

FROM INTERNATIONALISM TO DISPLACEMENT: MINORITIZED COMMUNITIES IN
THE FORMERLY SOVIET SOUTHERN TIER

By

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines how Soviet citizens who lived outside of their “home” territories or did not have them navigated the ethno-federal USSR after Soviet nationality policy shifted to prioritizing titular nations and, paradoxically, Russified centralization. It focuses on the USSR’s “southern tier,” which I define as the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Moldova, regions that generally underwent greater out-migration in the 1970s, were the sources of the most violent conflict and displacement with the USSR’s dissolution, and lost the greatest proportion of their self-identified Russian populations from 1989-2005. Through an analysis of hundreds of archival letters, party and government documents, periodicals, newspapers, and over a dozen oral interviews, this dissertation contends that Soviet internationalism, or internally adapted socialist internationalism, was a pillar of Soviet nationality policy and that it was central to legitimizing and safeguarding communities who lived outside of or without “their own” territories in the late Soviet period. Through a case-study of the Russian North Caucasus borderland, the site of the most in-migration amid the USSR’s demise as well as transregional displacement in Russia, this dissertation also shows how the legacy of Soviet nationality policy influenced enduring contestation over national space that contributed to the migrant crisis and the social response to it.

To my mother, who raised me to believe in myself.

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My research for this dissertation has informed the broader social, political, and economic histories behind major moments in my life, which has been especially rewarding. My own migration story is a complicated one. In August 1991, my mother, brother, and I left the USSR. Prior to our departure, astonishingly, we came across Mikhail Gorbachev on the Red Square, who at the time was the USSR's President, a newly created position. He took an interest in my brother and I, as two little kids, and chatted with us. The photograph we have with him from that day has timestamped this turning point in our lives. Soon after, the August coup began, and not long after, the Soviet Union collapsed. When we "returned" to Russia in 1994, intent to rebuild our lives there, it had become the Russian Federation. The passport I was issued for the Russian Federation that year was, however, a recycled Soviet passport with a hammer and sickle symbol on the cover—Russia was very much a nascent country. We left Russia, in its "lean" 1990s, once again, about a year later.

This dissertation is dedicated to my devoted mother, the strongest person I know, my best friend, and confidant. My mom, brother, and I have an incredible bond from sharing the experience of being first generation Americans together. My brother, my near Irish twin, fellow INFP (Myers-Briggs personality type), and yogi, has evolved in similar ways. I'm so glad that we have been able to march through life together (Ara-Ara-AraAra-Ara!). My baby sister, the firecracker spirit of the family, matured from a teenager into an adult throughout my doctoral program. She has always supported me. My grandmother, my namesake, embodies the meaning

behind our name, Liudmila. She is indisputably “kind to the people.” Her life stories, from Nazi occupation to her thirty-year career as a lawyer in the USSR, inspired my interest in Soviet history. My grandfather, who passed away in 2012, was a journalist with a degree in history. He has also been a source of inspiration. I am so fortunate to have family members, including my Uncle, who perceive the world in similar ways. One important aspect of that is the way we feel about animals. Vasya, Juney, Firestar (and JJ and April, who crossed the rainbow bridge during my Ph.D. program) are beloved pets and family members. I cannot imagine how I would have gotten through the rigors of a doctoral academic program without them.

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INTRODUCTION

In October of 1990, the youth arm of the Soviet Union's Communist Party, the all-Union Komsomol, met to plan a last-ditch intervention in an attempt to forestall the Soviet Union's dissolution.¹ By this time, national movements had proliferated across the country, and many of them were calling for secession. The Komsomol and its newly created Commission on Interethnic and Regional Youth Problems, nevertheless, doubled down on the USSR's decades-long policy intended to moderate nationalism: promoting socialist internationalism. The Soviet government reformed the socialist concept, which stood for global proletarian revolution, to fit more practical aims. Internationalism came to represent the bridging of the expanded socialist world after WWII, but it became just as important domestically. Internally, socialist internationalism encompassed the process of national development intended to eventually merge equal nations once subjected to Russian imperialism into communism. In other words, the Soviet state adapted the aims of global communism, which Marxism-Leninism supposed would make national difference gradually irrelevant, to its own nationalities. Though Soviet internationalism promoted all the different stages along this developmental trajectory, it widely came to symbolize multiculturalism—the “friendship of Soviet peoples”—and its end goal: the merging (*sliianie*) or drawing together (*sbliizhenie*) of Soviet peoples.

More than ideological justification for the USSR (as a state bent on achieving communism), it became a state practice used to counter overt domestic nationalism. The Komsomol, in its self-proclaimed “fight” against nationalism that now threatened the Soviet project at unprecedented levels, thus attempted to mobilize “international youth education

¹ RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 174, d. 2, ll. 1-50 (Department of the Komsomol Central Committee on Interethnic Relations and Regional Youth Problems 1990-1991).

[*vospitanie*]” and to “restructure” it to fit the (tense) perestroika climate.² The Komsomol Commission encouraged inter-republican and interethnic cooperation on the most pressing issues of the day within this international framework. It announced several concrete initiatives to this purpose, like the formation of the Komsomol Federation of Youth Migration, to manage and resolve the emerging problems of intensified migration, and the development of a Komsomol policy and assistance fund for “refugees,” who, in fact, had become internally displaced peoples.³ All the measures the Commission on Interethnic and Regional Youth Problems proposed in attempting to preserve the Soviet order were approved by the Komsomol Central Committee.⁴

The centrifugal forces would persist, however. By July 15, 1991, there would be more than 800,000 registered Soviet “refugees” in the rapidly dissolving country.⁵ How, exactly, did the USSR end up in this position? The problems displaced communities faced (and that the Komsomol still apparently hoped to tackle in 1990) were, in fact, rooted in the Soviet Union’s paradoxical nationality policy. The Soviet system of promoting titular nations in “their” ethno-territories—the first to ever do so—and simultaneously supporting centralizing mechanisms (like internationalism) created one of the USSR’s greatest problems. By the time of the Soviet Union’s collapse, the tension created through this approach, which was already felt at the everyday level decades prior, exploded as a result of the acceleration of nationalism. This dissertation examines the voices and experiences of the groups most affected by the rise of

² Ibid., 6.

³ Ibid., 3-7.

⁴ Ibid., 2

⁵ GARF, f. R9654, op. 6, d. 329, l. 16 (correspondence, proposals, and complaints from the citizens’ reception to deputy chairmen and members of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR).

national movements and mass displacement with the USSR's demise: Soviet citizens who came to live outside of or without "their own" titular territories in the ethno-federal state.

Many who fled came from the USSR's south (primarily the Caucasus and Central Asia), the geographic focus of this study, where titular consolidation grew substantially from 1959 on, and where the most violent conflicts provoked by titular nationalism broke out amid the Soviet Union's collapse.⁶ In the USSR's final years, national conflicts here dovetailed with economic decline and an established trend of outmigration. Migration rates began to tip away from the region in favor of Russia during the 1970s, and by the USSR's collapse, the south consequently became the greatest source of coerced flight to Russia.⁷ Scholars, however, have largely discounted the lived realities of groups living outside of or without "home" territories in the country's peripheries during its final decades and have instead concentrated on Soviet nation-building, "top-down" accounts of the Soviet Union's collapse, or on national movements.⁸

⁶ Barbara A. Anderson and Brian D. Silver. "Demographic Sources of the Changing Ethnic Composition of the Soviet Union," *Population and Development Review* 15, no. 4 (1989): 630-632.

⁷ Between 1992-1995. Turkmenistan and Armenia had comparatively lower rates in this period. For Armenia, this is largely because ethnic cleansing of much of the Azerbaijani population here had already transpired. Hilary Pilkington, *Migration, Displacement, and Identity in Post-Soviet Russia* (London: Routledge, 1994), 8.

⁸ Some key works include, Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford: 1993), Yuri Slezkine, "The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism," *Slavic Review* 53, no. 2 (1994): 414-52, Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University: 2001). On a comprehensive account of perestroika-era nationalist mobilization, see Mark Bessinger's *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State* (New York, 2002). Bessinger's "tidal wave" theory of national mobilization argues that in the glasnost' era of "thickened history," nationalist events and challenges to the state fed off one another. Similarly, and less recognized, however, were the reactive mobilizations that called on centralist intervention. Major historical works on the collapse have focused on the Soviet Union's systemic failures as an explanation for why it failed to cope with the perestroika reforms. Vladislav Zubok also argues that Mikhail Gorbachev's indecisive leadership was a factor in the state's inability to address rising titular nationalism and violence, and that it played a role in the state's collapse. See Vladislav M. Zubok, *Collapse: The Fall of the Soviet Union* (New Haven: Yale University, 2021), Stephen Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse 1970-2000* (New York: 2001), Edward W. Walker, *Dissolution: Sovereignty and the Breakup of the Soviet Union* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003). Few scholars have complicated historical debates regarding the USSR's nationalities policy during perestroika beyond state accounts. One exception is Jeff Sahadeo's oral history, *Voices from the Soviet Edge: Southern Migrants in Leningrad and Moscow* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2019). Sahadeo's oral history discusses how perestroika exposed and exacerbated nationalist tensions.

Understandably, scholarship on Soviet nationality policy has centered on the early Soviet period when Soviet nationality policies were developed, first put in practice, and transformed.⁹ Using newly accessible archival material, scholars in the 1990s and early 2000s focused on the early Soviet period to argue that the Bolsheviks were “makers,” not “breakers” of nations (a departure from an earlier position that saw the USSR as a “prisonhouse of nations”). Today it is widely accepted that, in an effort to develop former imperial minorities at ostensibly unequal stages of development toward communism, the Bolsheviks provided ethnic groups with fixed administrative territories and territorially affiliated cultural-linguistic institutions and national cadres—a policy known as *korenizatsiia*, or nativization. Establishing ethno-territories to springboard the national development of the empire’s former (non-Russian) minorities, though, still presented the question of other national communities living within these nationalizing spaces.

The Bolshevik solution was to extend nativization down by creating thousands of national units of the very smallest level (national districts, village soviets, and collective farms). After the late 1930s, however, the micro-territories intended for minorities were phased out and the national development of the titular nations of union republics was prioritized (and to a smaller extent, the titular populations of autonomous republics, regions, and okrugs subordinate to them).¹⁰ Terry Martin, who dubbed the Soviet Union an “affirmative action empire,” claimed that nativization was revised when other state initiatives, including foreign policy interests,

⁹ In addition to the works mentioned in footnote 8, some examples include Jamil Hasanli, *The Sovietization of Azerbaijan: The South Caucasus in the Triangle of Russia, Turkey, and Iran* (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah, 2018), Matthew D. Pauly, *Breaking the Tongue: Language, Education, and Power in Soviet Ukraine, 1923-1934* (Toronto: University of Toronto: 2014), Adrienne Edgar, *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2006), Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2005).

¹⁰ Outside of the RSFSR, there were only four other republics to have surviving autonomous territories after the late 1930s: the Uzbek, Georgian, Azerbaijan, and Tajik SSRs.

reshaped the Bolshevik's national development aims, which had also begun to backfire.¹¹ Soviet policy, as Francine Hirsch has argued, on the other hand, always endeavored to consolidate nationalities through "double assimilation," or the incorporation of diverse (and smaller) national groups into larger ones, and the integration of "more developed" nations into the Soviet state and society.¹² Hirsch thus emphasized that, rather than a reversal in policy, the Soviet practice of amalgamating nations greatly accelerated in the 1930s. Regardless, the shift toward national consolidation by the late 1930s meant that titular populations of the union republics, whom Soviet leaders classified at higher stages of development, mainly began to benefit from nativization.

There were numerous complications with the enforcement of nativization throughout its different stages. The Bolsheviks' idea of progress and their commitment to defusing the inequities wrought by imperialism and capitalism involved transforming the multinational empire into more homogeneously conceived (and modern-like) national spaces. Granting national units, "national in form, but socialist in content," they believed, would pass people through the stage of national consciousness necessary for creating an equal basis for their merging into an international socialist proletariat. This notion of modernity, however, entailed ascribing national identity to people and spaces that may have been nationally ambiguous or culturally complex. Nativization, then, though perhaps not a "prisonhouse of nations," could still act as an exercise of power. National identities, as Kate Brown writes, could serve as "penal colonies for individuals caught within them."¹³ In a study of Ukraine, Matthew Pauly has shown how Soviet national

¹¹ See Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*.

¹² See Hirsch, *Empire of Nations*.

¹³ Kate Brown, *A Biography of No Place: From Ethnic Borderland to Soviet Heartland* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 2004), 11.

development was problematic from the start at the local level.¹⁴ Language, important to forging national identity, was a crux of nativization policies. Language conversions to Ukrainian in the school system were often bungled and sometimes were met with local resistance.

Nativization was intended to encourage comprehensive national development—no matter the national group’s size—and to avert ethnic hostilities. The creation of thousands of national borders and the enforcement of national identity had the opposite effect, however: increasing ethnic mobilization and conflict. “Every village, indeed every individual, had to declare an ethnic allegiance,” which sparked fights over who could claim the national unit of question as “their own.”¹⁵ While central authorities considered “Great Russian chauvinism” the greatest threat in the initial years of nativization, by the end of the 1920s, they increasingly grew concerned about local nationalism—or local “chauvinism.” In essence, central authorities were worried that their nativization policies, instead of disarming nationalism, were doing the exact opposite, and therefore, local nationalism became, like “Great Russian chauvinism,” a perceived threat to the Soviet state. Nationalization, however, was never abandoned. Instead, in practice, those who questioned or allegedly deviated from Sovietization efforts were sometimes persecuted or accused of exhibiting “bourgeois nationalism.” These campaigns, which started in the western republics, eventually transferred to the Soviet territories the Bolsheviks had considered most “culturally backward,” like Central Asia and Kazakhstan—where the Bolsheviks had forged a titular elite and at one point supported expulsions as decolonial acts.¹⁶

The Bolsheviks perceived of national development and the modernizing aims of the state as married interests. By provisioning the empire’s former minorities with the trappings of a

¹⁴ On the local consequences of Soviet nativization policies, see Pauly, *Breaking the Tongue*.

¹⁵ Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*, 73.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 356-362.

nation-state: territory, language, elites, culture—and by infusing them with socialist values and aims—they could defuse nationalism and preemptively neutralize grounds for ethnic conflict. In other words, they believed that to build communism they had to elevate nationality, which had become a more salient basis for conflict, over class until national tensions were resolved. Even if national development was used to appease long-held national desires, and, therefore, to prevent nationalism (what Martin calls a “soft-line policy”) and the centralizing needs of the state, like industrialization, took precedence, the state committed to both policies. In fact, national development was also seen as necessary to achieve economic aims. For the state, that is, these policies sometimes intersected in important ways. In Ukraine, for instance, where the rural population was mostly Ukrainian speaking, and urban and industrial centers Russian speaking, linguistic nativization of the city offered a way for political leaders to win peasants over to the (modernizing) Soviet cause.¹⁷ Promoting national development through a complex system of national territories and meeting the central needs of the state, however, proved challenging.

If early Soviet national development was an uneven and contentious process, then what problems arose after the late 1930s? The intricate (though still problematic) system of national units that once tied the country together was superseded by the prioritization of union republics and an increasingly Russified Soviet centralization. Groups residing in another nation’s territory were sometimes forcefully assimilated, deported, or otherwise expelled, which served to homogenize republics and “reinforce the visibility of the titular nation.”¹⁸ Surviving communities living in another group’s national territory thus became either “extraterritorial,” territorially

¹⁷ Pauly, *Breaking the Tongue*, 5.

¹⁸ Krista Goff, *Nested Nationalism: Making and Unmaking Nations in the Soviet Caucasus* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2020), 134. See Claire P. Kaiser, “‘What are they Doing? After All, We’re Not Germans’: Expulsion, Belonging, and Postwar Experience in the Caucasus,” Krista A. Goff and Lewis H. Siegelbaum, eds. *Empire and Belonging in the Eurasian Borderlands* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2019), 80-94.

dispersed peoples who had “their own” titular territory in the USSR but lived elsewhere, or “nontitular,” minorities who had no national unit in the ethno-federal state. To underscore this critical difference, this dissertation consistently refers to the diasporic groups who lived outside of “their own” territories, and therefore who had greater access to resources and state recognition, as “extraterritorial,” and to the communities who did not have them as “nontitular.”¹⁹ Contrastingly, nationalities residing in “home” territories (and expressly those at the union republic level), on the other hand, became more self-conscious, educated, and represented in government than they were previously though their full national expression was stunted by the construction of the Soviet project.²⁰

Extraterritorial and nontitular groups, therefore, lived in nationalizing republics and, paradoxically, a (Russifying) centralizing state, though they were still entitled to national promotion in principle. The intent of “state-sponsored evolutionism,” a term Hirsch coined to describe Soviet national development, however, was to move the *entire* Soviet population along the path of national development. At the same time, throughout the USSR’s existence, “equal political, economic, state, cultural, and social rights” irrespective of one’s nationality, no matter how small, were bedrocks of the Soviet constitutions that extended to all citizens at least in theory.²¹ What of extraterritorial Russians, the former great power majority? The Bolsheviks decided that nationalization and the creation of ethno-territories made even territorially

¹⁹ Most works use “nontitular” to generally refer to Soviet ethnic groups living outside of “their” ethnic homeland and to those who did not have one. Historian Krista Goff, however, has adopted the term to specify groups in the Soviet hierarchy of nations who had no titular ethnic homeland and were more likely to be subject to titular assimilation after the late 1930s (see Krista Goff, *Nested Nationalism*).

²⁰ Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR, and the Successor States* (New York: Oxford University, 2011). The Council of Nationalities, which became an “upper house” of the Supreme Soviet in 1936, received 32 deputies from each Union Republic (up from 25 in the 1936 constitution), 11 deputies from each Autonomous Republic, five deputies from each Autonomous Region, and one deputy from each Autonomous Area. These cadres were controlled by Moscow but nominally representative of the titular nationality of each respective autonomous region. See Walker, *Dissolution*.

²¹ Goff, *Nested Nationalism*, 3.

dispersed, or extraterritorial Russians, minorities entitled to national units. Yet, after the late 1930s when Soviet nationality policy shifted, Russians were exalted as “first among equals” and the “elder brother” in the Soviet “brotherhood of nations.” Russians were universally heralded as leading and assisting the Soviet charge to the modern, communist future. Soviet authorities and everyday people—titular, extraterritorial, and nontitular alike—acknowledged this state policy by vocalizing gratitude to the Russian people.

How, though, did extraterritorial and nontitular peoples experience these shifts in Soviet nationality policy after the late 1930s? What new tensions emerged? By 1989 approximately one in five Soviet citizens lived outside of or without “their own” territories. Despite their remarkable size and diversity, there has been limited scholarship on the topic.²² Though the general contours of Soviet nationality policy after the late 1930s are understood by scholars, less is known about the lived realities of the groups most affected by them. The scholarship that does exist is focused on the major events that took Soviet citizens across borders (like war-affiliated displacement and evacuation, deportation under Stalin in the 1930s and 1940s, or postwar recruitment to the Virgin Lands Campaign) or, separately, on how “internal diasporas” managed life in the Soviet metropole. This scholarship, for the most part, does not reveal how

²² Erik Scott was of the first to focus on the “evolution” of “internal diasporas” in the Soviet Union through a study centered on prominent extraterritorial Georgians in Moscow. See *Familiar Strangers: The Georgian Diaspora and the Evolution of Soviet Empire* (New York: Oxford University, 2016). See Sahadeo, *Voices from the Soviet Edge* (Ithaca: 2019) for another recent monograph. On war evacuations, see Rebeca Manley, *To the Tashkent Station: Evacuation and Survival in the Soviet Union at War* (Ithaca: 2009). On the Virgin Lands Campaign, see Michaela Pohl, “The ‘Planet of one hundred languages’: Ethnic relations and Soviet identity in the Virgin Lands,” Nicholas B. Breyfogle, et. al., *Peopling the Russian Periphery: Borderland colonization in Eurasian History* (London: 2007). For the first comprehensive study of twentieth century migration in Russia and the Soviet Union, see Lewis H. Siegelbaum and Leslie Page Moch, *Broad is My Native Land: Repertoires and Regimes of Migration in Russia’s Twentieth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2014). On deportees, see: Pavel Polian, *Ne po svoei vole...istoriia I geografiia prinuditel’nykh migratsii v SSSR* (Moscow: OGI Memorial, 2001), Jeronim Perovic, *From Conquest to Deportation: The North Caucasus under Russian Rule* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2018).

extraterritorial and nontitular groups, writ large, navigated life in the USSR's nationalizing outskirts after the 1930s.

What did it mean to live outside of—or without—one's "own" territory in the USSR's non-European peripheries in the country's final decades? What recourse did such Soviet citizens have? Recent scholarship provides important insights. Krista Goff's monograph, which concentrates on the more vulnerable nontitular nations in the Caucasus left at the mercy of both titular nationalism and Russified centralization after the late 1930s, argues that it was, in fact, the former, not the latter, that many nontitular peoples came to blame for everyday inequalities.²³ In Azerbaijan, postwar governing elites prioritized titular hegemony by working toward the "discursive, linguistic, and demographic assimilation of the republic's nontitular minorities as a way of building the titular nation."²⁴ Goff shows that in the post-Stalinist period nontitular complaints "regularly emphasized the legal baseline of their claims to equality" in their references to violations of Soviet and Leninist nationality policy at the republican level. In other words, after the 1930s, the national rights of nontitular minorities, the groups most often subjected to titular assimilation, were continually debated and negotiated.

Industrialization in the USSR was often a multinational endeavor, and scholars focusing on all-Union enterprises have also provided important revelations on interethnic relations in the USSR's peripheries. In a study of large-scale development in Tajikistan, Artemy Kalinovsky, found that "the ideals of internationalism often were supposed to govern relations among the various groups within the Soviet Union."²⁵ Stefan Guth, also shows that in the industrial region of Mangyshlak in Kazakhstan, the promotion of internationalist practices was taken somewhat

²³ See Goff, *Nested Nationalism*.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 109.

²⁵ Artemy Kalinovsky, *Laboratory of Socialist Development: Cold War Politics and Decolonization in Soviet Tajikistan* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2018), 11.

seriously in key industrial sites. In the city of Shevchenko, an “industrial hot spot” named after Taras Shevchenko, a Ukrainian national poet exiled to the region in the mid nineteenth century, *sblizhenie* was stressed over nativization given its potential to “counterbalance the increasing parochialism of nationality policy as conducted by the union republics.”²⁶ While more balanced multiethnic representation in “sensitive state institutions” was monitored here, in Novyi Uzen, another city in the region, titular nationals, “dominated the city’s highest managerial, party, and administrative jobs with an absolute and continuously growing majority.” In Novyi Uzen, titular favoritism, in fact, served to play a role in the ouster of other nationals from the municipal party committee. In both cases, however, Kazaks showed a “backlog” in climbing up professional hierarchies in “their” republic. Owing to poor Russian language skills (often the favored language in institutes of higher learning and all-Union enterprises), many titular nationals lacked the requisite training necessary for such jobs. This, of course, produced tensions, particularly as the southern tier’s growing population brought a rise in unemployment. The economic interests of the center meant that, sometimes, titular nationals lost out to “USSR incorporated,” which grated against the principles of nativization.

This dissertation argues that internal, or Soviet, internationalism validated and safeguarded the presence of diasporic and minority peoples who began to live in another group’s national territory after the late 1930s. On one end, it supported ethnic particularism within the Soviet “friendship of the peoples”—a slogan that became ubiquitous throughout the USSR by the late 1930s; on the other, it promoted the exhaustion of national difference through the merging of Soviet peoples.²⁷ In other words, it encouraged the development of national

²⁶ Stefan Guth, “USSR Incorporated Versus Affirmative Action Empire? Industrial Development and Interethnic Relations in Kazakhstan’s Mangyshlak Region (1960s–1980s),” *Ab Imperio* 4 (2018): 171-206.

²⁷ On the “friendship of peoples,” see Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*, 432-461.

consciousness *and* supported the enervation of national identity (which was essential to communism). This approach, the state assumed, would dialectically resolve national difference as nations modernized, became more equal, and progressively bridged under Soviet guidance and a common way of life. Rather than simply sponsor national development, in short, it also sought to shape—and dictate—their evolution toward communism. In the post-Stalinist period, in fact, *sliianie*, the merging of Soviet peoples, and *sblizhenie*, their “drawing together”—the end goals of Soviet internationalism—became major state objectives.²⁸ As Adrienne Edgar has shown, under Khrushchev, intermarriage was leveraged as an important phenomenon in the merging and making of the Soviet *narod*, or people.²⁹ “Whereas nationality theorists of the Stalin era had maintained that the Soviet nations first needed to ‘flourish’ and only later would ‘draw together,’ Edgar has pointed out, these two processes were now [under Khrushchev] said to be taking place simultaneously.”

In practice, internationalism became a nationality policy that mediated and moderated alleged “extreme,” or discriminatory, nationalism that threatened the Soviet project. The state provided internationalist training to offset and prevent nationalism that jeopardized Soviet unity. It applied internationalist training or education (*vospitanie*) after reports about alleged excessive nationalism at the local, regional, and national levels. Teachers of Russian, primarily in national schools (where the primary language of education was one’s non-Russian native language), were trained to encourage students that knowledge of Russian was essential to foster an “international culture of Soviet peoples” and to avoid animosities between Soviet peoples.³⁰ Party

²⁸ Guth, “USSR Incorporated Versus Affirmative Action Empire?” 171-206.

²⁹ Adrienne Edgar, *Intermarriage and the Friendship of Peoples* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2022), 23-24.

