore, Hrushevs'kyi's 11-volume *History of Ukraine-Rus*, which was largely ignored by Western historians of "Russia" and denounced by their Soviet counterparts, is to President Leonid Kuchma, "the historical Bible of the Ukrainian people, a fundamental work … ."[70]

Ukrainian nation building continues to be based upon an inclusive, civic nation that has its roots in the culture, language and history of the core (titular) ethnic group, Ukrainians. The Ukrainian education system continues to utilize national historiography in the teaching of history throughout its territory, including in the Crimea. As Janmaat and Nancy Popson point out, local variances, values or customs do not influence school textbooks. Popson writes, "The textbooks approved by the Ministry (of Education) are approved for use across Ukraine."[71] School textbooks socialize children into respect for the constitution, language, state symbols, national traditions and values of ethnic Ukrainians and tolerance towards others. Ukrainian history is taught prior to the teaching of world history.[72]

Ukrainian national historiography and school textbooks have been revamped in seven key areas:

1. *Kyivan Rus'*: is either defined completely as a proto-Ukrainian state or as a state that Ukrainians have the majority title towards. The state symbol (*tryzub*) and unit of currency (*hryvnia*) were first used in Kyivan Rus', backing the claim to a "1000-year tradition of statehood;"[73]
2. *1654 Treaty of Periaslav*: is no longer depicted as the "re-union" of two branches of one people. It is defined as a confederal alliance, not submission, and forced upon Ukraine by Poland's unwillingness to recognize Ruthenia (Ukraine/Belarus) as a third partner in the Polish–Lithuanian commonwealth;
3. *Tsarist Rule*: is defined as something negative, leading to serfdom, a loss of elites and de-nationalization;
4. *Austrian Rule*: is seen in more favorable terms for having allowed nation building to take place;
5. *Collapse of Empires*: the Ukrainian People's Republic (UNR), Directory and Hetmanate of 1917–1921 are recognized as legitimate attempts at state building;
6. *Stalinism*: is perceived as a direct attack upon Ukrainian language, culture, elites; the 1933 artificial famine is viewed as "ethnocide" or the "terror/murder-famine;"
7. *World War II*: the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) nationalist partisans are now largely depicted as having fought against the Nazis and Soviets. This

period of history remains the most problematical for post-Soviet Ukrainian historiography.

Belarus

Belarusians were more modest than Ukrainians and claimed that they were building a state on the basis of "centuries-old traditions of statehood." Between 1991 and 1994 a program of national revival through a reinterpretation of the past along national lines was beginning to emerge in Belarus. Russia was being presented as predatory rather than liberating and those who fought against Moscow were being resurrected as heroes. The National Academy of Sciences and public figures began promoting a pro-Belarusian national ethos.[74] As George Sanford argues, the more recent the statehood the more likely that "golden eras" will creep into the new historiography.[75] The most important such era is the Grand Duchy of Lithuania which incorporated most of Belarus and used the Belarusian language and law. The coat of arms of the Grand Duchy—the *Pahonia*—was officially used in Belarus from 1991 until 1995.

The post-1991 national historiography sought to revive a mythical past which stressed Belarusian organic links to western Europe, differences with Russia and its "glorious" history. This transformed historiography into a battlefield through which national identity became contested in Belarus between "nativists" and "assimilados."[76] Belarusian history was both anti-Soviet and anti-Russian in the 5 years prior to President Lukashenka's election in 1994. It glorified the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and negatively assessed Tsarist rule from the late eighteenth century because of its denationalization of Belarus.

In 1991 V. M. Ignatovskii's 1926-edition of *Karotki narys historyi Belarusi* was reprinted in Minsk, a history which, like Hrushevs'kyi's contribution to Ukrainian history, carves out a separate identity and history for Belarus in relation to that of Russia. The new "heroes" introduced after 1991 into Belarusian history not only fought Tuetonic Knights, Tatars, and Poles—but also Muscovites and Russians. They re-emphasized Belarusian ties to the West, called for the country's "return to Europe," and stressed Belarusian history and national characteristics as different to Russian. A Belarusian scholar outlined the aims of higher education in the 1991–1994 period:

> Studying Belarusian history in the 5th–11th grades should help national cultural renewal of the Belarusian ethnos through familiarization with the unique characteristics of the historical-path, material and spiritual culture of the (Belarusian) people, appreciation of its national particularism and values within Slavic, European, and universal culture.[77]

The election of President Lukashenka in summer 1994 reversed Belarusian historiography back to its pan-eastern Slavic, Russophile and Soviet roots. Vladimir Zhirinovsky, the leader of the Russian (nationalist) Liberal Democrats, supported Lukashenka's proposal to withdraw the new history textbooks written and published

since 1991 due to their alleged "nationalist excesses."[78] Rejecting the Belarusian national school of history, which was prevalent between 1991 and 1994, Lukashenka turned back to Soviet history textbooks in order to downplay any differences between Belarusians and Russians. This also served to buttress his support for pan-eastern Slavism and to unite his country with the former imperial Soviet Russian core. Leading Belarusian writers protested this as an "attempt to turn back the tide of history and an attack on our nation's spiritual and intellectual freedom."[79] But Lukashenka remains un-apologetic; backing a return to Tsarist and post-1934 Soviet historiography as a means to support his policies of creating a Belarusian–Russian union.[80]

Belarusian academia is being re-centralized and research into controversial topics has been halted. "Independent historians are today viewed in the same light as opposition politicians," one author complained.[81] Ten leading writers wrote an open letter protesting "the attempt to turn back the tide of history and an attack on our nation's intellectual freedom."[82] Prime Minister Uladzimir Zamyatin warned that "seditious material" had been eliminated from Belarusian history textbooks because the "nationalist opposition" backed the alternative historiography that condemned the repression of Belarusian culture since the 1930s.[83]

The ideological guidelines for Russophile imperial historiography in Belarus now include:

1. Belarusian identity is tied to Russian and the eastern Slavic space—not western Europe. Belarusian participation in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania is downplayed. Stephen Burant points out that, "Those Belarusians who seek to bind Belarus's fate to Russia have little interest in Vilnius, the Vilna region, and Belarus's heritage in the Grand Duchy;"[84]
2. repression of Belarusian language and culture by either the Tsars (e.g. the destruction of the Catholic Church of the Byzantine Rite [Uniate Church] in the 1830s or the 1866 banning of the Belarusian language) or the Soviets (e.g. the Kuropaty mass grave of victims murdered in 1937) are now ignored;
3. Soviet power was "beneficial" to Belarus;[85]
4. Belarus did not exist except within the former USSR. Soviet Belarus is therefore the basis for Belarusian statehood;
5. Belarus was Russia's "junior brother" in the former USSR;
6. Russians are again defined only as "liberators"—never occupiers;
7. national symbols were scrapped in 1995 and replaced by modified Soviet ones;
8. Belarus is defined as one of the most "educated" regions of the former USSR;
9. the Belarusian language continues to be vilified as a rural dialect. The adoption of Russian as one's mother tongue is a sign of "progress."

Moldova

Moldova was created by the Soviet regime after World War II from Bessarabia and

the Trans-Dniestr region of Ukraine. Like Macedonia, it is a state whose identity separate to its neighbors was deliberately promoted by the former imperial metropolis. Although Moldova initially claimed it was building a state based on centuries-old traditions this could only be undertaken if it wished to accent its links to Romania as one of the three traditional Romanian provinces. When the Moldovan elites began to oppose unification with Romania from the mid-1990s, they looked to the brief Moldovan independent state of 1918 to legitimize their post-Soviet state.

In the former USSR, a Moldovan identity was developed by the Soviet authorities as a way of legitimizing their rule and proving that the region was not ethnically Romanian. The alphabet of the Moldovan language, which is Romanian, was changed to Cyrillic. Soviet Moldovan historiography downplayed any historical ties to Romania and exaggerated Besarabia's Slavic ties. It claimed, for example, that 40% of Moldovan vocabulary came from Slavic roots.