³⁰ I. V. Varannikova and M.V. Cherkezovoi, eds. *Vospitanie sovetskogo patriotizma i sotsialisticheskogo internatsionalizma v protsesse izucheniia russkogo iazyka i literatury* (Leningrad: Prosveshchenie, 1985), N.A. Baskakov, ed. *Puti razvitiia natsional’no russkogo dvuiazychiia v nerusskikh shkolakh* (Moscow: 1979).

organizations for the “patriotic and international education of workers” functioned throughout the country.³¹ The post-Stalin period also ushered in reforms that enabled letter campaigns and other forms of activism that petitioned for rights denied or suppressed under Stalin.³²

Through complaints and petitions deposited in archives, party and state documents, and interviews, this dissertation, the first extensive archival study on mass displacement associated with the USSR’s collapse, also seeks to understand and explain how the extraterritorial and nontitular groups who fled the rise of titular nationalism and violence with the Soviet Union’s collapse experienced its final decades. Many evoked socialist principles, like internationalism, to push for national rights but also to report nationalism and discrimination. These letters often employed the rhetoric of “excessive” and “extreme” nationalism to report ostensibly overt (and divisive) nationalism not sanctioned by the state. When nationalism surged in the USSR’s final years, many extraterritorial and nontitular Soviet citizens perceived their places of origin and their “home” territories (if they had them) as increasingly foreign. Some, identifying as “non-natives,” “Soviet citizens,” or “Russian speakers” formed multinational collectives for mutual support, often citing internationalism. Many appealed to central authorities for greater intervention—the past state response in cases of interethnic conflict or tensions—or they fled, sometimes staying on the move. Soviet “refugees” in Russia, the Soviet metropole, where many believed they would find greater security or belonging, faced rapidly devolving central institutions and increasingly parochial regional authorities that struggled to manage the migration crisis. Many were left uncertain of their fates, and some, homeless. Some of the internally

³¹ See, for example, Vladimir Emel’ianovich Naumenko, “Deiatel’nost’ Checheno-Ingushskoi oblastnoi partiinoi organizatsii po internatsional’nomu vospitaniiu trudiashchikhsia (1959-1971 gg).” Ph.D. Dissertation, Dagestan Friendship of Peoples University (Makhachkala: 1984), 165-174.

³² See Krista A. Goff, “‘Why not love our language and our culture?’ National rights and citizenship in Khrushchev’s Soviet Union,” *Nationalities Papers* 43, no. 1 (2015): 27-44.

displaced began to identify with the state label most often applied to them amid the USSR's collapse: "refugees." Some banded together to assert their rights as Soviet citizens even as they decried the decline of internationalism as a value and practice.

The scholarship on migration and the diasporas produced with the USSR's collapse has mainly come from outside the historical field and has therefore primarily focused on the post-Soviet period, or on ethnic Russians.³³ This dissertation, on the other hand, underscores the multidimensional and constantly constructed aspects of national identity that was pertinent to Soviet internationalism, but is also more reflective of the discursive nature of identity in general. To question what shaped and transformed the experiences people who lived outside of or without "their own" territories had amid the USSR's dissolution, this dissertation examines the social and political contexts, structures, and ideologies that (former) Soviet subjects engaged with historically.³⁴ I found that personal and collective experiences were often far more complex than one's official nationality inscribed in Soviet passports or one's ethnic group as often reified by scholars. Joan W. Scott writes that experience doesn't "happen outside established meanings" but "neither is it confined to a fixed order of meaning."³⁵ What people experienced with the USSR's decline and eventual collapse was indisputably complicated and varied, yet we cannot ignore the influence of Soviet knowledge systems. In adapting Rogers Brubaker's concept of

³³ For works focused primarily on ethnic Russian migration and diaspora issues, see Vladimir Shlapentokh, ed, *et. al.*, *The New Russian Diaspora: Russian Minorities in the Former Soviet Republics* (New York: 1994), Paul Kolstoe, *Russians in the Former Soviet Republics* (Bloomington: 1995), Pilkington, *Migration, Displacement and Identity*, Igor Zevelev, *Russia and Its New Diasporas* (Washington D.C., 2001), Moya Flynn, *Migrant Resettlement in the Russian Federation: Reconstructing Homes and Homelands* (London: 2004), and Sergey V. Ryazantsev, *Nashi za granitsei: russkie, rossiiane, russkogovoriashchie, sootchestvenniki: rasselenie, integratsiia i vozvratnaia migratsiia v Rossiiu* (Moscow: ISPI RAN, 2014). On post-Soviet migration, see Aksana Ismailbekova, "Mobility as a Coping Strategy for Osh Uzbeks in the Aftermath of Conflict," *Internationales Asienforum* 45, no. 1-2 (2014): 49-68, Cynthia J. Buckley, et. al., *Migration, Homeland, and Belonging in Eurasia* (Baltimore: 2008), Alexia Bloch, "Citizenship, Belonging, and Moldovan Migrants in Post-Soviet Russia," *Journal of Anthropology* 79, no. 4 (2014): 445-472.

³⁴ Joan W. Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4 (Summer 1991): 773-797.

³⁵ Ibid.

“groupness,” which argues that national identity is relational and contextual, to intercommunal identity, I show that internationalism established the foundation for the cross-ethnic collective consciousness that heightened in the USSR’s final years when national movements emerged.³⁶ When titular nationalism and violence more directly or more consistently targeted one group, others were enveloped by “ethnic” conflict, while violent episodes and titular nationalism also served as reference points, anxiety triggers, or a call to mobilization. These ethnic nexuses foreground the importance of Soviet internationalism even as it became, ironically, obscured as a state ideology and practice.

The decline and collapse of the USSR was undoubtedly a moment of great structural dislocation.³⁷ It “raise[d] the emotional intensity of life” and brought widespread insecurity that could produce, even within the same person, varied reactions: “anxiety, fear, or exhilaration; incessant activity, paralysis, extreme caution, or reckless abandon.” When titular collectives asserted sovereignty, sometimes through violence, they often set off a “chain of occurrences” that further upended and delegitimized the Soviet center. Though these events were also the result of a “buildup of pressures”—and sometimes past violent (but more isolated) fracturing of the Soviet project—Mikhail Gorbachev’s reforms provided the conditions for social ruptures to “overla[p] and interpenetrat[e]” bringing “epoch-making” change after which the Soviet system could not be repaired. As William H. Sewell writes, in such moments of profound structural transformation, actors are often “unsure about how to get on with life,” while the “uncertainty of structural relations” also stimulates “bursts of collective cultural creativity.” This was evident at

³⁶ See Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 2004).

³⁷ See “Historical Events as Transformations of Structures: Inventing Revolution at the Bastille,” William H. Sewell Jr., *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2005), 225-270.

every level amid the USSR's collapse—sociopolitical shifts that left many displaced, or inclined to flight, often to Russia, the (former) Soviet metropole.

The Russian North Caucasus, where most fled to amid the USSR's collapse, became a major migrant crossroads for people from across the former Soviet space as well as transregionally. These lived realities, however, have also played an understudied role in Western scholarship on the USSR's collapse.³⁸ The North Caucasus presents a unique case-study because it, like the rest of the southern tier, was a zone of development in the postwar era when Nikita Khrushchev sought to develop the peripheries in a bid for increased Soviet influence amid widespread decolonization.³⁹ In the 1940s, many Russian speakers moved into the territories abandoned by deported peoples, and in the 1950s, they continued to arrive in high numbers to industrialize the region.⁴⁰ Like the rest of the southern tier, however, the autonomous territories of the region acted as a site of outmigration by the 1980s. In addition to becoming the site of intense intraregional migration with the USSR's dissolution, as a major Russian borderland, it began to receive the majority of those displaced from other republics.⁴¹

³⁸ Political scientist Matthew Light's *Fragile Migration Rights: Freedom of movement in post-Soviet Russia* (London: Routledge, 2017) includes a chapter on Krasnodar and Stavropol, though it is focused on the post-Soviet period. Most literature on the North Caucasus affiliated with the Soviet collapse comes from outside the historical field and focuses primarily on conflict in the region from a state perspective. See, for instance, Robert Bruce Ware and Enver Kisriev, *Dagestan: Russian Hegemony and Islamic Resistance in the Russian North Caucasus* (London: Routledge, 2010), Svante E. Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers: A Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict in the Caucasus* (Surrey: Curzon, 2001). For a historical study that ends with the deportations, see Perovic, *From Conquest to Deportation*.

³⁹ Riazantsev, *Sovremennyi demograficheskii i migratsionnyi portret Severnogo Kavkaza* (Stavropol: ISPI RAN, 2003), 108-111.

⁴⁰ Roman Levita and Mikhail Loiberg, "The Empire and the Russians: Historical Aspects," Shlapentokh, *et al.*, *The New Russian Diaspora*, 14, Riazantsev, *Sovremennyi demograficheskii i migratsionnyi portret Severnogo Kavkaza*, 108-111. Both of these sources describe only "Russian" migrants for these movements into the North Caucasus autonomous territories, but Pavel Polian states that multinational peoples from neighboring territories, for the most part, were moved to the autonomous territories in the borderland when they were liquidated in the 1940s. See Polian, *Ne po svoei vole*, 131-136.

⁴¹ Up to 1992, three quarters of the displaced fled to the North Caucasus. Pilkington, *Migration, Displacement, and Identity*, 90.

The perestroika reforms here spurred ethnic mobilization that was often linked to concrete aims, like increased national rights, border disputes, and access to historic homelands. I show how ethnic mobilization was connected to the legacy of Soviet nationality policy in the region—the deportation of purported fifth column nations under Stalin, the dissolution of “their” territories, and, beginning in the mid 1950s, the movement of repressed peoples back to reinstated, though altered, territories. For many repressed peoples, common tragedy, traditions, and a stigmatized past combined with assertions of socialist principles, like internationalism, to fuel collective action over the reclamation of historic homelands. As I show, enduring claims over territory were also driven by the Soviet hierarchy of nations, which conditioned groups to compete over titular space. These processes sparked conflicts—sometimes between repressed groups, but also between repressed peoples and others, many of whom occupied the territories deported peoples left behind. In the borderland, perestroika also brought a moment of reactive group-making influenced by this legacy of state repression and a blundered Soviet nationality policy. Here, Soviet citizens who lost their moorings tried to fashion different forms of groupness, sometimes by leveraging and reshaping the Soviet (and more distant) past. During perestroika, the rehabilitation movement for repressed nations deported under Stalin intensified, spurring mass displacement, and Chechen and Russian nationalism. These processes worsened the migrant crisis in Russia and the social response to it.

After the USSR’s demise, new international borders altered the political landscape for former Soviet citizens who now found themselves in nationalizing nation-states. Those who turned to the Russian Federation, including hopeful immigrants, had to consider these changes in their negotiations, or appeals, to the former Soviet metropole. In seeking to shape nation-building processes in the newly independent nation-state in their favor, or in responding to transpiring

changes, some organized, forming major initiatives. The most vehement of these were Cossack organizations. The revivalist movement of the former imperial border guards in the Russian North Caucasus borderland turned the plight of Russians, Slavs, and Cossacks in the former Soviet space into a rallying cry. Some non-Slavs fleeing titular nationalism and violence to the former Soviet metropole were targeted by some of these groups, who ironically condemned the displacement of Russians and other Slavs. Soviet “refugees,” and those displaced in the aftermath of its collapse, therefore, sometimes had to contend with rising nationalism from one former Soviet republic or territory to another.

Dueling Centralization and Nationalization in the Postwar Era

By the postwar era, the Soviet Union was a more interconnected space in the minds and realities of millions, bridged by common trials and tribulations, like the Great Patriotic War, and other shared experiences. The war, for instance, moved people and industries; it shifted 20 percent of Soviet enterprises east, particularly to Central Asia and Kazakhstan, where many (citizens and industries) stayed on for good.⁴² Central authorities spoke favorably in regard to the increased international contact, particularly as it was necessary to meet the needs of industrialization and urbanization intrinsic to the communist mode of development.⁴³ The Soviet Union began to further invest in its non-Slavic peripheries to build on this momentum and to have a “showcase” of the Soviet model of development amid its Cold War competition for global influence.⁴⁴ To meet these demands, Soviet movement trends shifted south.⁴⁵

⁴² Levita and Loiberg, “The Empire and the Russians,” Shlapentokh, *et al.*, *The New Russian Diaspora*, 14-15.

⁴³ Robert J. Kaiser, *The Geography of Nationalism in Russia* (Princeton: Princeton University 1994), 151-153.

⁴⁴ See Kalinovsky, *Laboratory of Socialist Development*, and Jeff Sahadeo, *Voices from the Soviet Edge* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2019).

⁴⁵ V. Perevedentsev, “Population Migration and the Utilization of Labor Resources: The Problem of Population Migration.” *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 23, no.2. February 9, 1971: 1-6.

Scholars of postwar Soviet development, migration, and intermarriage indeed have begun to show how the USSR was far more complex than a “communal apartment” with each ethnic group confined to its “own room.”⁴⁶ Soviet capitals, as Paul Stronski has shown, were invented and transformed into the archetypes of socialist modernity—symbols of the “prosperity, abundance, and progress” of the socialist model of development where people from across the USSR lived and worked.⁴⁷ Post-Stalinist Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, was often remembered as “international” and unspoiled by ethnic animosities, where different people “were all in the same Kasha [porridge],” as one doctor recalled.⁴⁸ Public transportation, including air travel, became more readily accessible and affordable, which facilitated cross-border movement—what Lewis H. Siegelbaum and Leslie Page Moch have called, “transnationalism in one country.”⁴⁹ Even rural groups and seasonal traders from the USSR’s peripheries, as Jeff Sahadeo has revealed, frequented Moscow and Leningrad, cities they envisioned as the most “international” and therefore offering higher chances of social mobility.⁵⁰ Intermarriage, as an important marker, or “proof” of national merging, was “continuously count[ed], celebrat[ed], and otherwise manag[ed], as Adrienne Edgar has shown.⁵¹ So Soviet did some become, Anna Whittington has argued, that amid the debate on the 1970 constitution they argued against the need to have “their” nationality inscribed in passports.⁵²

In the postwar period, Soviet internationalism involved supporting both the “flourishing” of Soviet nations and, more emphatically, their gradual rapprochement. Nikita Khrushchev

⁴⁶ On the USSR as a “communal apartment,” see Slezkine, “The USSR as a Communal Apartment.”

⁴⁷ Paul Stronski, *Tashkent: Forging a Soviet City, 1930-1966* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 2010), 2.

⁴⁸ Bruce Grant, “Cosmopolitan Baku.” *Ethnos* 74, no. 2, (June 2010): 123-147.

⁴⁹ Lewis H. Siegelbaum and Leslie Page Moch, “Transnationalism in One Country? Seeing and Not Seeing Cross-Border Migration within the Soviet Union.” *Slavic Review* 75, no. 4 (2016): 970–86.

⁵⁰ See Jeff Sahadeo, *Voices from the Soviet Edge*.

⁵¹ Edgar, *Intermarriage and the Friendship of Peoples*, 2-3.

⁵² Anna Whittington, “Citizens of the Soviet Union—it sounds dignified” in Maarten Van Ginderachter and Jon Fox, eds., *National Indifference and the History of Nationalism in Modern Europe* (London: 2019).

championed an accelerated pace of change toward communism, which he claimed would be achieved by 1980—implying that the complete merger (*sliianie*) of peoples lay in the distant future. Under Khrushchev, officials and scholars underscored the emergence of the Soviet people as a “new historical community of people,” while intermarriage was “slated to play a crucial role in the formation and consolidation of the Soviet people.”⁵³ Though Leonid Brezhnev favored the more tempered attainment of *sblizhenie*, the “drawing together” of Soviet people (which did not necessarily equate to a loss of national consciousness but encouraged more interethnic mixing), a presumption that socioeconomic development would naturally integrate and assimilate the USSR’s nations existed throughout much of the postwar period.⁵⁴ In a conference dedicated to the Soviet *narod* in 1968, for instance, sociologists and other experts expounded that “each socialist nation was ‘borrowing elements’ from all the others—and as a result had started to manifest a combination of its own internal traits and those of the entire Soviet *narod*.”⁵⁵ They propounded the “objective sociological law of the development of nations,” which theorized that developed socialist nations would begin to look more similar and gradually merge when class and national antagonisms faded.

In addition to the increased sponsorship of international mixing and merging, however, nationality categories and a primordial understanding of nationality had also become a fixture of Soviet life. Through concepts like the “friendship of peoples,” the “depth and historicity” of national cultures were celebrated and featured prominently in the USSR.⁵⁶ Stalin’s propaganda campaign for the 1936 constitution had also involved emphasizing the “achievement of stateness and nationhood” with the USSR as the “vanguard of nations.” By the end of the 1930s, the

⁵³ Edgar, *Intermarriage and the Friendship of the Peoples*, 24.

⁵⁴ Kaiser, *The Geography of Nationalism*, 152. See also the epilogue to Hirsch, *Empire of Nations*.

⁵⁵ Hirsch, *Empire of Nations*, 316-317.

⁵⁶ Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*, 442-451.

USSR inculcated nationality as an inherited trait determined by the parents' nationality through constant ethnic labeling, including on Soviet passports. This "indoctrinated its population in the belief that ethnicity was an inherent, fundamental, and crucially important characteristic of all individuals," and it, arguably, popularly belied the Marxist notion that nations were fundamentally modern constructs—an impermanent development that would lose merit under communism. Titular status was based on the premise of indigeneity, which also served to ingrain the belief that territories historically "belonged" or were "native" to one principal nationality. The study of ethnogenesis provided the "'evidence' that anchored titular peoples in the ancient history of their republics" and the narratives that legitimized and entrenched the USSR's ethnoterritorial structure.⁵⁷ Complaints about titular chauvinism and forced assimilation, however, attempted to undercut these claims.

Postwar campaigns also produced growing autonomy for titular nations. As part of his destalinization initiative, Nikita Khrushchev decentralized "decision-making authority," which fostered local autonomy and inadvertently increased the power of indigenous elites. In some republics, this post-Stalinist shift, in fact, built on a trend of wartime experience that had further "emboldened national particularism" and "empowered local leaders."⁵⁸ The boundary between "acceptably communist national behaviors and inappropriately nationalist ideas and identifications" began to be blurred by "nationalizing politics and popular nationalisms" that entered the public sphere.⁵⁹ Post-Stalinist "pronouncements about the future merger of socialist nations," as Francine Hirsch writes, thus often "provoked a hostile response," particularly as a "postnational future" threatened national leaders.⁶⁰ The Kremlin, as a result, started to clash with

⁵⁷ Goff, *Nested Nationalism*, 109-118.

⁵⁸ Goff, *Nested Nationalism*, 106-109.

⁵⁹ Ibid

⁶⁰ Hirsch, 318.

republican leadership who attempted to “test” the limits of “Moscow’s willingness to let the republics chart their own path.”⁶¹ Between 1959 and 1961, it accused the leaderships of Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Latvia of “nationalist behaviors.”⁶²

Khrushchev envisioned that his reforms would increase the efficacy of the Soviet project, but he came to fear that they had, contrastingly, generated republican *mestnichestvo*, or parochialism. Despite various attempts to recentralize the Soviet apparat, however, decision-making authority still mainly “devolved de facto” to local indigenous elites.⁶³ A “pioneering” survey in the Brezhnev era, concluded that in the non-Russian republics (with the exception of Belarus and Latvia) titular nationals were felt to have an advantage in access to jobs, education, and party positions, and sometimes, an overwhelming advantage.”⁶⁴ Robert J. Kaiser writes that urbanization and “international equalization” as a modernizing measure often did not always reduce national tensions as projected but often “occurred simultaneously with rising intranational cohesion and national separatism.”⁶⁵ Why was this so? Kaiser offers one plausible explanation: “a basic misreading of nations.” Soviet leaders believed that national difference would become irrelevant amid the country’s progress toward socialist modernity, but time and again, they were proven that national ties (that they ironically cultivated) were more salient than expected.

This tension was tangible even in Central Asia, where national consciousness has been discounted by some scholars. Scholars of perestroika-era national mobilization have largely ignored archival material— i.e., the voices and experiences of the groups most affected—as well

⁶¹ Goff, *Nested Nationalism*, 106-109.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Kaiser, *The Geography of Nationalism*, 330-333.

⁶⁴ Terry Martin (Keynote presentation, International Conference, Nazarbayev University, “Empire, Colonies, and Knowledge: Intellectual Exchange in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union,” Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan, May 2022).

⁶⁵ Ibid.

as insights from the preceding decades. Pal Kolsto, for instance, dismisses conflict in Central Asia during perestroika as “non-political, inarticulate ethnic violence related to mass-level job competition.”⁶⁶ Economic concerns were indeed a key part of social tensions during the uncertainty of the perestroika era. The nativization of administrative posts, as mentioned previously, did not necessarily equate to economic clout, increasing the potential for conflict, while some locales were more “international,” or more national than others.⁶⁷ Yet, fundamentally, these issues were connected to Soviet national development, which provisioned nations with “their own” nation-like territories and increasingly promoted the “drawing together” of peoples, interethnic marriage, the Soviet identity, and the movement of people across national borders. In fact, according to public opinion surveys conducted in November 1989, a higher proportion of people in Uzbekistan (53%) identified primarily as citizens of “their own” republic than did Ukrainians (46%).⁶⁸ The emergent nationalist movement here, where a massacre of Meskhetian Turks occurred in June of 1989, was, in fact, just skillfully repressed.

Soviet national development, by its very design, fostered conflicting forms of patriotism. One 1985 guidebook on internationalism in the Soviet context urged teachers, for instance, to

⁶⁶ Pal Kolsto, “Nationalism, ethnic conflict, and job competition: non-Russian collective action in the USSR Under perestroika,” *Nations and Nationalism* 14, no. 1 (2008): 151-169.

⁶⁷ On economic-local administrative national divides as a potential for conflict, see Guth, “USSR Incorporated Versus Affirmative Action Empire? 171-206. Eric McGlinchey, “Fast Forwarding the Brezhnev Years: Osh in Flames,” *Russian History* 41(2014): 373-391. Terry Martin refers to this phenomenon as the “hole in the middle”—applicable to the “east,” or the regions Soviet leaders considered most “culturally backward.” Here, by 1939, titular nationals achieved proportionate representation in leadership positions and in the cultural sector, but were poorly represented in technical, medical, and communication spheres. Martin, however, attributes this divide to the fact that nativization created an “insatiable demand” for education and cultural workers, leaders in different fields, where titular nationals established patronage networks over time. Every non-Russian republic (with the exclusion of Armenia, where Armenians already dominated in white-collar jobs) experienced “substantial growth” in its white-collar nationalization rates from 1926-1939. By 1939, nationalization of visible leadership positions was a particular success—at above 80% across the USSR for leaders of “party, government, cooperative and mass organizations from the village to republican level. Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*, 379-387. From 1959 to 1979, white collar occupations rose in percentage overall among the fifteen republican nations with deviations falling considerably, as did the number of highly skilled specialists. On occupation trends in the post-Soviet period, see Kaiser, *The Geography of Nationalism*, 235-243.

⁶⁸ Mark Bessinger, *Nationalist Mobilization*, 257-261.

foster devotion to the central state, the Soviet Union, and for one's "home" territory and nation. According to the pedagogical essay, they needed to maintain, a "natural combination" of cultivating "children's love for their small homeland [*malaia rodina*]," like "their" republic, with an enculturation of love for the "mono-national Motherland—the USSR."⁶⁹ As nations modernized and collectively moved toward communism, these contradictions, Soviet authorities and experts expected, would dialectically resolve. The conditions were set, however, for divergent "imagined communities" to arise.

Ernest Gellner defines nationalism as the belief that "persons of the same culture" should compose the "legitimate unit" with that nation defining "the limits of the unit."⁷⁰ In the Soviet case, there were a plurality of nation-like "units" with their own territories, elites, languages, and cultures—oddly, provisioned by an overarching central state that paradoxically aimed to "draw together" and merge nations. Ethno-territories were intended to promote national development toward these ends, but they were often interpreted as definitively belonging to the titular nation. As previously mentioned, early Soviet nativization provoked myriad conflicts by pitting one ethnic group against another as people resisted becoming minorities in another group's national space. In Uzbekistan in the 1920s, for instance, nativization, executed at the local and republican level, was sometimes interpreted as providing "unqualified priority in all aspects of life," in which Uzbekistan belonged to Uzbeks.⁷¹ Even at the nationalized village soviet level, this meant that "minorities were inevitably viewed as a foreign presence," which often led to demands for expulsion.⁷² In other words, the primary emphasis on the development of one nation's culture

⁶⁹ I. V. Varannikova and M.V. Cherkezovoi, eds. *Vospitanie Sovetskogo Patriotizma i Sotsialisticheskogo Internatsionalizma v Protsesse Izucheniia Russkogo Iazyka i Literatury* (Prosveshchenie: Leningrad: 1985), 10.

⁷⁰ Ernest Gellner, *Nationalism* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1997), 6.

⁷¹ Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*, 151.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 42.

and interests inadvertently sometimes fostered local nationalism, or the belief that one nation should be exalted above others.⁷³

In contrast to scholars who have implied that the basis for interethnic tensions was no longer present after the late 1930s, or who, in the same vein, position interethnic conflict affiliated with the USSR's collapse as a product of perestroika, I show that there were persistent concerns and clashes over nationalization even after Russified centralization became a larger political and social force.⁷⁴ Some scholars, indeed, have stressed continuities in titular empowerment.⁷⁵ Despite the feats of industrialization and urbanization that produced different avenues for international mixing, the center's weakened or uneven presence in the USSR's late Soviet south (due to growing local autonomy and titular consolidation) handicapped its ability to direct Soviet internationalism. This set the stage for nationalist movements to emerge.

In short, tensions between Soviet nationalization and centralization endured into the postwar period. How did extraterritorial and nontitular communities fare? Janet Klein defines "minoritization" as the process by which one comes to be regarded as a threat "to the territorial integrity and sovereignty of 'the nation' and to the imagined privilege and power of the dominant (named) group now envisioned as the 'majority,' or the *real* citizen."⁷⁶ In the late Soviet period, titular nations sometimes continued to interpret their nationality as "the *real* citizen" in "their own" territories. Nationalization (and, sometimes, the incongruencies within this process that

⁷³ Definition of "nationalism," Merriam-Webster. Accessed January 4th, 2023. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/nationalism#:~:text=na%C2%B7%E2%80%8Btion%C2%B7%E2%80%8Bal,other%20nations%20or%20supranational%20groups>

⁷⁴ Martin implies that after the late 1930s, when nationalization policies were downplayed (what he calls silent nativization) in lieu of the state's centralized aims, the basis for the interethnic conflicts was no longer present. Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*, 192.

⁷⁵ See Suny, *The Revenge of the Past*, Jeremy Smith, *Red Nations: The Nationalities Experience in and after the USSR* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University, 2013), Goff, *Nested Nationalism*.