Moldova is therefore a "peculiarly fragile new state."[86] As with many post-Soviet states it must balance between recognizing its multi-ethnic character, adopting federal structures and providing collective minority rights. Violent repression of minorities because of the fear of separatism and unwillingness to recognize an inherited multi-ethnicity merely led to ethnic conflict with the Trans-Dniester and Gagauz regions. The Moldovan state's borders are those bequeathed to it from the former USSR. Accepting them requires the Moldovan state to also accept its inherited multi-ethnic character and accommodate cultural diversity.[87]

The Gagauz (a Christian Turkic people) question was resolved by granting them autonomous status. The Trans-Dniester problem is more difficult as it is based upon the Moldovan ASSR established within Ukraine in 1924 and then incorporated within Moldova after 1945. It was then resurrected in September 1991 in opposition to Moldovan unification with Romania. Its Russian-speaking *homo sovieticus* elites have a pan-eastern Slavic and sovietophile orientation.

As with many post-Soviet states, Moldova must decide how to define itself in relation to Russia. But, in Moldova's case, the state has to also define itself vis-à-vis Romania with whom it shares a flag, language and, prior to the nineteenth century, even a history for its Bessarabian region. The cultural intelligentsia are oriented towards Romania and largely in favor of unification. This has led to a rather unusual situation where the intelligentsia, who would be instrumental in providing for "cultural hegemony" and a new national historiography, deny the very existence of the Moldovan state as an "artificial" Russian and Soviet construct. As in many post-colonial states, the cultural intelligentsia are cut off from the 80% of the population living in rural areas who maintain a parochial, local identity. Hence, re-unification with Romania is only favored by 5–10% of Moldovans.[88] What this signifies is that, "this bifurcation between the 'creative intelligentsia' and the rest of Moldovan society is the greatest guarantee of the continuing salience of identity politics."[89]

The Moldovan education system has been reformed to teach a history of Romanian identity which links the new state to "Europe"—not Eurasia. A Latin script was

introduced as part of the process of de-Russification and street and city names have been replaced with historically Bessarabian ones. But, the Moldovan elites have drawn the line at this and from 1994–2000 they increasingly promoted Moldovan statehood—not pan-Romanianism. The Moldovan elites are in the unenviable position of being forced to be liberal nation and state builders in order to balance between the cultural intelligentsia, who are oriented towards unity with Romania, and the left, who wish Moldova to follow Belarus in seeking to re-embrace the former Soviet Russian imperial core.[90] From 2001 the victory of communist elites has returned Moldovan nationality policies to those of the Soviet era in language and historiography.

The Trans-Dniester separatist region, whose elites with the help of Soviet and Russian armed forces successfully launched a rebellion in 1992 against Moldova, orientates itself towards Russia and the eastern Slavic cultural space. As President Smirnov of the Trans-Dniester separatist enclave proclaimed, "We are fated to orientate ourselves to Russia."[91] The Trans-Dniester separatists have allies among the left in the remainder of Moldova, who, as elsewhere in the former Soviet space, back the constitutional provision of two titular nations (Moldovans and Russians) and two state languages (Moldovan and Russian).

To accommodate the Trans-Dniester region within Moldova has meant a watering down of Moldova's Romanian identity. Ultimately, the Moldovan leaders face two difficult choices. Either to maintain an independent state as a *de facto* loose confederation of Bessarabia and Trans-Dniester (the option preferred by the former imperial power, Russia). Or, to unite the Bessarabian territory with Romania and return to the inter-war status of a province. The post-colonial legacy therefore continues to play a defining role in Moldovan politics and, "the question of national identity will continue to be one of the motors of Moldova's policies."[92]

Kazakhstan

The Central Asian states inherited a legacy of colonialism, secularization, Russification, and artificial borders. Russian colonial migrants rarely mixed with the locals, few inter-married or bothered to learn the local languages. The identity of Russian migrants rested more with the former USSR than with the republic in which they resided. In Kazakhstan (and Kyrgizia) ethnic bifurcation of the titular nation, as in Ukraine and Belarus, harmed national consolidation.