⁷⁶ On minorityhood as socially and historically constructed, see Janet Klein, "Making Minorities in the Eurasian Borders: A Comparative Perspective from the Russian and Eurasian Borderlands," Krista Goff and Lewis H. Siegelbaum, eds., *Empire and Belonging in the Eurasian Borderlands* (Ithaca: 2019), 17-18.

resulted in a nationalized administration but the lack of comparable economic titular mobility) inadvertently fostered these sentiments. Titular favoritism, for instance, reportedly became a factor in the nationalization of the southern tier's workforce between 1967 and 1987, especially in Central Asia, where the titular (blue and white collar) workforce was underrepresented in proportion to its percentage of the republic's population.⁷⁷ Combined with international mixing, this created ample ground for national conflict. The interethnic brawls and conflicts Martin describes in the early Soviet period are, in fact, eerily similar in tone to some extraterritorial and nontitular complaints on titular nationalism in the USSR's final decades. These tensions impelled nontitular communities, and more privileged extraterritorial groups, to call on central organs. Central and republican organs oversaw (and sometimes silenced) these petitions through various measures aimed at restraining nationalism and promoting internationalism. Internationalist practices were the method with which the state addressed and monitored "extreme" nationalism, both as a preemptive measure or in the aftermath of interethnic conflict.

Perestroika-era national movements and interethnic conflict did not emerge out of a void. Despite Brezhnev's attempts to increasingly promote the end goal of internationalism (Soviet *sblizhenie*) and to resolve the problems created through the promotion of nationalization and centralization, national frictions persisted. When Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms loosened party controls, the tension between these two processes, as I will show, exploded. The state did not know what to do with the predicament it created, and a Soviet "refugee" crisis ensued.

The question, however, remains: could Russians, the former "great power" majority—and certainly the dominant USSR's nationality—be minoritized at the republic level? The USSR's south became less Russified as a result of outmigration and titular growth in the post-

⁷⁷ Kaiser, *The Geography of Nationalism*, 240-241.

Soviet period. When national consolidation and local autonomy increased, extraterritorial and nontitular peoples, including Russians, sometimes grappled with nationalism and violence at the republic level. In other words, Russians were not spared the everyday tensions caused by the increasing incongruity inherent within the paradoxical Soviet policy of sponsoring both nationalization and centralization. Extraterritorial and nontitular communities relied on central mechanisms like internationalist practices to moderate nationalism. Russian petitioners, however, sometimes marveled at the indignation that they, as the Soviet “elder brother,” suffered outside of the metropole. Such letters, ironically, employed discriminatory rhetoric.

Complicating the Nationalized Vantage Point of Soviet History

Shifting attention to the social and spatial movements of minority and diaspora communities not only complicates and decenters narratives of the USSR’s collapse, but it shows ways of seeing Soviet history that go beyond its ethno-federal structure. This dissertation focuses on the USSR’s “southern tier,” which I define broadly as the (North and South) Caucasus, Central Asia, and Moldova, where by the late Soviet period there was greater outmigration than in-migration. Azerbaijan and Georgia underwent net outmigration by the 1960s, and by the late 1970s, the Central Asian and Kazakh republics saw higher outmigration than in-migration. Moldova also began to see higher rates of outmigration by 1979, though in smaller numbers (58,000 left between 1971 and 1980 as compared to 562,000 from Kazakhstan or 162,000 from Georgia).⁷⁸ Self-identified Russian net out-migration from Moldova, however, was comparable to most of the Central Asian republics, where many Russians continued to move to in large numbers during the previous intercensal period (1970 to 1979). The autonomous regions of the North Caucasus began to see major drops in their Russian population, one of the largest regional

⁷⁸ Pilkington, *Migration, Displacement*, 118.

ethnic groups, between 1959 and 1979, when repressed peoples returned to reinstated territories. Russians went from comprising 38.9% of the population of all the autonomous territories in the region in 1959, to 29.3% in 1979, and to 25.6% in 1989—a migration trend that turned into an exodus of “biblical” proportions throughout the 1990s when wars broke out between Russia and separatist Chechnya.⁷⁹ The southern tier was a zone of higher outmigration by the late Soviet period, but it also underwent other common trends. The latter generally included increased titular consolidation as a result of titular growth or outmigration (and in the case of Armenia, titular in-migration).⁸⁰ Comparatively higher titular growth here also presented a manpower surplus, a factor that increased social tensions. The region also experienced increases, rather than decreases, in the rural population, which concerned Soviet experts and authorities determined to modernize the country (see chapter one).⁸¹ From an anti-imperial Soviet perspective, these were, in fact, troublesome realities.

Categorizations like the “southern tier” frustrate the Soviet ethno-federal structure and so they have been unusual for Soviet historians who have only more recently begun to “see” cross-border migration.⁸² However, they are not unique to sociologists and demographers who have

⁷⁹ The region experienced staggering intraregional displacement throughout the 1990s. In Ingushetia, the neighboring republic that split from Chechnya, one in four residents was a migrant between 1994-2000. Riazantsev, *Sovremennyi demograficheskii i migratsionnyi portret Severnogo Kavkaza*, 108-111.

⁸⁰ In the other republics, most notably Estonia and Latvia, the percentage of the titular population actually fell between 1959 and 1989. The change was negligible in Moldova, where titular growth was much smaller in comparison to the Caucasus and Central Asia. See Anderson and Silver, “Demographic Sources,” 609-56.

⁸¹ On the national character of postwar urbanization, see Kaiser, *The Geography of Nationalism*, 203. Generally, by 1989, the least urbanized republics were in Central Asia, the Caucasus, and included Moldova. There are some inconsistencies with this categorization, however. Armenia’s urban population, for instance, though lower than the Russian, Estonian, and Latvian republics, was higher or equal to Belorussia’s, Ukraine’s, and Lithuania’s from 1959-1989. Georgia became less urbanized than all the Slavic and Baltic republics by 1979. Russia went from being the eighth most urbanized territory in 1928, to the most urbanized by 1959, which it continued to be until 1989; Georgia, on the other hand, declined from being the fifth most urbanized in 1926, to the ninth most urbanized by 1989. Uzbekistan, which was the fourth most urbanized in 1926, fell to the 12th most urbanized by 1989. Between 1950 and 1987, however, all the Central Asian republics, the Caucasian republics, and Moldova had the highest increases in their rural populations due to the growth of their populations. V. I. Perevedentsev, *Molodezh’ i sotsial’no-demograficheskie problem SSSR* (Moscow: Nauka, 1990), 99.

⁸² See Siegelbaum and Moch, “Transnationalism in One Country?”

focused on transregional phenomena in their study of mobility, demography, and urbanization. Robert J. Kaiser, a geographer, for instance, cites the term “southern tier” in application to the Caucasus and Central Asia (Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan), where the gravity of movement was toward greater out-migration, numbering at about 2.5 million people in total who left the region between 1979-1988.⁸³ Most recently, Jeff Sahadeo highlighted this south-to-north movement in an oral history of increasing postwar Soviet migration to Leningrad and Moscow. Sahadeo mainly focused on the experiences of the titular peoples of the non-Slavic and non-Baltic territories, some of whom complained of a lack of social mobility in “their” republics, and who therefore turned to the Soviet Union’s cultural and political capitals.⁸⁴ The shift in Soviet investment away from the region, its manpower surplus, and sometimes, continued reliance on Russified external labor to fill positions meant that the titular populations also left “their” territories in search of opportunities. Soviet experts presented solutions to these problems that lay outside ethno-territorial boundaries. Vladimir Perevedentsev, a leading Soviet demographer, for instance, urged a general “south-to-north manpower shift” of people from labor surplus areas that included the Caucasus, Central Asia, South Kazakhstan, Moldova, the North Caucasus, and Western Ukraine in the early 1980s.⁸⁵

There are limitations, however, to broad categories like this one that cast such a wide net for analytical purposes. Moldova, a former (southeastern) European Soviet republic, for instance, remains somewhat of an outlier. Much of Moldova (that had at one point belonged to the Russian

⁸³ Kaiser, *The Geography of Nationalism*, 167.

⁸⁴ See Sahadeo, *Voices from the Soviet Edge*.

⁸⁵ V. I. Perevedentsev, “Population Migration and the Development of Agricultural Production,” *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 8, Vol.35 (March 23, 1983): 5-28. For another grouping of Central Asia, the Caucasus, Kazakhstan, and Moldova together (in reference to republics where the share of the rural population increased) see V. Perevedentsev, “Commentary on Statistics: We’re Always on the Go,” *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 37, vol. 27 (October 8, 1975): 7-8.

empire as Bessarabia) was annexed from Romania in 1940 and integrated into the USSR as a republic in 1944. The Moldovan ASSR, largely corresponding to modern day Pridnestrovia, had been a constituent part of Ukraine since 1924 until it was merged into the newly created Soviet republic. Moldova, then, largely did not undergo the critical period of early Soviet national development. In fact, due to a “combination of purges and emigration,” few native cadres were left in the immediate postwar years.⁸⁶ Significant inter-republican migration consequently filled the political and economic shortfalls. By the 1970s, however, the situation had improved for titular nationals. Though self-identified Moldovans made up only 35% of the republic’s population in 1970, in 1977 they reportedly composed 54% of the industrial workforce, 57% of those employed in leadership, and 68% of those in scientific work. Given the problematic entry of the annexed territories into the USSR, though, Moldova presents very different historical dynamics. My decision to include it is based primarily on the fact that Moldova underwent net out-migration in the late Soviet period, and that, like other parts of the southern tier where the economy generally lagged, it became the site of intense conflict amid the USSR’s dissolution. Archival letters and party and state documents in the archives related to Moldova warrant its inclusion in the history of the extraterritorial and nontitular experience of the Soviet collapse told here.

The southern tier, of course, experienced regional, republican, and intercensal variations. The Central Asian republics and Moldova, for example, were the least urbanized by 1989, but Moldova’s rate of urbanization, due to a comparatively lower titular fertility rate, was exponentially higher.⁸⁷ Azerbaijan’s general level of urbanization was higher than Moldova’s by

⁸⁶ William Crowther, “The Politics of Ethno-National Mobilization: Nationalism and Reform in Soviet Moldavia,” *The Russian Review* 50 (April 1991): 183-202.

⁸⁷ See Kaiser, *The Geography of Nationalism*, 203, and Anderson and Silver, “Demographic Sources,” 609-56.

1989, but its rate of urbanization (perhaps owing to high rural population growth) was comparable to Kyrgyzstan's. The average annual titular growth rate across the southern tier (the Caucasus, Central Asia, Kazakhstan, and Moldova), however, was highest across the USSR, and all these republics underwent total net outmigration between 1979 and 1989.⁸⁸ All but Moldova (where there was a negligible proportional change in the republic's titular population) recorded titular consolidation as a result. The North Caucasus, as previously mentioned, presents an interesting case-study because it underwent increased out-migration in the late Soviet period, but, at as a Russian borderland, it was also the site where most of the displaced fled to during the USSR's final years. The region became a conflict "hot spot" with considerable intraregional displacement. The migrant crisis, and reactive movements to it, had enduring effects on Russian nation-building.

These late Soviet migration trends reversed long-time migration patterns. Indeed, throughout much of the Soviet period, large-scale migration was generally characterized by movement from the Russian core to its peripheries. In the early 1920s, central authorities had gone as far as to sustain the majority ethnic status of titular groups by conducting a mass expulsion of Slavs from Kazakhstan (and what would become the Kyrgyz SSR), and the North Caucasus, where Russian and Cossack colonial settlement was immense.⁸⁹ Soviet authorities even considered transferring factories from central Russia to Central Asia but were unable to fulfill the program. Stalin's "socialist offensive" in 1928, however, brought "the most ambitious undertaking in centralized state planning ever attempted"—fast-tracked economic centralization, the collectivization of agriculture, as well as a militant cultural revolution, or the replacement of

⁸⁸ Pilkington, *Migration, Displacement*, 118, Kaiser, *The Geography of Nationalism*, 167.

⁸⁹ Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*, 59-66.

the previously tolerated bourgeois specialists and institutions with “red experts.”⁹⁰ By the late 1920s, measures to preserve titular majority status, like preventing immigration, were abandoned in light of all-Union economic interests (and the vindictive way in which some of these measures were carried out). It was also in this period of heightened urbanization and centralization, in December of 1932, that the internal passport (and residency permit) system was created as a way for the state to control intensified movement.⁹¹ The internal passport regime (and its enduring legacy beyond the USSR’s collapse) would become a major obstacle for those who attempted to flee rising titular nationalism and violence.

People moved throughout the state in high numbers with state-sanctioned campaigns. To some extent, these movements undermined early Soviet efforts to decolonize and nationalize the Soviet peripheries where many Slavic peasants from European Russia had increasingly moved to in the late imperial era.⁹² The war, as previously noted, also moved more people and industries eastward in a defensive measure. In the 1940s, many Russian speakers were (coercively) relocated to the areas in the North Caucasus deported peoples were forced to abandon.⁹³ These “compensatory forced migrations,” however, remain a less examined moment in Soviet history.⁹⁴ Soviet initiatives similarly funneled “reliable” Soviet cadres to postwar border annexes.⁹⁵ Major post-Stalinist ventures to develop the Soviet outskirts, like the Virgin Lands Campaign in

⁹⁰ Lewis H. Siegelbaum, “Year of Great Change,” *Seventeen Moments in Soviet History*. Accessed January 5, 2023. <https://soviethistory.msu.edu/1929-2/year-of-great-change/> By the late 1920s, the USSR shifted away from its New Economic Policy (1923-1928), a period of socialist experimentation when markets (and even a burgeoning capitalist class) returned to revive depleted industries after the Civil War.

⁹¹ Rural and sparsely inhabited areas were excluded from this system, which disadvantaged the social mobility of people living in them, as the document was needed for residence and employment in all other passport-controlled areas. In 1974, passports were finally extended to these groups. On the internal passport system, see Mervyn Matthews, *The Passport Society: Controlling Movement in Russia and the USSR* (Boulder: Westview, 1993).

⁹² Kaiser, *The Geography of Nationalism*, 53-58.

⁹³ Levita and Loiberg, “The Empire and the Russians,” Shlapentokh, *et al.*, *The New Russian Diaspora*, 14.

⁹⁴ Pavel Polian devotes a few pages to “compensatory forced migrations” in his monograph, *Ne po svoei*, 131-136.

⁹⁵ See Tarik Cyril Amar, *The Paradox of Ukrainian Lviv: A Borderland City between Stalinists, Nazis, and Nationalists* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2015).

northern Kazakhstan and the construction of the Baikal-Amur mainline railway (BAM), channeled hundreds of thousands of Soviet citizens to the USSR's peripheries.⁹⁶

This project thus began with the following inquiries: what changes took place on the ground when migration trends began to flip? What compelled people to leave in mass numbers from the southern tier with the USSR's collapse? What was the everyday experience of these movements? Conducting Soviet migration history presents challenges as one often needs to travel to archives in different locales (and possess knowledge of varying languages or have translators) to assess such questions, while many of the documents related to Soviet-era migration, like those pertinent to the USSR's labor recruitment agency (Orgnabor), offer few details on social dynamics. The former particularly presents restrictions on dissertation research. A planned expansion of this project, indeed, involves pursuing more republican-level sources.

Regional and district level archives in Krasnodar and Rostov, two majority-Russian provinces in Russia where many of the displaced fled to, have offered few personal details on migrants due to a law that restricts access to personal information contained in archive documents (without the respective person's consent) for 75 years.⁹⁷ The latter (obtaining consent) would be impossible for regional and municipal government documents, which often contain the credentials of hundreds of different people. When I told the regional archive staff in Krasnodar Krai that I was allowed to review similar files in the federal archives in Moscow, I was told: "We don't know what they do in Moscow, but here we follow the law." To obtain these

⁹⁶ See Pohl, "The 'Planet of one hundred languages,'" Christopher J. Ward, *Brezhnev's Folly: The Building of BAM and Late Soviet Socialism* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 2009).

⁹⁷ The restriction on access to documents containing personal information or that pose a safety risk to named people lasts for 75 years from the time the document was created. With written permission, including from heirs if the named person is deceased, may lift restrictions earlier. See "Stat'ia 25. Ogranichenie na dustup k arkhivnym dokumentam," from "Federal'nyi zakon ot 22 oktiabria 2004 g. N 125-F3 "Ob arkhivnom dele v Rossiiskoi Federatsii." Accessed January 16, 2023. <https://base.garant.ru/12137300/53925f69af584b25346d0c0b3ee74ea1/>. For whatever reason, local and regional archives are stringent when it comes to this policy in my experience, while federal archives allow access to letters, etc. that contain personal information.

documents in the regional and district level archives, as I was explained, I would need to go to court to make the case for the exception. I was not granted access to regional and municipal government documents on migration (as receiving consent was not an option), but, in one case, an archive director received direct approval on my behalf for a personal collection (files held by the archive that were deposited by an individual and not a governmental entity). It remains a mystery to me why the Moscow archives liberally grant access to documents containing personal information, like letters, without abiding by the 75-year rule. In any case, to respect the anonymity of the authors of archival letters, I only use the last name initial of all the individuals I cite. Regional and district level archives in Russia, on the plus side, have been somewhat useful in understanding local level changes and responses to mass in-migration.

Files on nationalism and nationality policy held at federal level archives, however, contained hundreds of letters sent on the behalf of extraterritorial and nontitular groups (primarily to central organs) complaining of discrimination, and sometimes violence. Some of these letters, I found, began to cite these issues to request relocation by the 1970s. More importantly, however, these sources reveal how internationalism operated as a nationality practice, both in legitimating extraterritorial and nontitular complaints, and in the state response to them. During the USSR's final years, the State Committee for Labor and Social Issues (Goskomtrud), which was tasked with overseeing the emergent migrant crisis, became inundated with letters, many of which came from the USSR's southern tier. These complaints often begged for relocation, while others stressed increased central oversight or intervention. Letters sent to Goskomtrud and other central organs from this period show that extraterritorial and nontitular groups were concerned with or affected by extremist attacks—even when another group was more systematically targeted. Some collectively mobilized in response. This period of

accelerated nationalism, as these documents show, was often most difficult on members of mixed families. The people least expected to support central authorities, like members of (formerly) deported nations, also sometimes evoked support for central intervention in the light of rising titular nationalism.

Though this dissertation relies largely on archival evidence (it is not an oral history), I have also turned to interviews to understand the more personal, quotidian, and social experiences of life outside of or without one's own territory—subtleties often missing from letters or state reports. These former Soviet citizens were not difficult to come across. People who lived outside of or without “their own” territories, were, after all, almost one in five Soviet citizens by 1989. Not everyone I've met in the field, however, wanted to tell of their experience. I am grateful to over a dozen people, most of whom were former migrants, as well as five heads of major organizations representing migrants or diasporas, who chose to speak with me. The popular press, as well as Soviet periodicals, pedagogical literature, and guidebooks have also illuminated the ways in which late Soviet processes of nationalization, centralization, and migration issues were packaged and debated in the public sphere.

Who were these extraterritorial and nontitular communities of the USSR's southern tier? Most of the Central Asian and Caucasian republics had relatively diverse populations despite an increasing trend toward titular national consolidation.⁹⁸ Members of ethnic groups from the same region made up a significant portion of these populations. In Central Asia, people self-identified especially heterogeneously. In 1989, 22 percent of Tajiks lived in Uzbekistan, while 24 percent of Uzbeks lived in Tajikistan.⁹⁹ Uzbekistan also had large populations of Kazakhs and Kyrgyz,

⁹⁸ Titular consolidation was sometimes achieved through the expulsion of minorities even into the late-Stalinist period, or their assimilation. See Kaiser, ““What are they Doing?”” Goff and Siegelbaum, eds. *Empire and Belonging*, Anderson and Silver, “Demographic Sources,” 609-56.

⁹⁹ Heleniak, “An Overview of Migration in the Post-Soviet Space.”

while Uzbeks made up 9 percent of Turkmenistan and 13 percent of Kyrgyzstan. In Kyrgyzstan, Russians constituted 21.4 percent of the republic, and other nationalities comprised 26.7 percent.¹⁰⁰ Even in Kazakhstan, where Russians made up 37.6 percent of the total, non-Russian non-Kazakhs accounted for 22.9 percent of the population. Though Armenia was the most ethnically consolidated republic (93.9 percent of Armenia), Armenians were the least concentrated within “their” republic (66 percent lived in the titular area). The one third of self-identified Armenians living outside of Armenia made up 6 percent of Azerbaijan’s population in 1989 (when mass out-migration was already underway). In Moldova, non-Russian non-Moldovans (though primarily Ukrainians and Belorussians) made up 22.8 percent of the population.

The range of groups living outside of or without “their own” territories meant that their relationships vis-a-vis national majorities and Soviet policy also differed. In the 1930s, Soviet nationality policy shifted from providing extra advantages to its border diasporas (in attempt to increase Soviet influence across its borders) to a growing distrust of border nationals with cross-border ties. Growing internal fears of local nationalism coincided with the increasing external threat of nationalism and fascism in Europe. Purported fifth column nations were stripped of their rights, and violently sent to “special settlements,” an internal exile, which sometimes made these continually marginalized peoples particularly vulnerable targets of titular nationalism. Deportees also varied, however. The historic homelands of some “special settlers” were restored during Nikita Khrushchev’s regime in the 1950s, while others had the legitimacy of external homelands (e.g., Greeks, Poles, Germans).¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Anderson and Silver, “Demographic Sources,” 609-56.

¹⁰¹ See Olga Zeveleva, “Political aspects of repatriation: Germany, Russia, Kazakhstan. A comparative analysis.” *Nationalities Papers* 42, no. 5 (2014): 808-827.

Among the most vulnerable were deportees who were denied the rehabilitation of, or return to, their historic homelands and did not have a recognized external titular homeland (e.g., Meskhetian Turks, Kurds, Crimean Tatars). The lack of national-cultural institutional support for nontitular peoples who did not have a “home” republic or territory after the late 1930s also caused some to adopt titular identities, which offered higher chances of mobility and social status.¹⁰² Some native communities who did not have “their” own ethnic territory, like Lezgins in Azerbaijan, or were not incorporated into “their” national unit when it was formed, like Tajiks in Uzbekistan, were also subjected to titular assimilation.¹⁰³ Sometimes citing titular animosity and assimilation, some of these repressed and native groups would continue to push central organs for the (re)instatement of autonomous territories.¹⁰⁴

Reperiodizing the Soviet Collapse? Late Soviet Movement to the Metropole

Did the reversal in migration trends that began in the late Soviet period foretell the decline of the USSR as a multinational entity? Periphery to metropole migrations have certainly been a characteristic of fallen (or declining) modern European empires. As Peter Gattrell, a migration historian writes, in the postwar era, when European colonial powers lost their control of African and Asian territories “decolonization largely reversed the direction of movement associated with the growth and consolidation of European empires.”¹⁰⁵ Many former colonial elites, settlers, colonial “accomplices and auxiliaries,” including missionaries, farmers, and

¹⁰² See Goff, *Nested Nationalism*.

¹⁰³ See RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 422, ll. 55-69, ll. 29-46 (letters from citizens of Tajik nationalities in connection with the aggravation of interethnic relations in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan). See also Goff, *Nested Nationalism*.

¹⁰⁴ On Volga German, Kurd, and Lezgin petitions for autonomous territories in 1988 and 1989, see GARF, f. R9654, op. 10, d. 369, ll. 119-124; 208-230 (correspondence, proposals, and complaints from the citizens’ reception to deputy chairmen and members of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR), and RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 433, ll. 11-13 (letters from Lezgins addressed to party congresses and conferences, the Central Committee of the CPSU). See also Sato Keiji, “Mobilization of Non-Title Ethnicities during the Last Years of the Soviet Union: Gagauzia, Transnistria, and the Lithuanian Poles,” *Acta Slavica Japonica* 26 (2008):141-157.

¹⁰⁵ Peter Gattrell, *The Unsettling of Europe: How Migration Reshaped a Continent* (New York: Basic Books, 2019), 105-123.

teachers, as well as mixed families sought “return” to the metropole even though some had never before set foot there. Some of these exoduses were, indeed, marked by harassment and violence. While some “returnees” were able to take advantage of connections in their respective metropolises, others were “left to their own devices” by (former) colonial governments they expected would support them for their years of service, or they had to adapt to less privileged and makeshift lifestyles. Mixed families and indigenous loyalists were sometimes exposed to race-based discrimination. At other times, “returnees” were typecast as reactionaries and colonial exploiters. In the 1970s, “returnees” to Portugal, where the economy staggered and a housing crisis persisted, also organized, and demanded compensation for the loss of property. Perhaps the most significant postcolonial exodus was from former French Algeria. One million colonial “returnees,” dubbed “pieds noirs,” or black feet, left for France amid the Algerian liberation struggle.¹⁰⁶ At least half, in fact, had origins in other countries and became French citizens only upon settling in the colony.¹⁰⁷ The French government, overwhelmed, withdrew funds from those who refused to move to labor scarce areas. Many organized. The National Association of the French from North Africa, from Overseas, and Their Friends, garnered a quarter of a million members by 1962 (when Algeria achieved independence).¹⁰⁸

The trends of postcolonial migration and their social consequences have remarkable parallels to the last decades of the Soviet experiment. What is special about the Soviet case? The debate about whether, or how, the Soviet Union functioned as an empire is a persistent one.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.,

¹⁰⁷ Andrea L. Smith, *Colonial Memory and Postcolonial Europe: Maltese Settlers in Algeria and France* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 2006), 8-9.

¹⁰⁸ Gatrell, *The Unsettling of Europe*, 105-123.

¹⁰⁹ Adeeb Khalid, in “Backwardness and the Quest for Civilization: Early Soviet Central Asia in Comparative Perspective,” *Slavic Review* 65. No. 2. (2006): 231-251, for instance, argues that the term “empire” applied by other scholars to the Soviet Union deemphasizes the distinctiveness of the modern Soviet project. For a recent adaptation of “empire” as a lens for which to understand the continuity of ruling strategies between the Russian empire and the

Certainly, the USSR, as previously mentioned, sometimes acted in coercive and vertical ways to impose its aims. What sets the USSR apart is that it was the “first multiethnic state in world history to define itself as an anti-imperialist state.”¹¹⁰ Unlike other European empires that used its peripheries to extract resources and to build wealth for the metropole and that sometimes had to make concessions to nationalist demands, the USSR actively pursued a policy of nationalization to promote the interests of the former Russian empire’s minorities. In French Algeria, by contrast, a national hierarchy functioned to promote French interests, and, in the settler colony, the French made up the colonial elite.¹¹¹

In the USSR, legally, all citizens were equal in the eyes of the state. Racism, used to legitimate European colonial ventures, was strictly forbidden in official Soviet rhetoric or practice. The Soviet project did, however, foster inequities. Soviet culture was progressively tied to the language and culture of the former “great power” majority. Fluency in Russian, the language of interethnic communication across the country, made people more socially mobile and, therefore, command of the language was necessary to achieve greater opportunities. Though socialist internationalism existed as a mechanism by which to check or moderate nationalism, by the late Soviet period it was not intended to reverse the dominance the Russian language and culture enjoyed in all-Union endeavors. Instead, it was envisioned as the medium for the upper level of “double assimilation”—the merger of all nations into the Soviet state and society. Seen as necessary for attaining communism, it became the mechanism by which all Soviet nations were intended to assimilate. This led some to argue that the hastened postwar campaign for the international rapprochement of nations was, in contrary to Vladimir Lenin’s designs, an

Soviet Union, see Valerie A. Kivelson and Ronald Grigor Suny, *Russia’s Empires* (New York: Oxford University, 2017).

¹¹⁰ Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*, 19.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 21.

“intentionally induced” supplanting of Russian language and culture with national ones.¹¹² The USSR was, therefore, sometimes perceived as, and denounced, as a colonial power. In this sense, increased pressure on internationalization in the post-Stalin period could also, paradoxically, influence nationalism.

It is important to recognize that titular nationals were former imperial minorities—and minorities within the USSR at the country-wide scale. Indeed, titular nationals also engaged with internationalism to make sense of their interests.¹¹³ Petitioners of all nationalities appealed to Soviet authorities with confidence in the legality and socialist merit of their complaints. The “promise of internationalism,” as Artemy Kalinovsky wrote, evoked the “social contract” of social welfare essential to Soviet rule—and it was harnessed to hold officials to account for inequalities.¹¹⁴ Soviet national development was designed to promote the interests of all the empire’s former minorities, yet titular nationals residing in “home” republics still generally possessed the most local influence and often had greater access to non-Russian cultural-linguistic resources.

It was this simultaneous empowerment and impairment of titular nationalism that laid the groundwork for exclusionary and sometimes violent nation-making processes that existed earlier but intensified with the emergence of national movements. In many ways, Soviet national development was successful in what it set out to do: fostering territories aligned—by language, cultures, and elites, in a more modern sense, to one nation. The second tier goal—the complete merger of nations—however, unlike what the Bolshevik’s envisioned, became increasingly

¹¹² See Ivan Dzyuba, *Internationalism or Russification? A Study in the Soviet Nationalities Problem* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968), 171-192. Originally published in Ukrainian.

¹¹³ Maike Lehmann, “Apricot Socialism: The National Past, the Soviet Project, and the Imagining of Late Soviet Armenia,” *Slavic Review* 74, (Spring 2015): 9-31.

¹¹⁴ Kalinovsky, *Laboratory of Socialist Development*.

incompatible with the lower one. Nikita Khrushchev first yielded more power to the republics, granting nationalists more influence, while ironically promoting *sliianie*, and the achievement of communism by 1980. The outmigration of other nationalities from the southern tier, no longer the focus of Soviet investment in the last quarter of the twentieth century, combined with titular growth to consolidate nations. Such republics thus increasingly behaved like “homogenizing nation-state[s] under the shadow of a communist government.”¹¹⁵ The dominant trends of the postwar period—sociocultural, economic, political, and, throughout much of the southern tier, demographic nationalization—in essence, made central authority increasingly irrelevant.¹¹⁶

When Mikhail Gorbachev’s reforms further decentralized the Soviet Union, national movements became the natural outgrowth of these trends. In turn, extraterritorial and nontitular peoples alike, including Russians, were sometimes met with exclusionary and violent nation-making processes. Mixed families, in particular, struggled to cope with the social consequences of ethnic “unmixing.”¹¹⁷ The Russian Federation, like other former metropolises, grappled with the fallout from the multinational state’s demise. The plight of Russians from the USSR’s periphery, where approximately 25.3 million ethnic Russian were left in diaspora in the wake of the USSR’s collapse, made some begin to perceive them as victims of the Soviet experiment. Such sentiments spurred Russian ethnonationalism in the former Soviet metropole, where hundreds of thousands of Soviet “refugees” fled. Nation-building, here too, was sometimes exclusionary and violent. The collapse of the Soviet Union profoundly affected the selfhood of some migrants. “It

¹¹⁵ Goff, *Nested Nationalism*, 142.

¹¹⁶ Kaiser, *The Geography of Nationalism*, 386.

¹¹⁷ Rogers Brubaker, “Aftermaths of Empire and the Unmixing of Peoples,” Karen Barkey and Mark Von Hagen, eds. *After Empire: Multiethnic Societies and Nation-Building* (Boulder: Westview, 1997).

was a small death. It felt that life ended. It felt like war,” Mila, a Meskhetian Turk whose family fled Uzbekistan only to be confronted with Russian ethnonationalism, poignantly recalled.¹¹⁸

The first chapter of this dissertation provides a background to the common trends across the USSR’s southern tier in the postwar period. It delves into extraterritorial and nontitular letters in this period (at the turn of the 1970s to the early 1980s) and focuses on petitioner claims of nationality-based discrimination and violence. It pays special attention to their rhetoric and on the handling of these petitions by central and republican authorities. This chapter presents internationalism as an important basis for these complaints, and as a nationality practice that compelled Soviet authorities to address them. The second chapter examines how the perestroika reforms mobilized nationalist movements—and more importantly, responses to them, across the USSR’s south. It argues that extraterritorial and nontitular communities shared a moment of heightened “groupness” in this period rooted in internationalist practices, both as groups who commonly faced or feared rising titular nationalism and violence, and as Soviet “refugees.”

The third chapter shifts attention to the North Caucasus from the late Soviet period, when repressed peoples began to “return” to reinstated (though altered) territories beginning in the late 1950s, through to the demise of Soviet power in the region. The case study shows how Soviet nationality policy stirred multiplying indignations and conflict as communities attempted to negotiate the Soviet hierarchy of nations in their favor. Soviet internationalist policies in the borderland attempted to manage the turmoil created through the failures of Soviet national development in the region. Here, unlike the republics, social tensions were more commonly rooted in a shared history of repression and a failed Soviet nationality policy that shifted titular designations. When the perestroika reforms ignited a movement for the rehabilitation of

¹¹⁸ Oral interview. October 2017.

repressed nations in the borderland, it had profound consequences, causing more conflict and displacement.

Chapters four and five explore the interconnection between Russia's ethno-cultural revival, mass migration, and the position of Russians, other Slavs, and Russian speakers in the former Soviet space. Chapter four asks: how did former Soviet citizens who remained in diaspora and sought "return" or protection from the former Soviet metropole attempt to negotiate their newfound status after 1991? It focuses on the formation of public associations in the USSR's former southern tier, where the drop in the self-identified Russian population was most significant due to outmigration to Russia (in proportion to 1989) in the aftermath of the USSR's collapse.¹¹⁹ I show how public associations worked to connect Russia's co-ethnics in the former Soviet space to Russia's national revival in the early 1990s. Finally, chapter five concentrates on the Cossack revival movement (the epicenter of which was in the North Caucasus), which was closely interrelated with, and influenced, the state response to migrants, borders, and diasporas.

¹¹⁹ This data considers 1989-2005 primarily using census data. Most of the former Soviet republics conducted censuses between 1999 and 2002. Turkmenistan conducted its census earlier, in 1995. Uzbekistan has consistently postponed its post-Soviet census, while Moldovan census data was not available for these estimations. For these two countries, estimates of nationality composition were based on "data on migration and natural increase by nationality." Most of the data on the "nationality composition of migration," however, considers only "long-term, permanent, legal migration." There were several other deviations from the 1989 to the post-Soviet censuses that could affect the remaining comparisons, including the efforts of some political and national leaders to influence census results. Throughout this extensive period, the proportion of Russians who left Moldova was almost equal to that of Lithuania and Estonia. In other words, Moldova lost a comparatively similar percentage of its Russian population (though total numbers varied) to Russian outmigration. In Moldova, in response to rising titular nationalism, a separatist movement surfaced, which won autonomy after an armed conflict (that involved Russian intervention on the side of the separatists) in the early 1990s. It is unclear how or if breakaway regions factored into these estimates. Timothy Heleniak, "An Overview of Migration in the Post-Soviet Space," Cynthia J. Buckley, et. al, eds. *Migration, Homeland, and Belonging in Eurasia* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 2008), 47-55.

ONE

“WE WILL ACHIEVE OUR RIGHTS”: SOVIET INTERNATIONALISM AND GROWING REPUBLICAN AUTONOMY IN THE LATE SOVIET SOUTHERN TIER

In September 1969, a group of self-proclaimed Communists from Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Georgia “fulfilling their party duty” reported “rampant nationalism” directed against “Russians and other nationalities” that they alleged had worsened in recent years.¹ In writing to Leonid Brezhnev, they described tensions that had escalated into physical violence, which they attested the leaders of these republics ignored, employing no serious measures. The group went as far to call the situation in these republics a “complete enslavement of other nations” that had begun to surprise “the entire Soviet people.” “How long will this last?” they begged, describing “arbitrariness and lawlessness” as well as the impunity and connivance of authorities. The group demanded the “strengthening of the friendship of peoples,” and not “the deepening of national discord.” They insisted on increased internationalist education (*vospitanie*), arguing that “justice in its socialist sense” had to be imposed as the rights of other nations living in these republics were infringed upon. The “honor of all nations,” they remarked, “must be carefully guarded.”

Soviet internationalism, an internal adaptation of socialist internationalism, as this chapter argues, was the multimodal Soviet nationality policy that enabled concerned citizens to voice problems with the growing empowerment of titular nations at the local, regional, and republican level. It became particularly important to communities, like this collective purported to represent, who lived outside of or without “their own” titular territories. Socialist internationalism, the global proletarian struggle against world capitalism, was reformed by the

¹ RGANI f. 100. op. 5., d. 407, ll. 77-79 (letters on nationalism in various republics of the USSR: 1966-1990).

Soviet state to suit more practical aims. It supported ties between the states of the newly expanded second world in the postwar period, but it also applied internally—to the nationalities within the country. What did this mean?

In communist theory, development is a telic process in which the establishment of the modern nation state is a necessary stage. In consolidating property into a few hands, the bourgeoisie centralize (and modernize) the means of production, which in turn, fosters political centralization (the modern nation) with the bourgeoisie as the new dominant class. In doing so, however, they forge their own “gravediggers”—the oppressed proletariat—who, through consciousness raising, the communist theory of development supposes, would unite in an international socialist struggle to achieve communism, the final stage of development. What happens to national difference once private property—the basis for the bourgeoisie’s political dominance—is abolished? Fredrich Engels, for one, wrote that in these final stages of development (socialism and communism) different nationalities would be “compelled to mingle with each other,” and, as a result, finally, “to dissolve themselves.”² Vladimir Lenin also established that the “aim of socialism” was “not only to bring nations closer together but to integrate them.”³

As a multinational state, the Soviet government adapted this concept (of fomenting a global proletarian revolution) to building a socialist society and state internally. Rather than allowing for the spontaneous evolution of the above processes (in which a proletariat majority was necessary), the Soviet state, for the most part, shaped them “from above.” To fashion modern nation-like entities, for instance, the Soviet Union established thousands of national

² Fredrich Engels, “The Principles of Communism.” Marxist Internet Archive. Accessed January 19, 2023. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1847/11/prin-com.htm>.

³ Vladimir Lenin, “Collected Works: Volume 22.” Marxist Internet Archive. Accessed January 19, 2023. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/cw/pdf/lenin-cw-vol-22.pdf>

territories for its different nationalities and equipped them with national elites, languages, and cultures—and then, by the late 1930s, shifted to consolidate them (with the union republics as the apogee of this national hierarchy). The latter move was, in fact, trumpeted as an outcome of the USSR’s modernization process. As Francine Hirsch has noted, Joseph Stalin had predicted that “soon after the establishment of socialism, ‘smaller’ peoples would begin to merge into ‘larger’ peoples, which would themselves be ‘incorporated into still larger nations.’”⁴ In 1936, when the new Soviet constitution was drafted, Stalin announced that socialism had been established.

This meant that central policies shifted to supporting “titular nation-building and minority assimilation in the republics,” which were sometimes coerced processes.⁵ The deportation of purported fifth column nations under Stalin also reinforced the status of remaining titular nations. This transition was conducted unevenly, often leaving nontitular peoples who had no surviving “home” territory in the USSR the most vulnerable to assimilation. Krista Goff has argued that “state officials and minorities themselves debated long past the 1930s what socialist progress should like in minority communities.”⁶ These contestations, in some cases, “even restored national rights circumscribed at the close of the 1930s.” Indeed, the Soviet hierarchy of nations has often been interpreted by many scholars as a static notion by the late 1930s, but, as archival evidence shows, it was continually questioned at every level. In addition to nontitular minorities, some native groups unabsorbed into “their” neighboring republics sometimes cited titular nationalism and continued forced assimilation to contest their subordinate status.

⁴ Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2005), 274.

⁵ Krista Goff, *Nested Nationalism: Making and Unmaking Nations in the Soviet Caucasus* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2020), 109. In 1937-1938, the smallest national units intended for minorities and diasporas were phased out. Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (New York: 2001), 412.

⁶ Goff, *Nested Nationalism*, 47-48.

At the same time, the Soviet Union intended to sponsor the merger of developed nations (and their remaining national entities, like republics and the larger autonomous territories as constituent parts of them) as part of a continual amalgamating process. How this process (the bridging of nations) was imagined and executed in the post-Stalinist period, however, has been remarkably under-researched and even discounted by scholars as a legitimate part of Soviet nationality policy. Alexei Yurchak, for example, argued that the post-Stalinist period largely underwent a “performative shift of authoritative discourse.”⁷ In short, that late socialist ideology (like internationalism, and its end goal: the merging of nations) was mostly empty rhetoric used as a pretense to sustain the state. Soviet nationality policy, in effect, has to some extent become synonymous with only one of its modes: nativization, or national development.

Though scholars have shown that concepts like *druzhba narodov* (the friendship of peoples), the Soviet *narod* (people), and socialist internationalism were meaningful to different Soviet peoples, for the most part, how Soviet nationality policy functioned beyond the promotion of national development in the post-Stalinist period has been poorly understood.⁸ On one end, Soviet internationalism promoted national development as a necessary mode of modernization. Through concepts like *druzhba narodov*, Soviet internationalism also promoted and celebrated the “mingling” of distinct Soviet nations. Ultimately, however, the end goal of the Soviet international continuum was the assimilation of developed nations into one Soviet *narod*

⁷ Alexei Yurchak relies mainly on interviews (and personal memoranda) conducted in the 1990s in the Soviet metropole. See Alexei Yurchak, *Everything was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 10-20.

⁸ See, for example, Anna Whittington, “Citizens of the Soviet Union—it sounds dignified” in Maarten Van Ginderachter and Jon Fox, eds., *National Indifference and the History of Nationalism in Modern Europe* (London: 2019), Jeff Sahadeo, *Voices from the Soviet Edge: Southern Migrants in Leningrad and Moscow* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2019), Erik Scott, *Familiar Strangers: The Georgian Diaspora and the Evolution of Soviet Empire* (New York: Oxford University, 2016).

(people). Their merging (*sliianie*) and “drawing together” (*sblizhenie*) were, in fact, state nationality policies in the post-Stalinist period.

In practice, internationalism endorsed all the above: national development, the promotion of Soviet multinationalism, and the Soviet identity. At the union-level, the ethnic particularism of Soviet national groups was supported along with the “international culture of Soviet peoples” connected through the Russian language; but at the republic level, internationalism meant safeguarding and respecting people living in or visiting another group’s national territory. According to Soviet logic, for nations to merge, they first needed to mature, or “blossom,” which would remove grounds for antagonisms between them. Internationalism was, therefore, especially important to extraterritorial and nontitular groups, who used the socialist concept in relation to all its modes: having national rights (in the USSR writ large as well as in another group’s national territory), Soviet multiculturalism, but also as a term synonymous to “Soviet,” or a supranational civic identity (see the next chapter). Ironically, however, the end goals of internationalism were promoted simultaneously with state measures that inadvertently initiated greater local autonomy and nationalism. Extraterritorial and nontitular groups, therefore, leveraged reforms introduced by Nikita Khrushchev that allowed for letter campaigns and other forms of activism to file passionate violations of internationalist practices.⁹

More than an ideology, as this chapter argues, internationalism was a multifaceted Soviet nationality practice that was used to counter or moderate nationalism that threatened the Soviet project. It was Soviet nationality policy, for instance, to increase international training or education (*vospitanie*) to unite Soviet peoples of different national backgrounds during moments

⁹ On how Khrushchev’s reforms allowed for these forms of activism, see Krista A. Goff, “‘Why not love our language and our culture?’ National rights and citizenship in Khrushchev’s Soviet Union,” *Nationalities Papers* 43, no. 1 (2015): 27-44.

of heightened tensions and conflict, or as a preemptive measure in highly multinational areas.¹⁰ In Kazakhstan's industrial Mangyshlak region, for instance, "thousands of lecturers and propagandists" were reported to have engaged in internationalist cultivation in 1970 to account for the "multiethnic composition of the population."¹¹ Like the collective introduced at the onset of the chapter, as this chapter shows, many extraterritorial and nontitular peoples were aware of these state internationalist practices and they used them to report perceived titular nationalism. The state regularly responded to reports of alleged excessive nationalism at the local, regional, or republican levels by deploying internationalist *vospitanie*; and when there were complaints of nationalist abuses, by conducting a *proverka*, or a verification. The latter, importantly, included conducting an audit (of the enterprise, department, or republic of question) to determine whether there were breaches in internationalist practices, and it could also serve as a method of enforcement. Such state evaluations (executed at the local level), in fact, were also used to examine the level of success of early Soviet nativization.¹² Indeed, the state deployed the *proverka* as a tactic to check and execute all aspects of Soviet nationality policy—from national development to international *vospitanie*.

The removal of local and republican leaders and others blamed for nationalist "deviations," or for inciting interethnic animosity, were, thus, part of state internationalist practices. Nikita Khrushchev's 1958 language reform, which made school instruction in one's native tongue optional, can also be interpreted as the center's attempt to diffuse local

¹⁰ "Explanatory [party] work"—commonly referenced in connection to international *vospitanie*—was encouraged in highly multinational areas, or where there was a great influx of diverse peoples. See Yu Bromlei, "Ethnic Processes in the USSR," *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 15, no. 35 (May 11, 1983): 9-18.

¹¹ Stefan Guth, "USSR Incorporated Versus Affirmative Action Empire? Industrial Development and Interethnic Relations in Kazakhstan's Mangyshlak Region (1960s–1980s)," *Ab Imperio* 4 (2018), 186.

¹² On formal evaluations (*perevirky*) of Ukrainian language education, and local resistance and challenges in conducting them, see Matthew D. Pauly, "'Tending to the 'Native Word': Teachers and the Soviet Campaign for Ukrainian-Language Schooling, 1923–1930." *Nationalities Papers* 37, no. 3 (2009): 251-276.

nationalism in the sake of internationalism, especially as its end goals had become a greater state priority. The text of the article enacting the reform declared that Russian had become “a powerful means of international communication.”¹³ Parents could now opt into Russian schools (where Russian was the primary language of instruction) that were provisioned throughout the country. The state simultaneously promoted internationalist aims by encouraging teachers of Russian (primarily in national schools where the primary language of instruction was not Russian), to inculcate knowledge of the Soviet *lingua franca* as an essential mechanism bridging the different nationalities of the country.¹⁴ Intermarriage (through the Russian language) was also championed as the ultimate marker of Soviet internationalism.¹⁵

In most cases, however, republican and local authorities were tasked with enforcing Soviet nationality policy and resolving complaints about nationalism. In other words, they had to ensure that national development, paradoxically, did not conflict with the promotion of Soviet unity. At the republic level, this meant promoting the titular nation while at the same time ensuring the rights of various groups. At one end, Soviet nationality policy guaranteed against discrimination based on one’s nationality and it supported ethnic particularism by permitting access to cultural-linguistic resources (indeed the lack of the latter inspired many complaints). According to the Soviet constitution, equal state rights of all citizens (cultural, social, political, economic) regardless of their national status were protected. Each republic, however, also had to promote the USSR’s overarching aims. This entailed upholding multinational local, regional, and

¹³The measure encountered considerable resistance. See Jeremy Smith, “The Battle for Language: Opposition to Khrushchev’s Education Reform in the Soviet Republics, 1958–59.” *Slavic Review* 76, no. 4 (2017): 983–1002. Contrastingly, on the nationalization of language instruction in the early Soviet period as a contested and problematic process, see Matthew D. Pauly, *Breaking the Tongue: Language, Education, and Power in Soviet Ukraine, 1923–1934* (Toronto: 2014).

¹⁴ I. V. Varannikova and M.V. Cherkezovoi, eds. *Vospitanie sovetskogo patriotizma i sotsialisticheskogo internatsionalizma v protsesse izucheniia russkogo iazyka i literatury* (Leningrad: Prosveshchenie, 1985), Baskakov, N.A. ed., *Puti razvitiia natsional’no russkogo dvuiazychiia v nerusskikh shkolakh* (Moscow: Nauka, 1979).

¹⁵ See Adrienne Edgar, *Intermarriage and the Friendship of Peoples* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2022).

republican institutions in accordance with the national composition of the respective (local, regional, or republican) population, and promoting the Soviet *lingua franca*, culture, and identity.

For their part, local and republican authorities often met with concerned groups who reported ostensibly “extreme” or discriminatory nationalism to evaluate cited problems, and they would frequently report back their findings to central organs if petitioners had notified the latter. Sometimes, however, these actions were, according to complaints and some central organs’ verifications, conducted perfunctorily. In some cases, local and republican authorities allegedly attempted to intimidate and silence petitioners or to resolve nationalist tensions in favor of the titular nationality. Evoking socialist principles, like internationalism, extraterritorial and nontitular groups, however, sometimes continued to report exclusionary and violent nationalisms to central authorities despite supposed intimidations or the lack of resolve at the republican and local level. The actions of local and regional authorities could also provoke reactive nationalism or discriminatory rhetoric; for Russians, the latter was sometimes employed with entitled language.¹⁶ Though often hesitant to intervene, the central state also sometimes validated these concerns in important ways: it sent special commissions from Moscow to investigate frequently reported or serious issues (such as those that concerned the indifference of local or regional authorities to nationality-based crimes), it escalated cases to higher (republican) authorities, and it oversaw complaints pertinent to nationalist tensions.

These mechanisms securing the presence of people outside of or without “their own” territories were sanctioned, as previously mentioned, by the increasing importance of internationalism and its aim (the merger of nations) as a Soviet nationality policy at the state-

¹⁶ On the interplay between minority-majority nationalism, see Krista Goff, *Nested Nationalism*.

wide level. In his 1961 address at the twenty-second party congress, Nikita Khrushchev announced that, after having achieved socialism, the USSR was adopting a program of communist construction.¹⁷ The latter, he envisioned, would be attained in twenty years. What did this mean in the realm of social relations? Khrushchev proclaimed that it involved the “merger” (*sliianie*) of workers into a classless society and the growing “communion [*obshchnost*] of nations.” Politically, Khrushchev declared, this involved the full participation of citizens in the management of public affairs. For Khrushchev, the latter entailed shifting away from the repressive and vertical mode by which Soviet nationality policy was carried out under Stalin. In line with this thinking, Khrushchev granted the republics more horizontal authority over their own affairs, while attempting to expand participation in local soviets (councils).¹⁸ In fact, in the aftermath of Stalin’s death, prior to Khrushchev’s consolidation of power, republican authorities had already lobbied and succeeded in winning expanded rights vis-à-vis the center.¹⁹

In his effort to create greater momentum toward the attainment of communism, Khrushchev inadvertently fostered opportunities for titular nationalism. In 1957, as part of his destalinization campaign, Khrushchev radically reorganized the economic “decision-making apparatus” by replacing the “vertical ministerial structure” of the economy with a system of regional economic councils (*sovnarkhozy*), which were, for the most part, affiliated with existing ethno-territorial boundaries.²⁰ Nataliya Kibita writes that Khrushchev “fully realized that the over-centralized economic administration was choking in red tape and slowed down economic

¹⁷ Nikita Khrushchev, “O programme kommunisticheskoi partii Sovetskogo Soiuza: Doklad tovarishcha N.S. Khrushcheva na XXII s”ezde Kommunisticheskoi partii Sovetskogo Soiuza.” *Literaturnaia gazeta* (Moscow), October 19, 1961. Accessed January 20, 2023. <https://dlib-eastview-com.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/search/advanced/doc?pager.offset=23&id=26742049&hl=%D0%A5%D1%80%D1%83%D1%89%D0%B5%D0%B2>

¹⁸ Robert J. Kaiser, *The Geography of Nationalism in Russia* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1994), 330-333.

¹⁹ Nataliya Kibita, *Soviet Economic Management under Khrushchev: The Sovnarkhoz Reform* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 34-45.