A combination of pressure from below from the cultural intelligentsia and from above from the former communist elites has produced a consensus on introducing a nation building project that undermines sub-ethnic and regional loyalties in the five Central Asian states. In the majority of cases, Russians have been re-defined from "elder brothers" to colonizers and removed from the public sector, business, banking, and law. Their paternalistic attitude to the "lower" Central Asian cultures was especially irritating to local leaders who are reviving historical myths to prove their

far greater cultural roots and pre-Russian "golden eras." Constitutions ensure the pre-eminence of the titular nation whose culture and "ancient homeland" requires protection by the national state. Russia has continued to expand or remain stable in Kazakhstan (and Kyrgizia) because of their bifurcated elites and titular nations (i.e. like Ukraine and Belarus they are divided between "nativist" Kazakh-speakers and "assimilado" Russian-speaking Kazakhs).[93]

The Central Asian states are legitimizing their states with new myths that claim ancient title to the homeland. Traditional social, cultural, and ethnical values are being re-introduced as part of the new state ideology taken from the titular nations. New national heroes are drawn from golden eras as part of the re-claiming of the past. Tsarist rule has been re-defined negatively and Russia is no longer the "carrier of civilization."[94] Throughout Central Asia, the former Soviet states are replacing Vladimir Lenin with pre-Soviet heroes who were often previously ridiculed by Soviet historiography.[95]

Kazakhstan faces a difficult nation-building project as it is not only divided by language but is also a bi-ethnic state with roughly equal numbers of Russians and Kazakhs. Nevertheless, Kazakhstan argues that it is building a state on the basis of a 500-year tradition of statehood going back to the mid-fifteenth century Kazakh Khanate. The 1916 and 1986 uprisings against Tsarist conscription and the replacement of a Kazakh communist party first secretary by a Russian respectively, are depicted as a deep yearning for liberation from foreign rule.

To strengthen Kazakh identity in the north of its state, the capital city was moved at a cost of $1 billion from Alma Ata to Akmola in 1998–1999, becoming the new political and state administrative center. A statue was unveiled in the new capital to, "those great heroes who in the bleak years spared no effort to defend their homeland."[96] The new state is both defined as a multi-ethnic society and the Kazakh homeland, although this political community is defined using only Kazakh symbols and myths.[97] The Kazakh language is being promoted at the expense of Russian and 1998 was defined as the "year of national unity and national history" as part of the state's nurturing of the Kazakh national idea.

In Almaty a large monument was unveiled to the Kazakh independent state on the fifth anniversary of its independence in the presence of the Turkish President. The monument to an ancestral Turkic warrior is meant to trace Kazakh history back through time. On the fifth anniversary of Kazakh independence, President Nursun Nazarbayev traced his country's struggle for independence back to the 1986 nationalist riots in his country, patently creating a new founding myth. Kazakhstan's "independence day" is 12 December, the day when the 1986 "uprising" began against the Soviet empire.[98] The revival of Kazakh history means, in the words of President Nazarbayev, that the "Spirit has been restored to the nation."[99] The 1731 and 1740 treaties with Russia have been reassessed as temporary alliances and not voluntary submission, as Russian and Soviet historiography argued. This is similar to the re-interpretation of the 1654 Treaty of Periaslav by post-Soviet Ukrainian historiography.

Conclusion

Thirteen of the 14 non-Russian successor states of the Soviet empire are undergoing "imperial transitions" that include state building and the consolidation of national states. Only Belarus of the Soviet successor states is not undergoing an "imperial transition" that includes re-claiming its national historiography. Moldova is attempting to follow the Belarusian path but the outcome of these new policies remains unclear due to the large opposition they have caused.