²⁰ Kaiser, *The Geography of Nationalism*, 330-333.

growth.”²¹ A key rationale for the sovnarkhoz reform, then, was that it would relieve major burdens on central managers and make central organs—and the Soviet economy—more efficient. This move, however, had the unintended effect of encouraging “territorial autarchy,” while some emboldened republican leaders increasingly began to push back against Moscow’s directives.²² Following Stalin’s death, as Krista Goff writes, titular populations “sometimes chafed at Moscow’s control over republican affairs and at the all-Union prestige and hegemony of the Russian language and culture.”²³ Goff, for example, argued that “policymakers in Baku began to treat language policies emanating from Moscow more as suggestions than declarations” amid the “shifting political climate” after Stalin’s death and Khrushchev’s Secret Speech in which he denounced the violent excesses of Stalin’s regime.²⁴ In Azerbaijan, this culminated in an amendment to the Azerbaijan constitution making the titular language the official language of the republic (a measure the Armenian and Georgian constitutions already had in place). The promotion and expansion of the titular language meant that minority languages were “regularly subordinated” —one part of a broader effort to “consolidate the national identity of the republic” in the post-Stalinist period.²⁵

Khrushchev attempted to curb the growing problem of “localism” by changing the sovnarkhoz boundaries so that they no longer corresponded to ethno-federal borders, while purging titular elites in several republics between 1959 and 1963 for nationalist deviations. Brezhnev’s limited recentralization attempts, which including balancing territorial and ministerial economic approaches, and promoting the more restrained “drawing together” of

²¹ Kibita, *Soviet Economic Management*, 34-45.

²² Kaiser, *The Geography of Nationalism*, 330-333.

²³ Goff, ““Why not love our language and our culture?” 27-44

²⁴ Goff, *Nested Nationalism*, 121.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 109-143.

nations versus their complete “merging,” still largely left “decision-making authority” with local elites.²⁶ What did the expanded autonomy of local and republican communist parties of “many republics” in the post-Stalinist 1950s-1980s entail?²⁷ This form of “indirect rule” from Moscow enabled national political elites, particularly in Transcaucasia and Central Asia, to promote corrupt patronage networks, titular favoritism, and widespread “bribe-taking and payoffs.”²⁸ These practices were reported by individuals, groups, and state organs alike. Corrupt systems persisted, even after Brezhnev’s regime attempted to reign in corruption and the “continued frustration” of Soviet economic plans in the late 1960s by ousting entrenched republican leaders and installing those, like Eduard Shevardnadze of Georgia, tasked with ending titular favoritism and explicit nationalism.

In the USSR’s “southern tier,” its (non-Slavic and non-Baltic) regions, there was arguably more cause to report violations in internationalist practices. By the 1960s, postwar Soviet investment began to shift away from the south. This trend continued into the Brezhnev period when the European core and resource-rich Russian Far North and East were prioritized instead. This turn away from the south corresponded with titular growth in the Caucasus and Central Asia, which created an increasingly problematic labor surplus that exacerbated tensions. Central Asia and the Caucasus, unlike the Baltic and Slavic republics, also became more nationally consolidated over time mainly due to titular growth and outmigration.²⁹

In other words, growing republican autonomy and titular consolidation amid a lagging economy created ample ground for social tension in the USSR’s south. Though Georgia and

²⁶ Kaiser, *The Geography of Nationalism*, 332.

²⁷ Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford: Stanford University, 1993), 117-120.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ There was negligible change in the titular population’s share of the total population between 1959 and 1989 in Moldova. Barbara A. Anderson and Brian D. Silver. “Demographic Sources of the Changing Ethnic Composition of the Soviet Union,” *Population and Development Review* 15, no. 4 (1989), 630.

Armenia had mostly proportional representation of titular nationals in the blue- and white-collar workforce between 1967-1987 (and in some years, over-representation), throughout Central Asia, despite considerable titular growth, titular nationals remained underrepresented in these jobs.³⁰ This meant that, in some cases, enterprises continued to hire outside labor despite a growing manual labor surplus. In Central Asia, however, titular “occupational mobility” and nativization increased “dramatically” in the postwar period, sometimes reportedly due to titular favoritism. Still, even as occupational mobility for titular nationals grew, the use of Russian in all-Union enterprises and in many institutes of higher learning remained a major obstacle limiting the integration of some titular nationals in Central Asia into the specialized workforce.

The aforementioned led to complaints from some extraterritorial and nontitular communities about unruly or “excessive” nationalism, like the collective first introduced, and titular violence. Sometimes, these complaints resulted in requests for transfers. Petitioners ran the gamut from privileged Russian speakers to native border groups and nontitular minorities subjected to (forced) titular assimilation. Though Russians were positioned to lead the country into communism and extraterritorial Russians were no longer considered minorities when nationality policy shifted by the late 1930s, by the Brezhnev period, some were, in fact, reporting that growing republican autonomy and titular nationalism in the USSR’s southern tier led to their minoritization, or exclusion—sometimes through violence.³¹ Put simply, the loosening of the center’s control combined with regional factors, like titular consolidation and an ebbing economy that favored Russian speakers, to generate initiative toward increased nationalization

³⁰ Kaiser, *The Geography of Nationalism*, 240-242.

³¹ See Janet Klein, “Making Minorities in the Eurasian Borders: A Comparative Perspective from the Russian and Eurasian Borderlands,” Krista Goff and Lewis H. Siegelbaum, eds., *Empire and Belonging in the Eurasian Borderlands* (Ithaca: 2019).

that made even privileged Russians sometimes contend with exclusionary and violent nationalism.

Shifting the focus to extraterritorial and nontitular communities—and their voices, experiences, and lived realities in the late Soviet period—complicates our understanding of Soviet nationality policy. It exposes the everyday friction between rising titular nationalization and the overarching aims of the Soviet project, which legally granted all nations the right to “flourish” and supported their merger into the Soviet *narod*. Irrespective of their background, extraterritorial and nontitular groups thus appealed to central (and republican) authorities by evoking socialist principles, like internationalism, for oversight and intervention. In their efforts, some, however, also used socialist rhetoric to stereotype (and ironically discriminate against) titular majorities.

Growing Disparities in the USSR’s Nationally Consolidating South

“The Russian language naturally began to turn into the language of communication and cooperation of all the peoples of our country under socialism when economic and industrial interethnic ties increased a thousandfold, when the internationalization of the population intensified,” read an essay from a 1979 manual for teachers of Russian.³² The manual stressed the necessity of teaching Russian in national schools, noting the irrefutable bridging—the growing internationalization—of the Soviet Union’s multinational peoples through the Russian language. It argued that the developmental trajectory of Soviet modernization toward communism was transformative and had shaped every facet of life. Indeed, in the first fifty years of its existence the urban population of the USSR rose from 15 to 60%, double the pace of

³² M. I. Isaev, “Rol’ russkogo iazyka kak sredstva mezhnatsional’nogo obshcheniia, ”*Puti razvitiia natsional’no russkogo dvuiazychiia*, 48-57.

urbanization in the United States.³³ The populations of cities and towns exploded. Some cities, like Magnitogorsk (Iron Mountain) that reflected the triumphs of socialist industrialization, were created from scratch. Everyday life in the USSR was also revolutionized with the development of institutions like houses of culture, which became important public spaces for worker engagement, and country-wide youth organizations like the Pioneers and Komsomol. The process of “internationalization,” as referred to in the manual, thus asserted that the Soviet Union was quickly overcoming—or exhausting—national differences as part of its telic course of development toward communism in the USSR. These modernizing processes that merged all Soviet peoples through shared experiences and practices, it contended, thus necessitated knowledge of Russian, the Soviet *lingua franca*. “Socialist industrial relations” and “international cooperation,” as one article in *Kommunist Uzbekistana* (Uzbekistan Communist), the Communist Party journal of Uzbekistan summarized, were the “two main factors” that characterized the economic and socio-political achievements of most socialist states.³⁴

Development of the country’s most rural or “backward” regions was of major importance to Soviet authorities. Modernization was essential to communism, but the development of these regions also served to legitimize the USSR’s anti-imperialist claims. Indeed, the USSR championed its model of socialist development in less industrialized imperial peripheries like Central Asia to compete with the West in the early Cold War era.³⁵ As Rafik Nishanov, Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan (who would become First Secretary in the late 1980s) wrote in 1970, “From the first days of the Great October Socialist

³³ Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR, and the Successor States* (New York: Oxford University, 2011), 268.

³⁴ N. Suchkov, “Antiimperialisticheskie sily krepnut,” *Kommunist Uzbekistana* vol 1. (1970): 82-88.

³⁵ See Artemy Kalinovsky, *Laboratory of Socialist Development: Cold War Politics and Decolonization in Soviet Tajikistan* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2018).

Revolution, the Communist Party led by Vladimir Ilyich Lenin launched an unprecedented struggle in history to liquidate the backwardness of the former colonial territories of the Russian Empire.”³⁶ A 1970 essay in *Kommunist Uzbekistana* proclaimed that Uzbekistan had been the “agrarian and raw material appendage of the Russian empire.”³⁷ By contrast, in the Soviet era, the authors highlighted, “modern industry with leading branches of heavy industry was created” in Uzbekistan and other national republics. The authors explained that development had to take on a faster pace than in more urbanized republics, which required great investment. Prior to the Great Patriotic War, 234 million rubles were invested in Uzbekistan, which only increased during the war. During the war, between June 1941 and May 1945, 280 new industrial enterprises were formed. Heavy industry tripled. Uzbekistan alone, the authors proudly celebrated, now “surpassed such capitalist countries as Argentina, Portugal, Greece, Iran and others” in electricity production per capita. As another essay from the same journal characterized more simply: “the common anti-imperialist struggle” is determined primarily by “growing economic power” and success in the “competition with world capitalism.”³⁸

In the country overall, great strides were made to promote development across the USSR and lessen national divides; in some cases, this was most dramatic in Central Asia. As Nishanov proclaimed, 98% of pre-revolutionary Uzbekistan had been illiterate as mainly male “children of tsarist officials, merchants, and bai [Muslim nobility]” were schooled. He continued: “In the former colony of the tsarist Empire there was not a single university, musical educational institution, theater, and there were no national cadres in the field of science and art. Currently,

³⁶ R. Nishanov, “Leninskoe uchenie o kulturnoi revoliutsii i ee osushchestvlenie” *Kommunist Uzbekistana* vol. 2 (1970): 22-43.

³⁷ S. Karabaev and K. Ernazarov, “Osnova dal’neishego rosta sotsialisticheskoi ekonomiki,” *Kommunist Uzbekistana* vol. 1 (1970): 59-64.

³⁸ N. Suchkov, “Antimperialisticheskie sily krepnut,” *Ibid*, 82-88.

there are more than 9 thousand secondary schools in Uzbekistan, in which 3 million 154 thousand students study.” Nishanov claimed that about a third of the population of the republic was receiving an education in some form, which by “no exaggeration” made the Uzbek SSR competitive with the “most educated countries in the world.”³⁹ From 1926 to 1959, the number of engineers, agronomists, and technicians in the USSR increased by 18 times, according to the Central Committee of Uzbekistan’s secretary, but this increase was 38-fold in Central Asia and Kazakhstan. He boasted that in Uzbekistan, there were 192 university students and 127 technical school students per 10,000 population, which was “three times more than in Italy, more than three times more than in England, and twice as much as in France.” These transformations were all the more drastic and historically significant for women, Nishanov declared, who came to make up 42% of Uzbekistan’s industrial workforce. The flourishing and “drawing together” (*sblizhenie*) of nations, Nishanov attested, per the party line, presupposed increasing such achievements to “accelerate common progress on the course toward communism.” In essence, Nishanov argued that communism (and the erosion of national difference) would be achieved once each republic and nation was developed on an equal footing. These feats in the republic’s development, rather than sponsoring nationalism, he suggested, would continue to draw the country’s nations together. Any remaining contradictions between nations—and the start and end points of Soviet internationalism—would be resolved dialectically through this common progression toward communism.

Efforts to improve the mobility of less developed regions did significantly diminish divides.⁴⁰ By 1980-1981, the gap between the republic with the highest number of secondary

³⁹ Nishanov, “Leninskoe uchenie o kulturnoi revoliutsii i ee osushchestvlenie,” 22-43.

⁴⁰ V. I. Perevedentsev, “Population Migration and the Development of Agricultural Production,” *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 8, Vol.35 (March 23, 1983): 5-28.

school students (Russia) per 10,000 people and the one with the fewest (Turkmenistan) had significantly narrowed.⁴¹ The number of students had increased across Central Asia tremendously (to 900% over the 1941 figure). At the end of the 1950s, republican titular nationals were, for the most part, underrepresented among college students in “their” territories, but this changed dramatically between 1959 and 1989.⁴² By the end of the 1980s, only the Slavic nations were underrepresented in the *VUZy* (institutes of higher learning) in “their own” republics. In eight of the non-Slavic republics, in fact, titular nationals had “rates of college entry that far exceeded their proportion of the total republic population.”⁴³ The latter was partially due to a system of quotas that was designed to increase the educational attainment of national groups with lower rates of education and to accelerate “international equalization.” Titular favoritism, in the sense that titular national status became a primary criterion for admissions, however, also likely played a role.

The country’s strides toward international equalization were symbolized through the passing of the 1974 Passport Statute.⁴⁴ The Statute furthered the opportunities available to all Soviet citizens by extending the right of passport identification, which facilitated mobility, to rural dwellers, who were not previously able to obtain passports, itinerants, and other previously excluded groups. It also removed the designation of class, which had been used for purposes of the state’s affirmative action, from Soviet passports. By the 1980s, Soviet articles celebrated the

⁴¹ Yu. V. Arutyunyan and L. M. Drobizheva, “The Social Structure of Soviet Nations at the Present Stage,” *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, No. 42, Vol. 34, November 17, 1982: 13-32.

⁴² See Kaiser, *The Geography of Nationalism*, 231-235.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Before the 1974 Passport Statute, passports were limited to residents of areas of state importance—urban settlements of various scales, areas within 100 kilometers of large towns, important agricultural sites, such as state farms (*sovkhoz*), Machine and Tractor Stations, border zones, and building sites. See Mervyn Matthews, *The Passport Society: Controlling Movement in Russia and the USSR* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), 27; Mervyn Matthews, “Passport and Residence Controls in the Soviet Union,” *The National Council for Soviet and East European Research* (March 1991).

increased urbanization and professionalization of Soviet citizens. Workers and office employees, Soviet experts claimed, had now become the largest social group in the country while education gaps between republics had been reportedly reduced. In 1960, collective farmers were 1/3 of the country's population, but by the 1980s this figure was down to 13.8%.⁴⁵ The professional class in each republic had expanded.

Even as the USSR was touted as an increasingly interconnected and equally developed space, which it was in many regards, by the late Soviet period, economic and social problems in the USSR's southern peripheries were also exposed. This was despite the fact that Brezhnev proclaimed in 1972 that "significant problems of regional inequality within the USSR had been resolved."⁴⁶ A population bulge in the USSR's southern tier expanded rural populations, particularly in Central Asia, which created a manual labor surplus that economies struggled to absorb.⁴⁷ The Caucasus and Central Asia had also become more nationally consolidated, mainly as a result of titular growth and out-migration.⁴⁸ National consolidation and increased republican autonomy, however, did not always equate to comprehensive titular empowerment.

Command of Russian, the state language used in official Soviet correspondence, in all-Union institutions and enterprises, and in many institutes of higher learning (*VUZy*), was a key indicator for social mobility, and by the late Soviet period, Soviet experts began to worry that the southern tier was falling significantly behind. Early Soviet nationality policy supported the equal development of all Soviet languages, but by the late 1930s, the state mandated the study of

⁴⁵ Arutyunyan and Drobizheva, "The Social Structure of Soviet Nations," 13-32.

⁴⁶ Sahadeo, *Voices from the Soviet Edge*, 28.

⁴⁷ Between 1950 and 1990 the population of Central Asia nearly tripled from 17.2 to 50.5 million people. "Youth in Central Asia: Losing the New Generation," *International Crisis Group*. October 23, 2003. V. Perevedentsev, "Population Migration and the Utilization of Labor Resources: The Problem of Population Migration." *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press*. No.2, Vol. 23. February 9, 1971: 1-6.

⁴⁸ Barbara A. Anderson and Brian D. Silver. "Demographic Sources of the Changing Ethnic Composition of the Soviet Union," *Population and Development Review* 15, no. 4 (1989), 630.

Russian, which became the language of “interethnic communication.” The Khrushchev language reforms made the study of one’s native tongue optional, which pushed many toward Russian, the Soviet *lingua franca*, as it offered more opportunities for social advancement. In some cases, national schools also had limited native language options. In Azerbaijan, for instance, after 1958, parents could only choose between Russian, Azerbaijani, Georgian, or Armenian as a language of instruction.⁴⁹ In Turkmenistan in the 1960s and early 1970s, parents could choose between the titular language, Russian, Uzbek, and Kazakh.⁵⁰ In the postwar period, the Russian language therefore became more dominant in school instruction, in publications, and as a form of communication, particularly in urban and industrial spaces.⁵¹ Reported use of Russian (as either a native or second language), however, was comparatively lower among Central Asian and Caucasian titular nationalities in “their own” republics.⁵²

Due to the prevalence of Russian in higher education and in all-Union enterprises, Russian speakers were often the more qualified and mobile populations who filled positions for skilled labor.⁵³ Those who lacked Russian-language skills were often at a disadvantage and were sometimes excluded from employment opportunities even in “their” national territories.⁵⁴ In 1965, the director of a uranium combine in Kazakhstan, for example, asked for local party and Komsomol representatives to gather 1,000 local school graduates for professional training and employment.⁵⁵ The local party organization, however, struggled to assemble even a third of the

⁴⁹ Goff, *Nested Nationalism*, 127.

⁵⁰ Kaiser, *The Geography of Nationalism*, 416.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 250-324.

⁵² There were some exceptions. Kazakhstan, which had a large ethnic Russian population, for instance, had a more linguistically Russified titular nation. Anderson and Silver, “Demographic Sources,” 645-646.

⁵³ Students technically had the right to university instruction in their native tongue as well, though Russian was the main language in Soviet VUZy, state institutes for higher education. Mervyn Matthews, *Education in the Soviet Union: Policies and Institutions since Stalin* (London: George Allen, 1982).

⁵⁴ See Guth, “USSR Incorporated Versus Affirmative Action Empire?” 171-206.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

requested locals mainly because the educational requirements could not be met. “Large numbers” who did join the combine’s labor force often left due to lack of Russian language skills. Not surprisingly, members of national communities living outside of “their” titular homeland across the USSR were generally more linguistically Russified—even in rural areas—than titular groups living in urban spaces in “their” homeland between 1959 and 1989.⁵⁶

By the late Soviet period, when investment in Central Asia and the Caucasus declined and titular consolidation increased, people (including some titular populations) increasingly began to leave for Russia.⁵⁷ In 1983, one Soviet expert showed alarm in the fact that the number of enrollees in Russian-language schools was, in fact, “lagging behind,” causing a generational lull in Russian language fluency in a number of republics.⁵⁸ This was despite the fact that an October 1978 decree called on improvements in Russian language instruction, which included more time devoted to Russian in non-Russian schools.⁵⁹ In some cases, increased outmigration of Russians lessened the opportunities available for Russian language education. The absolute number of (self-identified) Russians began to decrease in Georgia in the 1960s, in Azerbaijan in the 1970s, and from the rest of the southern republics (including Moldova) by the 1980s.⁶⁰ In Central Asia’s Fergana Valley, a diverse borderland, the outmigration of the Slavic population decreased the number of available Russian-language teachers—even as demand for Russian language instruction increased.⁶¹

⁵⁶ See chapter six, “The Ethnocultural Transformation of Soviet Society: Russification versus Indigenization,” Kaiser, *The Geography of Nationalism*, 250-324.

⁵⁷ Heleniak, “An Overview of Migration in the Post-Soviet Space,” 45, Sahadeo, *Voices from the Soviet Edge*.

⁵⁸ These republics are not named, but one can assume they likely include those of the southern tier, where the rural populations increased. Yu Bromlei, “Surveying Ethnic Assimilation, Integration,” *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 35, no.15, (May 11, 1983): 9-18.

⁵⁹ Edgar, *Intermarriage and the Friendship of the Peoples*, 164.

⁶⁰ See Anderson and Silver, “Demographic Sources,” 609-56.

⁶¹ Sahadeo, *Voices from the Soviet Edge*, 27.

As Soviet investment moved north, Soviet campaigns ironically attempted to address the problem of the southern tier's rising rural population and growing labor surplus through different avenues aimed at professionalizing, relocating, or otherwise mobilizing Central Asian populations.⁶² In the late Soviet period, the modernizing "mobilizational" state found the increasing rural population in the USSR's south, and its comparatively lower rates of mobility and Russian fluency, a cause for concern.⁶³ While in the rest of the USSR the number of rural residents declined between 1959 and 1969 (and most significantly so in the RSFSR), the opposite was occurring in the southern tier due to rapid titular growth.⁶⁴ By the end of the 1970s, as the rural population there continued to expand, state officials also became troubled with inequities in mobility and fluency in Russian. Between the census years of 1959 and 1970, the rural population increase in the Caucasus and Central Asia ranged from 5% in Georgia to 38.1% in Uzbekistan.⁶⁵ In Moldova, the number of rural residents increased by 9%. The increase was highest in Central Asia and in Azerbaijan.

Despite the state's attempts to modernize the southern republics as a showcase of Soviet anti-imperialism, emerging and persistent regional discrepancies (that were most prominent in Central Asia) revealed problems with its international model of development. They also

⁶² Ibid., 29-30.

⁶³ For an argument that the concept of "modern mobilizational state" for the Soviet Union is more appropriate than "empire," see Adeeb Khalid, "Backwardness and the Quest for Civilization: Early Soviet Central Asia in Comparative Perspective," *Slavic Review* 65, no. 2 (2006): 231-51, Perevedentsev, "Population Migration and the Utilization of Labor Resources, 1-6; V. Perevedentsev, "Population Distribution and Migration," *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, No.29, Vol. 26, August 14, 1974: 22-23, D.I. Zyuzin, "Causes of Low Mobility Among the Indigenous Population of the Central Asian Republics," *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 35, no.8, (March 23, 1983):1-4.

⁶⁴ In the Russian North Caucasus, however, the rural population had increased. The rural population decreased in Belorussia, Estonia, Lithuania, Ukraine, and Latvia between 1959 and 1969. Perevedentsev, "Population Migration and the Utilization of Labor Resources," 1-6.

⁶⁵ These numbers reflect the natural population increase of the rural population, but not in proportion to the increase of the urban population. The share of the urban population grew everywhere: in Tajikistan, between 1959 and 1979, from 21% to 28%, in Turkmenistan, from 25% to 31.4%, and in Uzbekistan, from 22% to 30%. Perevedentsev, "Population Migration and the Utilization of Labor Resources," 1-6, Arutyunyan and Drobizheva, "The Social Structure of Soviet Nations at the Present Stage," 13, 31-32.

contributed to social tensions —decades prior to the Soviet collapse—and the desire of some to leave the region. Some Soviet experts worried that the “traditional” way of life had also become more popular than the appeal of the “modern” socialist one.⁶⁶ In Novyi Uzen, an industrial hub in Kazakhstan where widespread violence broke in 1989, one regional party leader argued (perhaps speaking to such assumptions) that the very presence of Kazakh shantytowns in the city meant that the local population did want to participate in the region’s industrial development but had limited opportunities to do so.⁶⁷ At the same time, an investigation in 1987 (after riots broke out in Alma-Ata and across the Kazakh SSR), determined that Novyi Uzen Kazakhs had been ousting other national group’s from the city’s top positions. Despite economic disparities that left some titular nationals at the fringes of urban life, the share of Kazakhs in the city’s workforce had been increasing (though mainly in blue-collar jobs); in some locales, like Novyi Uzen, titular nationals were also consolidating administrative dominance.

Some had also begun to raise challenges to the Russian language’s dominance in institutes of higher learning as it had become a major hurdle to titular advancement. One student collective from the Tashkent Institute of Irrigation and Agricultural Mechanization Engineering reported in 1982 that Russian was “actually compulsory” as the language of instruction at the Institution for most subjects.⁶⁸ This led, the letter complained, to the “low academic performance” of the local population who struggled as a result and sometimes had to leave their studies. Some of the docents also spoke Russian poorly, the student collective proclaimed, and it was difficult to understand them. “If they could teach in Uzbek,” the students wrote, “it would be more useful to science and to students of local nationalities.” In contrast to the students of the

⁶⁶ Perevedentsev, “Population Migration and the Utilization of Labor Resources,” 1-6.

⁶⁷ See Guth, “USSR Incorporated Versus Affirmative Action Empire?”

⁶⁸ RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 422, ll. 6-10 (letters from citizens of Tajik nationalities in connection with the aggravation of interethnic relations in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan).

Tashkent Institute, a student collective from the Samarkand Agricultural Institute, another diverse region of Uzbekistan, petitioned in 1986 that, in fact, too many subjects were taught in Uzbek instead of Russian, which they preferred.⁶⁹ According to the Ministry of Higher Education of the Uzbek SSR, teaching was conducted in Uzbek in junior courses at the Institute due to the “very poor knowledge” that these students had of the Russian language. This helped to remove a major impediment for titular nationals, but apparently did not bode well for everyone.

Internationalizing the USSR’s Southern Tier in the Postwar Period

The unification of the country and the leveling of development became paramount under Nikita Khrushchev as part of his strategy to replace Stalin and to further the Soviet Union’s global influence.⁷⁰ In the 1950s and 1960s Soviet investment “poured into the Caucasus and, especially, Central Asia” but did not always lead to sustainable regional economies.⁷¹ The wartime relocation of industries to the USSR’s southeast inspired further postwar investment in these regions. Hydroelectric, coal, and chemical factories flourished. Growing and new enterprises requiring additional work forces could apply for them from across the USSR through the Soviet system of Orgnabor, or “organized enlistment” of labor to ensure that labor met the needs of industry, yet other Soviet institutions like the Komsomol, also facilitated temporary youth labor for various Soviet projects. Between 1959 and 1970, the country’s population shifted toward the south, which became a “zone of sharply higher population increase” as a result of migration and natural increase that included Moldova, the North Caucasus, Central Asia, and Kazakhstan.⁷² The Slavic and Baltic national groups of the USSR reportedly made up the largest

⁶⁹ RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 427, ll. 19-20 (letters from citizens of the Belarusian, Kazakh, Uzbek SSR on the language situation in the republics of the Soviet Union).

⁷⁰ See Sahadeo, *Voices from the Soviet Edge*, and Kalinovsky, *Laboratory of Socialist Development*.

⁷¹ Sahdeo, *Voices from the Soviet Edge*, 27.