This paper has discussed four post-Soviet case studies in five areas. Firstly, post-colonial and nation building policies in three of the cases (except Belarus) are being conducted in a liberal fashion and are compatible with civic nation building.[100] Secondly, one of the four case studies—Belarus—has adopted a different path because the "assimilados" (Russian speaking Sovietophiles) have captured the state and are attempting a unique experiment; namely, the re-integration of a colony with the former imperial core (Russia). Moldova may try and emulate Belarus.

Thirdly, the "imperial transitions" of Ukraine, Moldova, and Kazakhstan are fundamentally different to those which took place in the 1970s and 1980s in Latin America (which withdrew from the Spanish and Portuguese empires in the nineteenth century). They are also different to those which took place at earlier periods of time in southern Europe (the cores of two former empires). Instead, they are more akin to those found in other post-colonial states of Africa and Asia.

Fourthly, Moldova is an example of nation building (not destroying) under communism, similar to Macedonia in the former Yugoslavia. Ukraine and Kazakhstan are "returning" to national historiographies broken by imperial rule, while Belarus is convinced there was no "colonial" rule and that Russia was a benevolent "elder brother." Meanwhile, Moldova is starting practically from scratch. Of the four cases Moldova is therefore most similar to the post-colonial states of the former western empires.

Fifthly, Russia and Turkey, unlike western European imperial powers, failed to create nation-states before they created their empires. The Turkish nation-state only appeared after the collapse of the Ottoman empire. After the disintegration of the Soviet empire the Russian Federation may evolve into a Russian nation-state.

To date, no Russian equivalent of the Turkish leader Kemal Ataturk has appeared to radically break with the imperial past in favor of a nation-state. Its ruling elites continue to remain confused: is Russia to be a nation-state, leader of a new union and "great power" (which, as defined earlier, has to include both Belarus and Ukraine) or both? The Tsarist and Soviet empires left a profound post-imperial identity crisis for Russians as to where "Russia" in fact lay. The imperial temptation of re-integrating the empire is still strong (as seen in the case of Belarus).

In conclusion, this paper's central argument is that the re-claiming of the past, the revival of national history and collective memory is central to "imperial transitions" in overcoming their colonial legacies. The re-claiming of national history for post-

colonial Soviet states—with the exception of Belarus—is taking place at the same time as their rejection of Tsarist and Soviet imperial historical frameworks that denied them a past, present or future. These new national histories seek to legitimize newly independent states by looking back to pre-imperial "golden eras," claiming the right to territory on the basis of first settlement and rejecting their colonial depiction as "younger brothers" and their language and culture as "inferior" and provincial.

Thus, it is incumbent upon scholars to place post-Soviet "imperial transitions" within the world-wide process of de-colonization that has taken place since the conclusion of World War II.

NOTES

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6. Anthony H. Birch, "Minority Nationalist Movements and Theories of Political Integration," *World Politics*, Vol. 30, No. 3, 1978, pp. 341–344.
7. John Hutchinson, "Archaeology and the Irish Discovery," *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol. 7, No. 4, 1991, pp. 505–520.
8. On this question see Terrence Brown, *Ireland. A Social and Cultural History, 1922–1985* (London: Fontana, 1981), pp. 47, 53, 62–63, 79, 84, 92–93, 98, 107; Victor Kiernan, "The British Isles: Celts and Saxons," in Mikulas Teich and Roy Porter, eds, *The National Question in Historical Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 1–34; and F. S. L. Lyons, *Culture and Anarchy in Ireland, 1890–1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 8–9, 16, 22, 32, 42, 48, 57–84.
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27. Anthony D. Smith, "Ethnic Myths and Ethnic Revivals," *Journal of European Sociology*, Vol. 25, 1984, p. 288. Myths are divided by Smith into six component parts—myths of origin, myths of migration and/or liberation, myths of descent, myths of the heroic age, myths of communal decline and myths of rebirth and reawakening. The entire issue of *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol. 7, No. 4, 1991 is devoted to "Archaeology and Nationalism."
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