⁷² Perevedentsev, “Population Migration and the Utilization of Labor Resources,” 1-6.

proportion of those migrating inter-regionally.⁷³ By 1982, a Soviet study concluded that Russians, Ukrainians, and Belorussians—national groups from Slavic republics with the highest reported use of Russian as either the native or second language—were the country’s “main migrating groups.”⁷⁴ These nations, it recounted, provide the “main reinforcements for detachments of skilled urban workers and specialists” in Central Asia and most new agricultural workers in Kazakhstan as well.

The most infamous of the new enterprises that relied upon external migration to the south was the Virgin Lands campaign in Northern Kazakhstan, which by the 1960s had transformed the lives of millions—local and nonlocal alike.⁷⁵ As part of the mission to balance the country’s development, Khrushchev commenced the Virgin Lands campaign in 1954-6, believing the project would reduce the burden on collective farms and the central regions of the USSR to produce grain. The Virgin Lands campaign brought “hundreds of thousands of the most varied people opportunities to build new lives and reinvent themselves.”⁷⁶ Many of the settlers romanticized such opportunities, which offered a chance to leave bleak postwar villages. Workers to the Virgin Lands were oversupplied to “combat the effects of out-migration,” but overcrowding and competition also created more grounds for new settlers to abandon the project. Those who remained in the region mostly arrived after the initially turbulent years of the campaign’s opening when better regional infrastructure developed, by that time some reported that life in the Virgin Land even brought material advantages. As an all-Union undertaking in the

⁷³ Perevedentsev, “Population Distribution and Migration,” 22-23.

⁷⁴ Arutyunyan and Drobizheva, “The Social Structure of Soviet Nations at the Present Stage,” 13-32, Anderson and Silver, “Demographic Sources of the Changing Ethnic Composition of the Soviet Union,” 646. Russian language use as either the native or second language among titular nationals in “their” republic was, for obvious reasons, not recorded here for Russians the RSFSR.

⁷⁵ See Michaela Pohl, “The ‘Planet of one hundred languages’: Ethnic relations and Soviet identity in the Virgin Lands” in Nicholas B. Breyfogle, et. al., *Peopling the Russian Periphery: Borderland colonization in Eurasian History* (London: Routledge, 2007), 238-262.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 239.

USSR's periphery, the Virgin Lands campaign facilitated settlers from across the USSR to work, mix with, intermarry, and sometimes violently clash with native residents and "special settlers" of different nationalities deported to the region under Stalin.

By the turn of the 1960s, Khrushchev grew less interested in investing in Central Asia as a showcase, or model, of transformative Soviet industrialization (even as many all-Union projects continued to enlist outside labor and specialists). This pivot away from the south continued under Brezhnev. When Brezhnev delivered the 9th five-year-plan of 1970-1975 at the 24th Communist Party Congress, he claimed to concentrate on the country's "all-round development" and the "drawing together" of the working class, but the actualization of these aims were envisioned through greater state focus on the resource-dense and labor-scarce Russian Far East and North.⁷⁷ "The task of the next ten years" the Soviet demographer, Viktor Perevedentsev, pointed out in 1974, was to "balance the distribution of the country's population and natural resources."⁷⁸ The "East," which he identified as Siberia and the Russian Far East, had the "most abundant natural resources" while the European "West" portion of the USSR and the "Southeast," or the North Caucasus, the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Kazakhstan, had much higher densities of population. This campaign to develop the Russian frontier involved mass mobilization to construct the Baikal Amur Mainline (BAM), a four-thousand-kilometer (2,305 miles) extension of the Trans-Siberian Railway through harsh Siberian terrain all the way to the Pacific Ocean. BAM was heralded as the "Project of the Century" that would bring modern "civilization" to the USSR's far eastern regions through socialist industrialization and ethnic

⁷⁷ "The 24th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union." Marxist Internet Archive. <http://marxism.halkcephesi.net/soviet%20archives/Congre%20reports/congress%2024.htm>

⁷⁸ Perevedentsev, "Population Distribution and Migration," 22-23.

cooperation.⁷⁹ Construction began in 1974, and like other Soviet “gigantomania” projects, it involved a massive, and often inefficient, deployment of human and material resources.

Even as the state began to levy more resources to develop the Russian Far East and North, some southern regions and republics continued to externally recruit skilled workers and specialists despite a manual labor surplus and an increasing rural population. By 1976, Uzbekistan was still experiencing significant industrial labor shortages.⁸⁰ To fill the need for industrial specialists despite a surplus of manpower, enterprises continued to hire (often skilled and specialist) labor from outside the republic. In 1973, 22-year-old Nina P.’s graduating class of the Engineer-Construction Institute in the city of Poltava, Ukraine, for instance, was recruited by the Ministry of Medium Machine Building (Minsredmash) for industries in Russia and in Tashkent, Uzbekistan requiring specialists.⁸¹ Her mother encouraged her to “see the world” and that “In Tashkent it’s warm! You’re provided with a dorm, and a job in a project-based institution! You don’t have to go alone. Everything is wonderful!” After a KGB clearance, Nina P. left to start a career in Tashkent—where she remained until the Soviet Union’s dissolution.

External labor recruitment presented difficulties, however, especially considering the ample manpower in the southern tier. In the fall of 1970, after the 24th Party Congress, one reader wrote into *Pravda* to complain that migratory flows, as Soviet experts had revealed, were often to areas “where the level of manpower resources” was already “sufficiently high.”⁸² The letter’s author observed that this led to decreased labor productivity overall. Indeed, sometimes when migrants arrived at their new locales they were told to return to their place of origin or

⁷⁹ Christopher J. Ward, *Brezhnev’s Folly: The Building of BAM and Late Soviet Socialism* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 2009), 1-6.

⁸⁰ Sahadeo, *Voices from the Soviet Edge*, 28.

⁸¹ Interview with author. August 31, 2017.

⁸² V. Boldyrev, “The Reader Asks to be Told: On Migration of the Population” *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 22, no. 34, (September 22, 1970): 18-19.

were not provided with the contact information for their place of work.⁸³ Noting the state's need to better address labor efficiency, the letter to *Pravda* drew attention to the growing labor surplus and low rural mobility problem (endemic to the southern republics).

The question then remained, why not spend more resources on mobilizing local labor in the southern tier, where it was readily available? In fact, state and expert concern about the implications of the labor surplus in the southern tier grew. In some cases, republican party committees blamed sub-regional party organs for growing youth unemployment and interrelated problems. On June 21, 1962, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Armenia, for instance, worrisomely reported that party organs “poorly mobilized” youth and Komsomol members in the building of economic and cultural infrastructure in the republic and that young people were not “sufficiently educated in the spirit of the Communist attitude toward work.”⁸⁴ In fact, in the republic, the Central Committee reported, the number of unemployed youth continued to grow, which was contributing to a high crime rate among them. In the capital of Erevan alone, 40% of reported crimes were committed by unemployed youth.

The state and relevant experts did explore and employ various campaigns to leverage labor that was increasingly in surplus in the southern tier. One such effort in the Brezhnev era was to move production closer to the sources of raw material, which also meant situating “labor-intensive production” in labor-rich regions.⁸⁵ Mikhail Pervukhin, a member of the board of the USSR Gosplan, the state planning committee, confirmed in an interview that the state sought to build new enterprises in small and medium towns with significant labor resources, like the

⁸³ A. Yurkov, “Editor’s Reply: Once More About the Urge to Travel.” *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 23, no. 30, August 24, 1971: 16; interview with the author. August 31, 2017.

⁸⁴ RGANI f. 5, op. 31, d. 198, ll. 4-5 (letters from local party bodies, the Komsomol, and others of the Transcaucasian republics on the CPSU Plenum of Armenia and Georgia).

⁸⁵ “Pervukhin on the Plan for Industry: Productive Forces, People, Rates of Growth.” *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press*. No. 9, Vol. 23. March 30, 1971: 8-10.

Caucasus, Central Asia, and Moldova.⁸⁶ With this scheme, the state sought to bring jobs to many communities at risk for high unemployment and low social mobility, yet this plan had obvious limitations, particularly as state investment was generally gearing north. Moreover, this proposed solution was unlikely to address the broad extent of socio-economic problems. As Mikhail Pervukhin's interviewer, Viktor Perevedentsev, a leading demographer on the subject, retorted, "Obviously, you can't put factories and plants in all the small and medium-sized cities."

The state's various attempts to address the problem of rising rural populations and growing unemployment in the southern tier were generally futile. Another related (and more controversial) state strategy was to discourage Central Asian families from having many children (the average family had 3.9 children in the region from the late 1970s), but this strategy faltered after fears about racism.⁸⁷ State training initiatives attempted to mobilize Central Asians for service and industrial sectors of the economy. Efforts to enroll Central Asians in professional-technical institutes, a training initiative sponsored by the State Commission of Labor and Social Problems, was hampered by low interest, despite a public media campaign.⁸⁸ Placing new graduates in appropriate industrial sites or new towns away from home also proved challenging. The state likewise explored initiatives to relocate manual laborers from Uzbekistan to "kill two birds with one stone: to draw underemployed rurals from Uzbekistan and supply badly needed agricultural workers to the Non-Black Earth region" of the RSFSR.⁸⁹ In 1970, however, virtually "no movement" was recorded out of the rural areas of Central Asia, while Moldova, the Caucasus, and the North Caucasus had "low out-migration" despite their abundance of labor

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Sahadeo, *Voices from the Soviet Edge*, 29-30.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Lewis H. Siegelbaum and Leslie Page Moch, *Broad is My Native Land: Repertoires and Regimes of Migration in Russia's Twentieth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell, 2014), 63-64.

resources.⁹⁰ The root of the problem may have been that titular nationals simply did not have the requisite Russian language skills. Some local intellectuals, like the Kyrgyz writer Tugelbai Sydybekov, however, also encouraged locals to remain in their “natural” homes.⁹¹ One Soviet ethnologist similarly argued that “urban, factory life would remain alien to Central Asians unless it was, somehow, made to reflect their traditions.”

Toward the end of the Soviet period, other schemes still attempted to “relieve Central Asia of its ‘excess’ labor supply,” including, “annual bonuses, free housing for the first two years, guaranteed apartments, extra vacation time, educational opportunities, and other incentives.”⁹² These initiatives, contrary to expectations, still foundered due to the recurring problem, or assumption, that concerned Soviet experts: despite communist logic, many Central Asians seemed to consistently prefer a “traditional” way of life deemed “backward” by Soviet standards. Perhaps because of such assumptions and setbacks, Viktor Perevedentsev finally recommended a relocation plan in the early 1980s that instead concentrated on the “most mobile” urban populations of the southern republics, like extraterritorial groups, who were more likely willing to leave the region.⁹³

When the “Soviet turn from the south” that began under Khrushchev continued under Brezhnev, more people from the region moved north to where Soviet investment had shifted.⁹⁴ Some titular populations of the USSR’s southern tier also left the region for seasonal work, like selling southern products that were hard to come by elsewhere, and to seek other opportunities that were increasingly difficult to obtain at home.⁹⁵ The combination of these trends ensured that,

⁹⁰ Perevedentsev, “Population Distribution and Migration,” 22-23.

⁹¹ Sahadeo, *Voices from the Soviet Edge*, 28-29.

⁹² Siegelbaum and Moch, *Broad is My Native Land*, 63-64.

⁹³ Perevedentsev, “Population Migration and the Development of Agricultural Production,” 5-28.

⁹⁴ See also Sahadeo, *Voices from the Soviet Edge*, 26-30.

⁹⁵ Sahadeo, *Voices from the Soviet Edge*, 26.

after the 1970s, migration trends flipped, and more people began arriving in, rather than leaving, Russia. Instead of bridging ties between Soviet nationalities, these shifts began to further homogenize the southern republics. In the “non-Slavic south,” by the end of the 1960s, higher outmigration coincided with reports of titular favoritism in the blue- and white-collar workplace, and the rate of indigenization of the (blue- and white-collar) workforce, especially in Central Asia, began to grow rapidly.⁹⁶ Perhaps as a reflection of the growing influence of titular cultures, children of mixed marriages who had to choose their passport nationality at the age of 16 to match that of one of their parents (no option for mixed nationalities existed) by the 1980s began to select the titular nationality over Russian more frequently.⁹⁷

These trends coincided with the growing autonomy of the republics, whose leadership was given “considerable leeway with the affairs of their own republics,” including the fostering of national cultures.⁹⁸ The relaxation of central control over the republics that began under Khrushchev and for the most stayed in place during Brezhnev inspired a boom in the production of national culture in the republics and the strengthening of a national intelligentsia instrumental to the dissident movement that began to take form. During this period, nationalists increasingly and more brazenly mobilized (including for independence), sometimes through underground and even terrorist movements.⁹⁹ In July of 1962, the penultimate year of Khrushchev’s regime, for instance, the Central Committee of the USSR reported “national provocations” in Armenia and in the majority-Armenian autonomous Nagorno-Karabakh territory in Azerbaijan over the fate of

⁹⁶ Kaiser seems to include all the non-Slavic and non-Baltic republics in this category, as they all apply here, with the exception of Armenia, which already had 100% indigenous representation in white- and blue-collar jobs according to this data. On the national character of postwar urbanization, see Robert J. Kaiser, *The Geography of Nationalism in Russia and the USSR* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1994), 240-241.

⁹⁷ Zevelev, *Russia and Its New Diasporas*, 110.

⁹⁸ Jeremy Smith, *Red Nations: The Nationalities Experience in and after the USSR* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University, 2013), 215-244.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

Nagorno-Karabakh. Azerbaijan's KGB reported that some of the organizers were part of the intelligentsia.¹⁰⁰ The tensions reportedly worsened after Nikita Khrushchev visited the republic, which spread rumors that Khrushchev would "gift" Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia. Other rumors followed. The agitations reached a concerning level when the first secretary of Nagorno-Karabakh, Nikolai Shakhnazarov, was threatened via an anonymous letter from an alleged collective of 272 Armenians who noted that Shakhnazarov was a "notorious enemy of the Armenians" who would "not stay alive."

Among other serious party deficiencies, the Committee concluded that "the theme of socialist internationalism and the friendship of peoples did not take its proper place on the pages of republican newspapers and magazines, in radio and television broadcasts, in literature published by Armenian publishing houses" nor in lectures of party committees and political and scientific societies.¹⁰¹ In 1965, when a mass national demonstration was held to commemorate the Armenian genocide, the First Secretary of Armenia, Zakov Zarobian, was then removed from his post despite his popularity in the republic for his "conciliatory attitude toward Armenian national feelings."¹⁰² Similarly, at the Plenum of Georgia's Central Committee, it was reported that some party committees of the republic were not leading an ideological struggle against elements, like nationalism, that were "alien" to Soviet society.¹⁰³ According to the representative of the executive party committee of one Georgian city, crime had instead become endemic to party organizations, which thieved from state funds. Astonishingly, these labor and ideological shortcomings were prevalent despite Khrushchev's anti-parasite labor campaign, which

¹⁰⁰ RGANI f. 5, op. 31, d. 198, ll. 32-44.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Suny, *Revenge of the Past*, 122.

¹⁰³ RGANI f. 5, op. 31, d. 198, ll. 79-82.

commenced in 1961 to punish people not participating in “socially useful work” or who led a way of life deemed “anti-social” in the USSR.

On the 50th anniversary of the USSR, Brezhnev thus underscored the need to “intensify work on internationalist upbringing,” or *vospitanie*, and republican leadership also stressed the issue. The 24th and 25th party congresses in 1971 and 1976 brought resolutions that put “patriotic and international education” at the center of attention of the party apparatus, including in regional committees, city committees, district committees and university party committees (partkom) of universities.¹⁰⁴ The First Secretary of the Uzbekistan Communist Party, Sharaf Rashidov, in turn, pledged to address the “lax organization of atheistic work and the indifferent attitude of a number of party, Soviet and public organizations toward religion” in 1973.¹⁰⁵ Following Khrushchev’s anti-religious campaign (1959-64), the party approached religion with coalescing “hard and moderate lines.”¹⁰⁶ In Central Asia, Eren Tasar points out, the “gradual devolution of power from the center to the republics” in the late Soviet period sometimes resulted in “Janus-faced” official condemnation of “unregistered” or illegal religious affairs. Rashidov’s statement, however, came a few years after nationalist tensions resulted in mass riots in Tashkent in which people perceived of as Russian and women dressed in European attire were targeted. Both the Uzbek and the USSR Central Committee, however, only officially recognized the unrest as “hooliganism.”

Yet Rashidov’s statement now admitted that broader social problems in the republic existed. He wrote that “money-grubbing, bribery, parasitism, slander, anonymous letters [likely

¹⁰⁴ Vladimir Emel’ianovich Naumenko, “Deiatel’nost’ Checheno-Ingushskoi oblastnoi partiinoi organizatsii po internatsional’nomu vospitaniiu trudiashchikhsia (1959-1971gg).” Ph.D. Dissertation, Dagestan Friendship of Peoples University (Makhachkala: 1984), 165-174.

¹⁰⁵ Sh. R. Rashidov, “Raise Ideological Work to the Level of the Party’s Requirements Today,” *Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 25, no. 11, (April 11, 1973): 13-15.

¹⁰⁶ Eren Tasar, *Soviet and Muslim: The Institutionalization of Islam in Central Asia* (New York: Oxford University, 2017), 298-305.

those of a nationalist or threatening nature], drunkenness, etc., still make themselves felt frequently.”¹⁰⁷ Rashidov also acknowledged that “the number of people who observe religious rites” was increasing in a number of districts, cities, and provinces, including Tashkent. Rashidov, ostensibly concerned, wrote that religious customs “engender an incorrect attitude toward women and crimes denigrating their honor and dignity” that sometimes leads to “grave consequences.” Young people in the republic, Rashidov wrote, were “insufficiently aware of their public duty” and they “violated the rules of socialist communal living and Soviet laws and even commit crimes.” All this, Rashidov concluded, “indicates serious lapses in our ideological work among young people.” Indeed, citing corruption, crime, and rising nationalism, diasporic and minority communities in various southern republics reported tensions and sometimes violence in the late Soviet period as the friction between nationalization and centralization—the paradoxical modes of Soviet internationalism—mounted. This friction, rather than resolving dialectically as Soviet policy intended, began to show warning signs of a deeper rupture.

Vocalizing National Tensions in the Brezhnev Period: Conflicts in the USSR’s Southern Tier between Titular Nationals and the Soviet “First of Equals”

Reports of nationalist extremism and violence, according to party and government reports and letters, became heated in parts of the USSR’s southern tier by the late 1960s. They reached a fever pitch in Uzbekistan in 1969, where they primarily targeted people perceived of as Russian, the ostensibly revered Soviet “elder brother” in the “brotherhood of nations.” Reportedly, unrest in Tashkent lasted for days, from April 4-12th of 1969, after a group of Uzbek youth fought with Russians in Tashkent near the stadium Pakhtakor following a soccer match in which Uzbeks lost to Minsk, the Belorussian capital.¹⁰⁸ Nationalist posters appeared. The turmoil then spread

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ I have not found any published sources that account for the 1969 unrest in Tashkent, which I believe is indicative of the immense lacuna in Soviet historiography on nationality policy in the late Soviet period. In addition to archival

throughout Tashkent. According to witnesses, women dressed in European attire were attacked throughout the city.¹⁰⁹ Crowds were heard yelling, “beat the Russians!”¹¹⁰ Women were dragged to the ground, beaten, and their clothes were ripped off. The militia struggled to quell the unrest. To restore order, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, using special military equipment, arrested about a thousand people. Following the April events, the local police (*militsia*) was purged (as they had been unable to quell the unrest and witnesses reported that some had abetted the rioters). Another major episode of nationalist unrest, however, repeated in September. Once again, the violence and anti-Russian demonstrations began at the Pakhtakor stadium following a game and then spread into the city, where many people perceived of as Russians on the streets and in public transport were targeted and beaten.

Russians and Russian speakers undoubtedly had a privileged position in the USSR after the late 1930s, yet their complaints of widespread violence and discrimination were still ignored by central authorities who entrusted republican authorities to handle nationality issues. Despite the party’s attempts to conceal the affair, letters continued to report on the conflict, which finally prompted a special commission investigation under the direction of the USSR’s Deputy Prosecutor General Gusev in 1974.¹¹¹ The Commission identified nationalist structures (working in opposition to Rashidov) in the republic in which some members of the Uzbek Central Committee, Presidium, and Supreme Court were enmeshed. The Chairman of the Supreme

sources (and an oral interview) that recount the events, the following online article has been helpful. More research is needed to understand the 1969 episodes and their consequences. ““Russkie—von!”: pochemy proizoshli besporiadki v 1969 gody v Tashkente,” *Russkaia Semerka*. Sep. 16th, 2018.

¹⁰⁹ These attacks may also have targeted non-traditionally dressed Uzbek women. After independence, intra-group tensions between groups embracing a more modern, secular state and those favoring an Islamic revival made Uzbeks dressed *both* traditionally and in the “Russian fashion” targets of harassment. David Abramson, “Engendering Citizenship in Postcommunist Uzbekistan,” Kathleen Kuehast and Carol Nechemias, eds. *Post-Soviet Women Encountering Transition: Nation Building, Economic Survival, and Civic Activism* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 2004), 65-84.

¹¹⁰ ““Russkie—von!”” *Russkaia Semerka*.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

Court, the Commission determined, had terminated cases against detained rioters. He was sentenced to ten years in jail. Due to the extent of the problem, the party chose not to publicize the issue, though it removed those guilty from their posts. The appeals of citizens concerned with the conflict amid reports of continued titular nationalism and violence—years after the 1969 unrest—thus finally forced central authorities to intervene.

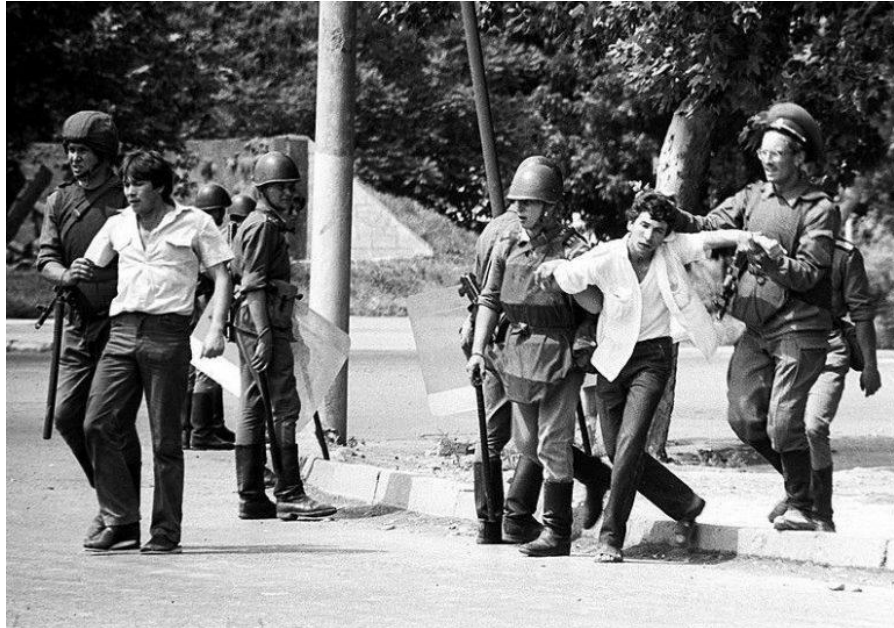


Figure 1. A photo of some detained rioters during the 1969 Tashkent unrest (listed as public domain by *Russkaia Semerka*)

Why was 1969 a particularly explosive year in Tashkent? And why were there reports of rising nationalist tensions elsewhere in the southern tier by the late 1960s? This was likely due to both the aforementioned internal issues in the USSR's south that left many unemployed, underemployed, or otherwise missing opportunities in "their" republic even as labor was recruited (from mainly European parts of the USSR), as well as external, or international factors. While the USSR was still grappling with the fallout of its invasion of Czechoslovakia, which transpired a year prior, a border conflict broke out between China and Russia, two nuclear

powers, in March over the fate of two small islands on the Ussuri River in the Far East.¹¹² The conflict, which took place at the climax of China's Cultural Revolution, was a culmination of the deteriorating relationship between the two countries (and tensions over the disputed territories) that transpired after Stalin's death—and it raised serious fears about war.

Adding to the destabilization in the city was a devastating earthquake in 1966, which left 300,000 Tashkenters homeless, and threatened the basic needs of many when sewage and water pipes broke. The earthquake, and its enduring toll, prompted intensified migration to Tashkent as workers from across the USSR, who largely came from the Slavic republics, assisted in various rebuilding efforts.¹¹³ Many stayed on, swelling the numbers of external laborers in Uzbekistan and its capital. Soviet officials used the country-wide efforts to reconstruct the city (and further its Sovietization) following the quake to commemorate the feats of socialist internationalism. The earthquake indeed provoked moments of ostensibly sincere Soviet solidarity. Tashkent children were sent to summer camps and distant relatives across the USSR to shield them from various dangers, while “‘moral support’ flowed into the city.” Residents of European parts of the USSR, propagandists noted, were now “repaying their wartime debt to Tashkenters” who had cared for refugees from the western Soviet Union during the 1940s. Ironically, however, the earthquake, which was used to showcase Tashkent's internationalism, contributed to national tensions that broke out into violence a few years later.

On September 25, 1969, the USSR Central Committee reported receiving letters describing worsening nationalist tensions and violence in Uzbekistan, which took on a particular

¹¹² Scholars have debated the implications of the 1969 Sino-Soviet conflict on Cold War politics, but less is known on the influence of the conflict at the everyday level in the USSR. See Y. Kuisong, “The Sino-Soviet Border Clash of 1969: From Zhenbao Island to Sino-American Rapprochement,” *Cold War History* 1, no. 1 (August 2000): 21-52.

¹¹³ Paul Stronski, *Tashkent: Forging a Soviet City, 1930-1966* (Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh, 2010), 250-256.

anti-Russian character.¹¹⁴ The USSR Central Committee confirmed that a “group of youths molested, beat up, and tore off the clothes” of women in an act of “cynical hooligan[ism]” in Tashkent in April. It stopped short of labeling the crimes nationalism (or that Russians, non-Uzbeks, or a specified groups were targeted), and it referred the matter to the Uzbek Central Committee, which noted that guilty persons were arrested and put on trial. Despite reports that republican and local authorities did little to address such problems, the USSR Central Committee continued to relegate the matter to the republics. It was not until 1974, several years later, that the special commission was sent from Moscow to investigate the issue.

Why is the focus on non-Uzbek perspectives and state reports on the 1969 conflict here valid? Simply put, this analysis relies upon complaints about nationalism and nationality policy that had been shuffled to central authorities, and which, unfortunately, do not include Uzbek perspectives on the 1969 events. More research is needed to understand the implications (and everyday realities) of the conflict. To my knowledge, it has never been previously discussed in western historical scholarship. This project, on a broader scale, also privileges extraterritorial and nontitular voices to complicate dominate narratives on Soviet nationality policy that have been centered on (early) Soviet nation-building, national movements, and state histories of the Soviet collapse.¹¹⁵ Years prior to the emergence of perestroika-era national movements and mass flight from the southern tier, extraterritorial and nontitular peoples were reporting (and, in some cases,

¹¹⁴ RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 407, ll. 54-56.

¹¹⁵ Some representative key works include, Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Revenge of the Past*, Yuri Slezkine, “The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism,” *Slavic Review* 53, no. 2 (1994): 414–52, Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (New York: 2001). See also Mark Bessinger’s *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State* (New York, 2002), Stephen Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse 1970-2000* (New York: 2001). As previously discussed, scholars have recently begun to complicate the scholarship on Soviet nationality policy by focusing on extraterritorial and nontitular histories, and on other works that have concentrated on Soviet development, migration, intermarriage, and Soviet identity.

anticipating), problems associated with strengthening republican autonomy and eased central control that would broaden and intensify in later years.

Both collective and individual letters adamantly reported breaches in socialist practices with the intent that central authorities would intervene to end titular favoritism, corruption, and nationalism. These assertions were grounded in the practices and rhetoric of internationalism, which taught Soviet citizens that national animosities were evidence of “extremism” that threatened the Soviet project, and that all nations had the right to equal protection under the law. Many letters blamed the increased autonomy of titular authorities for widespread issues, and some claimed that it had worsened under Brezhnev. Letters indicated that Uzbeks, the titular people, began to call for sovereignty and independence from the USSR. According to these letters, such anti-Soviet sentiments made Russians, as the “first among equals” in the Soviet Union, a particular target.

Letters, including that of the collective introduced at the beginning of the chapter, reported that the border conflict worsened national tensions in the USSR’s southern tier. One anonymous letter reported nationalist anti-Russian and anti-Soviet demonstrations in April of 1969 in various parts of Uzbekistan.¹¹⁶ The letter alleged that a group of youths in different locations in Uzbekistan took to the streets to demonstrate against the presence of Russians in the republic with a slogan that read: “Get the Russian colonialists out of Uzbekistan, we are for Mao Zedong.” Given the USSR’s anti-imperial stance and anxieties over the breakout of war, the alleged nationalist slogan was deeply anti-Soviet. The letter’s author was therefore disappointed with the Central Committee of Uzbekistan’s reaction to such evidently nationalist demonstrations, which it labeled only as hooliganism. The letter pleaded, “why is the Central

¹¹⁶ RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 407, ll. 54-56.

Committee bureau so indifferent?” Frustrated with the situation, the author criticized the republic’s leadership. “The fish stinks from the head,” the anonymous author claimed, blaming Rashidov for allowing overt nationalism in the republic. The author, furthermore, accused Rashidov of corruption, nationalism, nepotism, and the poor implementation of socialist practices. “There is clearly a problem with political and educational work in the republic,” the author concluded, describing widespread problems and fears.

The indifference of local and regional authorities to nation-based discrimination or violence was a frequent complaint. Amid the breakout of mass violent conflict during perestroika, discussed in the next chapter, this problem, and complaints regarding it, would deepen. “There was no such disgrace, there was no nationalism” during Khrushchev, one woman from Tashkent claimed on August 21.¹¹⁷ During an anti-Soviet demonstration, girls were mocked, raped, and being killed, her letter reported, describing the April 1969 unrest. The authorities, she claimed, only responded with a slap on the wrist for the perpetrators. The letter similarly contended that nationalism, and along with it, corruption, and crime, in the republic had worsened under Brezhnev, which made life “unfair” for working people. She begged for party leaders to “intervene in the internal affairs of the city” to give a “fierce rebuff to scoundrels [*negodiai*], hooligans, brutes [*khamy*], murderers, thieves, who appear more and more every day,” which she blamed on “the unfair and incorrect leadership of local authorities and progressively strong nationalism.” The author claimed that the local government “took no action,” writing “the entire militia [police force] is in their hands,” alleging that they only attempted to protect “their own.” When Uzbeks are involved in a fight, she claimed, the Uzbek *militsiia* (police) doesn’t attempt to figure out who was wronged. They “let their own Uzbeks

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 66-70.

go” while restraining Russians (*skruchivaet russkikh rebiat*). Uzbeks, the author alleged, “have more and more hatred for other nations.” The author proclaimed the following could be heard among Uzbeks: “we will paint all the walls with the blood of Russians” and “in case of war with China, we will immediately move to the side of China.” The letter alleged that recently Uzbeks “started to behave like fascists.” In making such claims, however, the author also stooped to discriminatory language by labeling all Uzbeks as conniving, untalented, anti-Soviet, and unequipped for leadership positions in various industries— i.e., as inherently backward. She wrote, “by the time an Uzbek child has learned to walk he is already speculating.”

Extraterritorial Russians pushed for central oversight after the April 1969 events and some requested, as a final measure, for relocation to Russia. The “Moscow leadership apparently decided to sacrifice all Russians in Uzbekistan to Uzbeks,” an anonymous collective letter from August 27, 1969, despaired, begging “how can you live in Uzbekistan in this situation?” The collective demanded major reforms in Uzbekistan’s party leadership and that administrative bodies include more Russians, or, they declared, “take all Russians to Russia and give us apartments for housing.”¹¹⁸ It is not possible to protect yourself with the law,” the collective claimed, since “all the authorities,” including district committees, district executive committees, prosecutors’ offices, and other organizations consisted of Uzbeks. The collective letter sent to Brezhnev and the USSR Central Committee reported that Russians faced nationalist discrimination and violence in Uzbekistan. The collective asserted that Russians heard threats like, “the time for Russians will come. We will water the Uzbek land with blood.” The collective declared that Uzbeks “welcome Mao and unrest, like in Czechoslovakia.” ““Russians, Belorussians, and Ukrainians are beaten even in broad daylight. Even before our eyes,” another

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 74-75.

collective letter reported.¹¹⁹ “These are what kind of nationalists they are,” the letter stated, “not only can you not build communism with them, but they don't have socialism either.” “Neither the militia, nor the local authorities,” the letter alleged, “take any measures, on the contrary, they cover it all from the bottom to the top.” The authors wrote in anguish. Remarkably, the letter compared the situation of Slavs in Uzbekistan—more often Russian speaking groups who enjoyed privileges across the USSR—to the treatment of Black minorities in the US.

In a similar tone to the aforementioned letters, the collective of Communists introduced at the beginning of the chapter claimed that Chinese anti-Soviet provocations had worsened titular nationalism in Kazakhstan and Georgia in addition to Uzbekistan.¹²⁰ “In recent times, as in no other times, all party life has been ignored, the party's sense of responsibility has been lost,” they wrote. Most Russians, they claimed, were sent to these republics by the party, but now they are being “expelled” from various institutions and party and Soviet bodies. “Drastic measures are needed,” they claimed, citing various party principles, like internationalism, and the need for national cohesion. “Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Georgia have become intolerant. Why is that? Why can't the politburo, the party, find the strength to put everything in its place?” they beseeched. Apparently, the Sino-Soviet border conflict also spread unrest to Moldova. The First Secretary of Moldova, Ivan Bodiul, had reported years earlier, in 1966, that “Mao Zedong's statements about the occupation of a number of foreign territories” had contributed to the strengthening of “nationalist tendencies” in Moldova.¹²¹ One collective letter from six Communists there complained that nationalism had become a “mass phenomenon” in Moldova that had “penetrated

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 76.

¹²⁰ RGANI f. 100. op. 5., d. 407, ll. 77-79.

¹²¹ “Sovetskaia Moldaviia v 60-kh godakh: konflikt TsK KPM I intelligentsia,” Informatsionno-analiticheskii portal AVA.MD. August 9th, 2013. <https://ava.md/2013/08/09/sovetskaya-moldaviya-v-60-h-godah-konflikt/> Accessed September 22, 2022.

into the working and service environment” and reflected a “hatred of the Russian and Ukrainian people.”¹²² In response to concerns about rising nationalism, the Central Committee of Moldova increased internationalist *vospitanie* among youth, party organizations, and cultural and public education workers—at the district, regional, and republican level.¹²³

Some feared that the unrest in Uzbekistan would continue to enflame nationalist tensions. One ethnic Russian from northern Kazakhstan (where Russians had a long history of settlement in addition to Soviet development campaigns like the Virgin Lands) wrote in apprehension over the unrest in neighboring Uzbekistan in 1970. “V.I. Lenin,” wrote the author, who complained of rising titular nationalism in Kazakhstan, would “not allow nationalism to grow, especially since an example of emerging nationalism has already been given by the Uzbeks.”¹²⁴ A self-proclaimed member of Uzbekistan’s Central Committee also felt obliged to “urgently signal about the serious situation in Tashkent” in 1971 fearing that it would (again) turn into a “serious anti-Russian conflict.”¹²⁵ The anonymous letter stated that the “beating of Russians,” the “bullying of Russian girls,” and demonstrations against Russians were “barely suspended and temporarily hushed up” in 1969. Writing a couple of years later, but prior to the investigation conducted by Moscow’s special commission, the author claimed that tensions “have grown into a deaf universal dislike of the Russians, which at the slightest skirmish spills out.” The author blamed this state-of-affairs on the “anti-party style” and corruption on the part of Rashidov and the leadership of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan. “There has never been such a tense situation in Tashkent,” the author wrote, “A very dangerous situation!”

¹²² RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 407, ll. 1-6.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 405, ll. 7-8 (letters on the CPSU’s nationality policy, January 1966-April 1972).

¹²⁵ RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 406, ll. 80-82 (letters on non-compliance with the provisions of the national policy in the selection and placement of personnel, April 1966-August 1987).

In addition to the 1969 unrest, some ethnic Russians were driven to leave Tashkent Oblast when they felt nationalist tensions began to affect them more at the everyday level. Arkadii moved to Tashkent as a child when his father, an engineer, was placed in Tashkent Oblast' to work on constructing the city's metro.¹²⁶ When they first arrived, they lived in a dormitory with engineers who had come from across the USSR. "It was a very active time of building Tashkent," he recalled, citing the earthquake. Arkadii enjoyed his upbringing in Tashkent, and, for the most part, lived harmoniously with his Uzbek neighbors who often invited him to weddings, and took care of him when his parents were away at work. National tensions, however, eventually prompted his family to leave, despite the lifestyle they, for the most part, enjoyed. The Russian speaking population, he noted, had to be protected at the stadium after nationalist skirmishes broke out in the city (he cited the early 1970s, but was likely referring to the 1969 events). His family were of the groups harbored at the stadium, an event his mother would recall to him, as he had been just a small child when it occurred.

Later, alleged discrimination at the hands of authorities motivated his family to move. One evening, his father called the police with a group of his engineering friends to complain about a taxi driver who allegedly inflated the cost of a ride from 1 to 5 rubles.¹²⁷ Supposedly, instead of resolving or mediating the issue with the taxi driver, the police, who were all Uzbek, arrested Arkadii's father and his friends. Citing a public disturbance, the judge was going to sentence Arkadii's father to 15 days in jail, but his mother provided a bribe (*na ruku*) to set him free. The incident rattled his father who was determined to return to Russia afterward. Supposed nation-based discrimination similarly encouraged one self-identified ethnic Russian from the city of Andizhan in Uzbekistan to complain to the state in February 1980. "Local leaders do

¹²⁶ Oral interview with author. November 2021.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

everything to discriminate against Russians,” the letter bemoaned, claiming “intolerant, unequal conditions.” The author warned that the (consequent) “departure of the European population from Central Asia” was “fraught with terrible and hard to determine consequences.”¹²⁸ The letter thus suggested that the flight of Russian speakers would only strengthen or cement nationalism in Uzbekistan and that it, therefore, seriously threatened the Soviet project.

In contrast to the 1969 Tashkent unrest, which involved tensions over privileged urban space and the arrival of newcomers, some extraterritorial Russians who lived in rural areas for generations in other parts of the USSR’s southern tier also cited increased national animosities, violence, and corrupt local authorities by the late 1960s. “In recent years, it has become impossible for the Russian people to live among Armenians,” a 1966 petition from the village of Fioletovo in the Gugarskii region of Armenia stated. “Russians have been and are being subjected to all kinds of bullying and various kinds of outrages in the republic’s center [Erevan], but now they have begun to spread to the outskirts,” the letter expounded.¹²⁹ The petition, signed by 41 residents following a village meeting, stated that Russians had lived in this “remote region” of Armenia for generations, as they were exiled there by the Tsarist government (when religious sects were expelled to the empire’s peripheries).¹³⁰ The intent of these actions against Russians was to “get rid of the Russian people from the territory of Armenia,” the petition claimed. The collective described violence, murder, and intimidation of the village’s residents, including the murder of a disabled veteran of the Great Patriotic War whose body was “thrown” back into the village at night. Another resident, the petitioners claimed, was poisoned, while a

¹²⁸ RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 422, ll. 1-2.

¹²⁹ RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 439, ll. 20-27 (letters from citizens of various nationalities demanding recognition of their nation, language, culture).

¹³⁰ On the imperial exile of religious sects to the Caucasus, see Nicholas B. Breyfogle, *Heretics and Colonizers: Forging Russia’s Empire in the South Caucasus* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2005).

third, a nineteen-year-old boy, was executed in the neighboring Armenian village Gamzachiman (present day Margaovit). The letter described that Armenians from Gamzachiman armed with knives demanded to take two Russian girls one evening in January 1966, after which they began to hit residents passing along the street with their car and threatening to “destroy Russians by any means.” Moreover, the petitioners claimed, people on the bus traveling through the village regularly get out to “beat up” Russians. “We no longer risk going out at night and driving to Kirovakan [the nearest city; present day Vanadzor].”

The local authorities, they proclaimed, also ignored the problems. “We appeal to the Central Government to send a special commission to thoroughly analyze this issue,” they pleaded.¹³¹ They also sought an opportunity to leave for Russia. “It is impossible for us to stay here any longer,” they concluded. A separate collective petition from the village signed by 28 people enumerated ten cases that had threatened the lives of the villagers.¹³² Some instances allegedly involved beatings that led to hospitalization, other violent crimes, several different murders, intimidations, and near-death experiences—without consequences for the perpetrators. Their fears of local and regional authorities were so intense that the collective pleaded for central authorities to “destroy” the letter, writing that if it ended up in their hands, “we won’t be able to live and we do not know where to run.”

The Fioletovo residents’ petitions were relegated to the Armenian Central Committee (whose First Secretary was removed a year prior for permitting national sentiments), however, and they were not taken up by the USSR Central Committee. The former, though, still conducted a review (*proverka*) in response to the letter and, remarkably, confirmed breaches in internationalist practices. The villages of Fioletovo and Gamzachiman, it determined, “do not

¹³¹ RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 439, ll. 20-27.

¹³² Ibid., 27-28

carry out targeted measures for the international education [*vospitanie*] of the population, they do not take measures to strengthen public order, as a result of which some people commit antisocial acts.” The Central Committee thus placed part of the blame on the village of Fioletovo. Its residents, it claimed, were “strongly influenced by religious sects,” which insinuated that the lack of adherence to socialist morality in both villages influenced the conflict. Still, the Central Committee concluded that the district did not “react promptly enough” to the crimes committed by individual residents of the village of Gamzachiman and that they showed “unjustified slowness in investigating” these actions as a result of which a resident of the village of Fioletovo died. It instructed the Prosecutor’s Office of the Republic to “thoroughly investigate” the death of one of the village’s residents (though several had been reported) and to “take measures to bring the perpetrators to justice.” The Central Committee also removed the Secretary of Party and Organizational Work of the state farms of both villages from their positions.

The Central Committee confirmed, in essence, that the district authorities failed to properly address serious and persistent violent crimes. Though it attributed the violence to “hooligan actions,” or unruliness, it obliged the district to “take measures to decisively improve international education [*vospitanie*].”¹³³ By stressing the need for international *vospitanie*, the Central Committee implied that national tensions were present and that they did, in fact, play some role in the conflict. Though petitioners in other parts of the southern tier claimed that social tensions were fueled by the titular population’s anti-Soviet sentiments, the state determinately upheld or expanded internationalist *vospitanie* as the solution to nationality-based conflict. From the official state perspective, nationalist tensions and overt nationalism writ large *were*

¹³³ Ibid.

symptomatic of anti-Soviet attitudes, but they were caused by ignorance or wayward adherence to “backward” ideas and simply required socialist consciousness raising to resolve.

Internationalist Advocates: Border and Deported Communities in the Late Soviet Southern Tier

Collective and individual letters also reported nationalist tensions between titular majorities and border and deported communities by the late Soviet period. When Soviet nationality policy faded out the smallest ethno-territories by the late 1930s, some populations who were never integrated into “their” neighboring republics, like Tajiks in Uzbekistan, were native to the regions in which they resided. After the late 1930s, however, they ironically lived as extraterritorial communities in another group’s nationalizing titular territory whose claim to that status—and its various privileges—relied on indigeneity. In contrast to nontitular minorities who did not have “home” territories, communities with “[k]in republic relations” could have privileges like higher recognition of their complaints, as well as inspiration and support from their kin republic, and the space to organize.¹³⁴ Many continued to report titular nationalism, and often, coerced assimilation despite their still privileged status as one of the USSR’s principal titular nationalities. Irrespective of their nationality or the presence of a “home” republic, however, Soviet citizens were guaranteed national rights, which included that of economic, cultural, social, and political equality.¹³⁵ The centrality of internationalism to the Soviet *raison d’être* and to communism in general, made the concerns that extraterritorial and nontitular communities had vis-à-vis titular nationalism legitimate, and it fueled their demands for central intervention. Such internationalist-inspired advocacy was also more permissible by the late Soviet period.

¹³⁴ Goff, “‘Why not love our language and our culture?’ 27-44.

¹³⁵ See Goff, *Nested Nationalism*.

In most cases, central organs trusted republican authorities to objectively review incidents reporting titular nationalism, which gave titular authorities considerable power. When serious complaints were sent to central organs, in almost all cases, the problem was relegated to republican authorities who then reported on the issue to central authorities. One may argue that the involvement of central organs in the 1969 Tashkent unrest is evidence that Russians were somehow more protected by central authorities. However, it is difficult to compare state responses to reports of mass violence toward Russians with other complaints of titular nationalism in the late Soviet southern tier. Republican authority over interethnic affairs is even more evident in the fact that, despite continued violence and reports of nationalist tensions and discrimination in Tashkent, it took years before central authorities conducted their own investigation.

Letters complained about rising titular nationalism by citing internationalism and socialist principles, which Brezhnev promoted amid the struggle to reign in growing titular favoritism, corruption, and the empowerment of titular republics. The USSR was founded on the guarantee of equal rights (which were continually trumpeted by Soviet leaders), and they motivated the vocalization of—and mobilization for—national rights. In Samarkand, Uzbekistan, a historically diverse Islamic city along the Silk Road, an alleged “anti-nationalist group” of about 2000 people emerged in 1970 in response to the “Uzbekization (*obuzbechivaniia*)” of the native Tajik population. The group reportedly promoted the annexing of the Samarkand region to Tajikistan.¹³⁶ Though the Samarkand First Secretary discounted the group, and its alleged planned demonstrations, the issue continued to simmer, with numerous letters continuing to cite (coerced) assimilation of native Tajiks in Uzbekistan and the unfair incorporation of Samarkand

¹³⁶ RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 407, ll. 82-83.

within the Uzbek SSR.¹³⁷ In essence, they disputed Tajik primordialism in the territory—and Tajik claims, or right, to titular status there. One collective of 29 self-identified Tajiks wrote that since 1950, along with diminished linguistic cultural-linguistic resources, Tajiks were recorded as Uzbeks in passports against their wishes.¹³⁸ Another letter from self-identified Tajiks in Uzbekistan, similarly cited that they were listed as Uzbeks in their passports though they “speak only in the Tajik language.”¹³⁹ Since the statistics did not reflect the “true situation,” linguistic-cultural resources inadequately addressed the needs of the Tajik population of Uzbekistan, the collective letter complained.

Repressed peoples without claims to indigeneity also reported and contested titular nationalism and assimilation. Just days after Mikhail Gorbachev took office as General Secretary of the Soviet Union, the Armenian Central Committee reported receiving numerous letters and telegrams addressed to central organs complaining of persecution of Kurds and Kurd intellectuals in Azerbaijan.¹⁴⁰ Many Kurds fled to the Caucasus and other neighboring regions from Iran in the interwar period when their communities were “disrupted” by Reza Shah’s centralizing policies.¹⁴¹ The Soviet Caucasus also became a point of destination for Kurds from Turkey, where many were repressed both by the policies of the Young Turks who rose to power in the early twentieth century, and a reactive Kurdish national movement led by Shaikh Said. Toward the end of the 1930s, thousands of Kurds were deported from Armenia and Azerbaijan to Kazakhstan. Kurds who had settled in Nakhichevan, a territory in the region landlocked by

¹³⁷ In addition to the letters mentioned here, see RGANI f. 100, op.5, d. 422, ll. 55-69, ll. 29-46. On the allocation of Samarkand and Bukhara to Uzbekistan as a contentious issue since the early Soviet period, see Grigo Ubiria, *Soviet Nation-Building in Central Asia: The Making of the Kazakh and Uzbek Nations* (London: Routledge, 2016), 115-117, Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*, 71-72, Hirsch, *Empire of Nations*, 175-183.

¹³⁸ RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 439, ll. 53-57.

¹³⁹ RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 427, ll. 1-5.

¹⁴⁰ RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 408, ll. 41-42 (letters of citizens about the manifestations of nationalism in various republics of the USSR volume 2 1980-1987).

¹⁴¹ See Goff, *Nested Nationalism*, 34; 209-212.

Armenia but allocated to Azerbaijan as a constituent territory, were also relocated by Azeri authorities to interior parts of the republic. In 1959, one Kurd specialist and ethnographer condemned Azeri practices toward the repressed nation as particularly detrimental toward Kurds. In terms of national identification and resources, Kurds were comparatively worse off in Azerbaijan, where some in governing circles insisted that Kurds either did not know the Kurdish language or were actually just Azeris. Kurds in both Azerbaijan and Armenia, however, continued to face assimilation, especially in the USSR's final years.

Kurdish complaints indeed intensified in 1985 when V. M. Mustafaev, a Kurd, was fired from his post in the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Nakhichevan ASSR.¹⁴² One member of the Union of Writers and Journalists of the USSR petitioned on their behalf, writing that Kurds from both Azerbaijan and Armenia appealed to him claiming that Kurds were dismissed from leading positions in Nakhichevan ASSR, where there were attempts to “assimilate Kurds” and to “persecute those who complain.”¹⁴³ The author, who represented Kurd petitioners (and was likely a Kurd himself), stated, “this contradicts the ideas of the great Lenin on the national question.” “The nationalist trend in Nakhichevan has intensified, especially recently,” he continued, warning that it was “fraught with undesirable consequences.” Citing “discontent” among the Kurds of Armenia and Azerbaijan, he requested central authorities to authorize a special commission to investigate the matter. In response, the Central Committee of Armenia, stated that Mustafaev's dismissal was warranted. It instead authorized the party district committees and party organizations to conduct “extensive explanatory and educational [party] work” among the Kurd population in Armenia to “curb negative effects” of the cited national tensions. In other words, Kurd activists used Soviet internationalist principles to lobby for their

¹⁴² RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 408, ll. 41-43.

¹⁴³ RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 408, ll. 43.

right to national development, but the same logic was deployed by the republic to label these concerns as “negative” or “extremist.”

“The trend of chauvinism is growing” similarly reported six Azeri Communists from Georgia to Brezhnev in 1978, stating that “the work and issue of socialist internationalism” was “poorly organized” in the republic.¹⁴⁴ The group also complained of the lack of cultural and educational institutions and resources in the Azeri language in Georgia, and the dominance of Georgians in leadership positions even in certain regions where the Azeri population was larger. “The entire three hundred thousand army of the Azeri population in Georgia is outraged...the tide is growing. We will achieve our rights,” they forewarned. A few months earlier, a collective letter from Azeris in the city of Marneuli also complained that newly arrived Georgians from elsewhere in the republic had taken most of the leadership posts in the majority Azeri region in Georgia, including the position of the First Secretary of the Raikom (Regional Party Committee). “Local Azerbaijanis” had begun to leave to different cities of the Soviet Union due to discrimination against them—despite their demographic dominance in the region—the letter bemoaned.

“Is it even possible to build communism in this position?” they lamented, claiming that native Azeris in Georgia were not given the right to “flourish” equally, a necessary precondition for *sblizhenie*.¹⁴⁵ The letter begged for Brezhnev not to transfer the complaint to the Georgian authorities, but rather to send a commission from Moscow to investigate the issue. Georgian commissions, they complained, would only hide the facts. However, the Georgian Central Committee oversaw the case, against the wishes of the petitioners, though it reported back to the USSR’s Central Committee. The former stated that citizens from “other cities and districts of the

¹⁴⁴ RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 407, ll. 117-121.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

republic” were sent to fill leadership roles, especially in administrative organs, due to a lack of trained personnel in the Marneuli district. It ensured that “measures have been developed and are being implemented” to resolve the problem, including the training of local personnel.

With conviction in their internationalist rights, some determined groups who felt continually wronged proceeded to report persistent issues with titular nationalism. This perseverance, for instance, prompted central authorities to eventually intervene in the Tashkent affair. In Georgia, some unwavering Azeris resolute in achieving their rights, similarly continued to report breaches in internationalist practices—even when there were alleged attempts to silence them.¹⁴⁶ A few years later, a collective of 26 Azeris from the same Marneuli region in Georgia wrote to central organs that “no changes have taken place.”¹⁴⁷ They demanded the “blocking of national discrimination and national humiliation” and the restoration of their “constitutional rights.” Representatives from the region had appealed in person to the *priem* (reception) of the USSR Central Committee, though no measures had been taken, they claimed. Instead, members of the Central Committee of Georgia and its Council of Ministers—and allegedly Eduard Shevardadze himself, who visited the region—blamed the nationality personnel problem on the lack of qualified Azeris in the area. The Azeri representatives who petitioned in person in Moscow, the letter despaired, were now intimidated, and threatened by republican authorities, one of whom told them “If you don’t like it here, then the border to Azerbaijan is open, you can move there.” “These comrades and their families live in fear,” the letter expounded, noting that the representatives who appealed directly to Moscow were intimidated at work and by the local KGB. The letter pleaded for central authorities to investigate the issue. Once again, the petitioners claimed that Azeris from Georgia are forced to leave the region and the republic for

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 406, ll. 69-75.

work elsewhere in the USSR. “The workers of our district will not leave these issues without solutions and repercussions,” they asserted. It is unclear how, or if, the issue was further addressed.

Similarly, in post-Stalinist Azerbaijan, Georgian-Ingilo communities (generally categorized as an ethnographic group of the Georgian nation historically linked to the multiethnic Zaqatala region of the Russian empire annexed to the Azeri SSR in 1921 after some contention) increased grassroots efforts to secure their rights.¹⁴⁸ Azeri claims to the territory remained a point of tension between the Georgian and Azeri SSR. National leaders of the former even petitioned Stalin on behalf of Georgian-Ingilo communities when Azeri officials closed Georgian schools during World War II in the northern half of Azerbaijan where they were located. Agitations grew on a grassroots level in the Khrushchev era, becoming bolder and eventually coming to a head with republican authorities in the early 1960s when Georgian-Ingilo communities sent many complaints about the closure of Georgian-language schools and limited economic, political, and cultural resources. The Azerbaijan Ministry of Enlightenment (MinPros) issued a decree to provide additional support for Georgian-language schools and ensured the right of choosing the language of instruction. Yet, Georgian-Ingilo communities continued to petition republican and central authorities for further supports. In this case, after a decade of activism enabled under the Thaw, Georgian-Ingilo rights were addressed yet again in Azerbaijan. One petitioner claimed that Stalin’s *Marxism and the National Question* and the Soviet constitution inspired their engagement with the cause for Georgian-Ingilo national rights. He blamed local officials for transgression of national rights and “disloyalty to Soviet principles.”

¹⁴⁸ Goff, *Nested Nationalism*, 87-90. Goff, “‘Why not love our language and our culture?’ 27-44.

Like other petitioners, he was convinced that the center would intervene once they understood the offenses committed against his community.

In the post-Stalin period, deported or repressed peoples also activated movements to restore their rights; some like the Chechens and Ingush, used “letter campaigns, work stoppages, demonstrations, and unauthorized migrations” to demand the right to return to their historic homelands.¹⁴⁹ Indeed, Meskhetian Turks, Crimean Tatars, and Kurds (as we have already seen) whose homelands were never reinstated appealed to central organs for the restitution, or protection of, their rights. One 120 person “delegation” of Meskhetian Turks who wrote to Brezhnev in 1968 demanded that Brezhnev personally attend to their national issue, which they deemed “fair and legitimate before the party and the state.”¹⁵⁰ They claimed that 15 telegrams were sent with similar requests. In a collective letter from 1971, 73 Meskhetian Turks sent a repeat address to central organs from Fergana Oblast, Uzbekistan, the republic to which many had been deported to under Stalin.¹⁵¹ One of their activists, Anvar O., they claimed, was arrested in Azerbaijan. They begged for his release and for the right of return to their homeland. Not deterred, they continued their campaign for equality, writing: “we want our youth to be brought up in the spirit of internationalism.”

By the late Soviet period, internationalism—as a state concept and practice—enabled extraterritorial and nontitular communities to vocalize their problems with the USSR’s ethno-federal structure. By this time, titular populations (and most emphatically so, those at the republican level) had greater autonomy, and in Central Asia and the Caucasus, they were also more nationally consolidated. The same post-Stalinist mechanisms that fostered the growth of

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 407, ll. 17.

¹⁵¹ RGAN f. 100, op. 5, d. 407, ll. 91-92.

titular nationalism or made it more reportedly tangible when Moscow loosened its grip, also enabled and arguably necessitated the advocacy of other communities. Different extraterritorial and nontitular communities, some much more privileged than others, felt compelled to draw on internationalism and socialist rhetoric when tensions between nationalization and the USSR's overarching aims began to intensify in the late Soviet southern tier. Some complained of exclusionary and violent nationalism. Petitioners, however, were determined to receive the equal rights they were guaranteed under the Soviet constitution and socialist policy.

Soviet internationalism promised nations the right to develop. Even when their complaints went unresolved by republican or central authorities, or when they were allegedly hushed up or intimidated, petitioners also continued to believe in the validity of them under the practice, and aims, of Soviet internationalism. Khrushchev and Brezhnev attempted to promote Soviet cohesion and diminish local nationalism by encouraging internationalism and its end goals—despite leaving considerable power to republican authorities, especially in the management of interethnic relations. In other words, internationalism became more immediate and important to the legitimacy and security of extraterritorial and nontitular communities precisely when advocacy based on its principles became more accessible to petitioners. When national movements accelerated during perestroika, extraterritorial and nontitular communities would draw on these internationalist practices established over decades to demand central intervention, redress, or transfers.

TWO

“AS THE FOREST IS CHOPPED, THE CHIPS FLY”: PERESTROIKA, THE DECLINE OF SOVIET INTERNATIONALISM, AND THE PLIGHT OF EXTRATERRITORIAL AND NONTITULAR COMMUNITIES IN THE SOVIET SOUTHERN TIER

“We live in a time when everything is in motion,” Valentina Semenovna Shevchenko, the Deputy Prime Minister of the USSR Supreme Soviet, acknowledged in February of 1989.¹ In a span of five days, Shevchenko met with displaced peoples from Baku, Azerbaijan; Armenia, and later in the month, representatives of nontitular populations of Moldova, including the Gagauz people and Bulgarians in the *priem* (public reception) of the Supreme Soviet.² Taking an incredulous attitude toward some of their concerns, Shevchenko had told a group of 200 people, representing 250 families of Armenian “refugees” from Baku, who were still, technically, internally displaced, to stop “dramatizing the situation.” Instead, Shevchenko commanded that they return home to their place of origin, or that they seek refuge in “their” titular nation, Armenia. The Soviet Union’s capital, Shevchenko maintained, would not continue to harbor them.

Appalled by the cold reception, one of the migrants, Vladimir P., attempted to better define the issue at hand—they no longer had business in either nationalizing republic.³ Speaking on behalf of 250 displaced families, Vladimir responded that Shevchenko must not be aware that “Baku Armenians” were “a special ethnic group.”⁴ In continuing to make the case for the group of families to remain in Moscow and the RSFSR, Shevchenko argued that “many of them have

¹ GARF, f. R9654, op. 10, d., 369, ll. 157-167 (correspondence, proposals, and complaints from the citizens’ reception to deputy chairmen and members of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR).

² In February 1993, the Russia Federation would legally differentiate between “forced migrants” and “refugees.” Forced migrants would become the category claimed by those who could assume Russian citizenship. In this chapter, the terms are used contemporaneously (i.e., interchangeably). GARF, f. R-9654, op. 10, d. 369, l. 1-22.

³ Full names are not included to protect privacy.

⁴ GARF, f. R9654, op. 10, d. 369, ll. 10-22.

mixed [nationality] marriages, many do not know the Armenian language, do not know the Armenian culture.” Furthermore, their lives in Azerbaijan were still threatened, and they were concerned that their public complaints to the Supreme Soviet could be used as ammunition against them in the nationalizing republic. To explain the infeasibility of returning to nationalizing republics, Vladimir decried, “All my ancestors live [sic] in Russia, I was educated in Ukraine. I cannot live and work in Armenia. It is a mono-national Republic.”⁵

The petitioners received at the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet included “refugees” from emergent conflict zones, like the group of families from Baku, and extraterritorial and nontitular citizens from various republics concerned with intensifying titular nationalism and violence. The latter was epitomized by violent mass conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, a majority Armenian territory in Azerbaijan, that began in 1988. Citing nationalism unchecked by party and state bodies of the republic, a group of workers in a self-declared “internationalist” labor collective from Lithuania, for instance, beseeched Shevchenko for transfer to Russia.⁶ The mixed nationality collective consisted of 28 members of Belorussian, Ukrainian, Russian, Kazakh, and Bashkir nationalities, some of whom were in mixed families with Lithuanians. “What if there is another Karabakh?” they begged, in reference to the nationalist tensions in the Caucasus that exploded into violence. When Shevchenko denied their petition to relocate, they despaired, “We, who considered ourselves full members of a large family of Soviet peoples, have turned into ‘migrants,’ ‘aliens (*inorodtsy*),’ people without a clan and tribe.”

Mikhail Gorbachev’s liberalizing perestroika and glasnost’ reforms inadvertently accelerated titular nationalism. Hundreds of thousands became threatened, intimidated, or

⁵ By 1989, Armenia was the most nationally consolidated republic. see Barbara A. Anderson and Brian D. Silver. “Demographic Sources of the Changing Ethnic Composition of the Soviet Union,” *Population and Development Review* 15, no. 4 (1989), 628-635.

⁶ GARF, f. R9654, op. 10, d. 369, ll. 157-167.

anxious as conflicts erupted over territory, sovereignty, and state languages. Many Soviet citizens living outside of “their own” territories or without one, regardless of their background, had come to rely on all-Union ideologies and practices, like Soviet internationalism. The latter moderated nationalism, it encouraged multiculturalism, and it promoted the bridging of Soviet nations into one Soviet *narod* (people). Internationalism and all-Union structures, like the Soviet constitution, also confirmed the equal rights of Soviet nations, including cultural, social, and political national rights, throughout the ethno-federal space. Soviet internationalism, as a centralizing concept and practice, legitimated and safeguarded the presence of extraterritorial and nontitular communities across the USSR’s ethno-federal space. The USSR thus enacted contradictory programs: it prioritized the national development of titular nationals, and it sponsored overarching central structures that promoted multiculturalism, the Soviet identity, interethnic marriage, and movement across the Union. In the postwar period, these systems increasingly came into conflict in the USSR’s southern tier when growing republican autonomy and national consolidation clashed with policies that allowed for the “flourishing” of all nations and that encouraged their “merging” and “drawing together.”

The increased autonomy of republics evoked a slew of concerns from extraterritorial and nontitular groups beginning in the late 1960s, but it was the decline of the Soviet center in the USSR’s final years that would throw many of these communities into crisis. Each community, collective, family, and individual had their own unique encounter with the problems that ensued, or intensified, since perestroika. Precipitous economic decline and, eventually, the loss of one’s conceptual homeland—the USSR—played heavily on the psyche of many former Soviet citizens,

as some works have begun to show.⁷ Extraterritorial and nontitular communities, however, had to confront particular challenges with the emergence of national movements.

This chapter brings to focus the shared anxieties and lived experiences of the approximately one out of five Soviet citizens who by 1989 lived outside of their constituent ethnic territories or did not have one. Their collective voices and concerns vis-à-vis titular nationalism and violence have largely been overshadowed by historical narratives that have focused on national movements or state perspectives of the Soviet collapse.⁸ Mark Beissinger, for instance, concentrated on the patterns of nationalist mobilization in connection to the collapse of the USSR. He argued that the “mobilizational cycle” began sometime in the summer of 1987 when “nascent nationalist movements grew regularized and began to influence one another.”⁹ Many extraterritorial and nontitular peoples also mobilized, however, and their movements in response to titular nationalism and violence were similarly shaped by the experiences of others. Sharing common concerns, for instance, they paid attention to the vulnerable position of extraterritorial and nontitular groups more persistently targeted by titular nationalism and violence, and some united in collective action to appeal for central intervention, sometimes on the behalf of others. Often “ethnic” violence enveloped other groups who were not the main targets of titular nationalism and violence. Accelerated nationalism was equally hard on members of mixed families, some of whom faced harassment and family separation. Others, determined to stay in their places of origin, collectively organized to challenge growing titular

⁷ See Svetlana Alexievich, *Secondhand Time: The Last of the Soviets* (New York: Random House, 2017).

⁸ For examples of key works, see Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union*. (Stanford: Stanford University, 1993), Mark R. Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State* (New York: Cambridge University, 2002). Beissinger’s work mentions “Russophone minorities,” but does not focus on their voices and experiences during perestroika. See also Stephen Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse 1970-2000* (New York: 2001), Vladislav M. Zubok, *Collapse: The Fall of the Soviet Union* (New Haven: Yale, 2021).

⁹ Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization*, 74.

nationalism and violence. Some, even after becoming Soviet “refugees,” made last ditch attempts to push for their rights at Soviet citizens.

This chapter relies on archival letters and oral interviews to concentrate on the extraterritorial and nontitular response to titular nationalism and violence across the USSR’s southern tier, where the most extensive conflicts broke out amid the USSR’s demise.¹⁰ These included: the Alma-Ata 1986 demonstrations; the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh that culminated in the Sumgait and Baku pogroms in Azerbaijan (1988-1989), and interrelatedly, ethnic cleansing in Armenia; the April 1989 demonstrations in Tbilisi, Georgia; the Fergana Valley Massacre in Uzbekistan in June 1989; the Novyi Uzen riots in Kazakhstan that transpired later in June of the same year; and the Dushanbe Riots of February 1990. Extraterritorial and nontitular voices and experiences surrounding these conflicts reveal a major reckoning between the two contradicting aspects of Soviet nationality policy: nationalization, on one end; and the centralizing mechanisms upholding the Soviet project, on the other. While the former primarily supported titular elites, languages, and cultures, the latter promoted the Soviet identity, the Russian language, all-Union projects and enterprises, and other shared Soviet rights and experiences. Groups living outside of or without “their own” territories included Russian speakers of diverse backgrounds residing in cosmopolitan Soviet capitals, but they also encompassed native minorities, like nontitular groups with no “home” territory (e.g. Lezgins) and border populations not consolidated into their “own” republics or autonomous territory (e.g. Tajiks in Uzbekistan); communities who lived outside of “their own” ethnic territories with colonial ties who considered Russia their historic homeland (e.g. Dukhobors in Georgia); and

¹⁰ As previously discussed, I define the “southern tier” as the region that saw a general trend of out-migration in the late Soviet period (by the 1970s), in addition to, generally, titular growth, a manual labor surplus, and national consolidation. These late Soviet trends are broadly applicable to Central Asia and Kazakhstan, the Southern Caucasus, the Northern Caucasus, and Moldova, though, of course, there were regional variations.

members of deported nations who did not “return” to reinstated ethno-territories or who were perpetually denied them (e.g. Meskhetian Turks). These categories are not meant as exhaustive typologies. Rather, they depict the diversity of these communities across the USSR’s southern tier, many of whom faced common anxieties amid the rise of titular nationalism and violence.

By 1989 about half of the people who lived outside of or without “their own” ethno-territories were self-identified Russians (approximately 25 million).¹¹ Near 70 percent of Soviet citizens who lived outside of their constituent territories or did not have one also claimed Russian as their native or second language by 1989, and they entered mixed marriages exponentially more frequently than the rest of the Soviet population.¹² Indeed, such intermarriages were encouraged by the state.¹³ Armenian women, for instance, entered mixed marriages 15 times more often outside of Armenia, Azeri women living outside of their republic were 3 times more likely to marry a person of another nationality, and Azeri men were 4 times as likely. Among extraterritorial and nontitular populations whose native language was not the one of their ethnic group, the Russian language was five times more popular than the titular language.¹⁴ A major concern that many extraterritorial and nontitular communities had, therefore, was changing language laws that transpired between 1988-1990 throughout the non-

¹¹ The total number of people living outside of or without “their own” territories (between 54 and 64 million people) varies depending on what understanding of homeland is used. See Bohdan Nahaylo, “(After the Soviet Union)-Population Displacement in the Former Soviet Union,” *Refugees* 98 (1994), T. Katagoshchina, “Krizis identichnosti kak faktor migratsionnykh protsessov na postsovetском prostranstve.” *Vostok: Afro-Aziatskie obshchestva* (Nov. 2001): 75-92.

¹² Those who name Russian as their native language, or second language that they could “freely command.” Igor Zevelev, *Russia and Its New Diasporas* (Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2001), 94. Generally, in Soviet cities, mixed marriages occurred more frequently—they were 17.5% of all urban marriages in 1970. Over half of the Russian women living outside of their republic entered mixed marriages in Belorussia, Armenia, Moldavia, Ukraine, Georgia, and Lithuania. See Mark Tolts, “Personal Life Reflected in Statistics: Interethnic Marriages,” *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 42, no. 4 (February 29, 1990), 31.

¹³ See Adrienne Edgar, *Intermarriage and the Friendship of Peoples* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2022).

¹⁴ Igor Zevelev, *Russia and Its New Diasporas*, 94-95; 109.

Russian republics.¹⁵ Even changing language laws, however, influenced tensions and fear of titular violence.

Russian served as the “language of interethnic communication,” and, as the Soviet *lingua franca*, it was regularly heralded as the mechanism for *sliianie* and *sblizhenie*, by which the USSR could finally realize communism and the fruition of the Soviet *narod* (people). In reality, the Russian language and Soviet culture did blur boundaries between Russian speakers of different ethnic backgrounds who lived outside of “their own” ethnic territories or did not have one. Though the titular population in the USSR’s capitals had expanded since the late imperial era, by 1989, only six out of fourteen non-Russian republican capitals had a predominant titular population in 1989.¹⁶ Connected by a common Soviet citizenship, Russian speakers of different nationalities often maintained a privileged urban existence as the republics of the southern tier grew more nationally consolidated and autonomous and their economies began to lag. The use of Russian in all-Union industries and in institutes of higher learning and the shifting of Soviet investment away from the region also left many missing opportunities in “their” republic, a fact that influenced tensions.

Experiences with titular nationalism differed at the collective and individual level. Some members of the most targeted ethnic groups did not report any changes vis-à-vis titular groups when mass hostilities toward their co-ethnics occurred.¹⁷ Contrastingly, groups who were not at the center of mass ethno-nationalist violence, like the internationalist collective from Lithuania, reported fears because of it. Russians enjoyed a special status in the USSR, which perhaps made

¹⁵ Pal Kølsto, “Nationalism, ethnic conflict, and job competition: non-Russian collective action in the USSR Under perestroika,” *Nations and Nationalism* 14, no. 1 (2008): 151-169.

¹⁶ The increase in titular representation in Soviet capitals is in comparison to the census of 1897. Zevelev, *Russia and Its New Diasporas*, 109.

¹⁷ Oral interview with author conducted with the head of the International Meskhetian Turk Organization “Vatan” based in North Ossetia. January 18, 2022.

them a more daunting rival when national movements emerged, but archival evidence suggests that they were also directly engaged in, and displaced by, “ethnic” conflict, especially as members of mixed families.

Extraterritorial and nontitular voices and experiences in the USSR’s final years, as this chapter argues, reveal a moment of heightened “groupness”—an intercommunal solidarity, awareness, and group identity—that was grounded in decades of Soviet internationalist practices.¹⁸ These conflicts, indeed, sent shock waves throughout these communities in the Soviet Union. The literature on nontitular and extraterritorial peoples in the Soviet Union’s final years, however, has not, to my knowledge, incorporated the voices and everyday realities of those displaced or distressed by titular nationalism through archival research.¹⁹ Archival evidence shows that these communities shared common anxieties when confronting nationalizing spaces in the USSR. Extraterritorial and nontitular groups also understood that the fates of others living outside of or without “their own” territories could presage what might soon follow befall to them. Many formed multinational collectives as leverage to solicit central oversight or transfers as they faced a common enemy: titular nationalism and violence.

Though conflicts existed throughout the late Soviet period, they were hushed up and did not generally cause widespread panic. Perestroika and glasnost’, and its accompanying effects—the lifting of censorship and the public airing of grievances—gave nationalist movements an outlet. Importantly, at the same time, fears were amplified or spread among others. Perestroika also exacerbated embroilments over resources and access to privileged urban space by triggering

¹⁸ See Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University, 2004).

¹⁹ See Yaacov Ro’i, “Central Asian riots and disturbances, 1989-1990: causes and context,” *Central Asian Survey* 10, vol 3. (1991): 21-54, Kølsto, “Nationalism, Ethnic Conflict, and Job Competition,” 151-169, Matteo Fumagalli, “Framing ethnic minority mobilization in Central Asia: the cases of Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 59 (2007): 567-590, Sato Keiji, “Mobilization of Non-Titular Ethnicities during the Last Years of the Soviet Union: Gagauzia, Transnistria, and the Lithuanian Poles,” *Acta Slavica Iaponica* 26 (2009): 141-157.

a devastating economic crisis that furthered regionalism.²⁰ Perestroika and glasnost' then effectively deepened a growing divide between titular nationals and other populations by escalating tensions on an economic basis, as well as by providing national movements with momentum through a public platform unprecedented in the Soviet era. In 1988, the reforms, which loosened party controls, (re)ignited tensions over autonomous territories, which became a basis for conflict between ethnic groups. Conflict over the majority Armenian Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast', a constituent territory of the Azerbaijan SSR, for instance, resulted in clashes between the two ethnic groups in both Armenia and Azerbaijan, and widespread displacement. In Georgia, the fate of Abkhazia, an autonomous territory, where many rallied for secession from Georgia (though Georgians had developed a majority in Abkhazia), spiraled into broader issues. As central oversight continued to weaken in the USSR's southern tier and titular nationalism grew, displacement from the region continued.

Scholarship on mass migration to Russia from the former Soviet republics has primarily come from outside the historical field and has, therefore, focused primarily on the post-Soviet period.²¹ So, what do the archives tell us about the USSR's final years? Hundreds of thousands of people began out-migrating as central organs continued to falter to address the growing crisis. According to Soviet figures, between 1989-1990, 600,000 Soviet citizens were forced to

²⁰ See William Moskoff, *Hard Times: Impoverishment and Protest in the Perestroika Years, 1985-1991* (New York: Routledge, 2015). The Kyrgyz SSR, for example, which had previously exported vegetables vital to the Siberian, Ural, and Far North regions, halted their exports in October of 1989 to all areas outside of the republic.

²¹ See Vladimir Shlapentokh, *The New Russian Diaspora: Russian Minorities in the Former Soviet Republics* (New York: Routledge, 1994), Paul Kolstoe, *Russians in the Former Soviet Republics* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1995), Hillary Pilkington, *Migration, Displacement and Identity in Post-Soviet Russia* (London: 1998), Igor Zevelev, *Russia and Its New Diasporas* (Washington D.C., 2001), Moya Flynn, *Migrant Resettlement in the Russian Federation: Reconstructing Homes and Homelands* (London: Anthem Press 2004), Aksana Ismailbekova, "Mobility as a Coping Strategy for Osh Uzbeks in the Aftermath of Conflict," *Internationales Asienforum* 45, no. 1-2 (2014): 49-68, Cynthia J. Buckley, et. al., *Migration, Homeland, and Belonging in Eurasia* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University 2008), Alexia Bloch, "Citizenship, Belonging, and Moldovan Migrants in Post-Soviet Russia," *Journal of Anthropology* 79, no. 4 (2014): 445-472, and Sergey V. Ryazantsev, *Nashi za granitsei: russkie, rossiiane, russkogovoriashchie, sootchestvenniki: rasselenie, integratsiia i vozvratnaia migratsiia v Rossiiu* (Moscow: ISPI RAN, 2014).

abandon their places of permanent residence; 160,000 of whom were displaced in the RSFSR.²²

Letters from extraterritorial and nontitular collectives and individuals were routed to the State Committee on Labor and Social Affairs (Goskomtrud), which was tasked with overseeing the developing migration crisis. In the USSR's last years, extraterritorial and nontitular populations sent a deluge of letters to central organs with common complaints. Many pleaded for central oversight from the central government. Letters also requested relocation, sometimes desperately, as well as for central intervention.

In writing to central organs, and most often addressing Mikhail Gorbachev, extraterritorial and nontitular populations hoped to illuminate their concerns and win further central interference in nationalizing republics—as many had done decades prior. Soliciting the state as extraterritorial and nontitular Russian speakers, they often reflected faith in, and dependency on, Soviet internationalism and all-Union institutions. Other petitioners demeaned (in, at times, discriminatory discourse) the titular nationality. Some described how the decline of internationalism caused a rift in their psyche. The determined few, like the collectives introduced at the beginning of the chapter, pushed their way to the *priem* of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet.

***Sblizhenie* and National Development since Perestroika and Glasnost'**

Following the death of its past three leaders, Mikhail Gorbachev attained the Soviet Union's highest political post, becoming the General Secretary of the Communist Party in March of 1985. The country seemed destined to either reform and modernize, or degenerate. Gorbachev was a self-proclaimed member of the *shestidesiatniki*— the intelligentsia of the sixties generation who favored a democratized form of socialism, or socialism with a “human face,” a term he

²² GARF, f. 10121, op. 1, d. 30, ll. 9-10 (RSFSR Council of Ministers on the problem of migration, vol. 1. January 1991-May 1991).

would recycle from the Czechoslovakian leader Alexander Dubček.²³ Unlike Leonid Brezhnev, whose regime he labeled a period of “stagnation,” Gorbachev focused on reforming the economy, but he would ultimately seek to revitalize the Soviet Union at every level. By mid-1986 Gorbachev’s policy of perestroika had begun to provoke large-scale change. In July 1986, Gorbachev would even declare that there was a “degree of similarity” between perestroika and revolution.²⁴ The intent of his reforms was to engage the public in the rooting out of corruption that had purportedly resulted in systematic stagnation. In February of 1986, slightly before the year anniversary of Gorbachev’s election as General Secretary, he addressed its 27th Congress where he stressed the need to combat problems with party activity.²⁵ By the summer of 1986, the press began to write more openly.²⁶

Gorbachev’s first delivery of the party’s program at the 27th Congress in February 1986, however, offered few practical departures from the state’s program on nationality policy. Gorbachev continued to walk the line between the two contradictory pillars of Soviet nationality policy. He engaged, for instance, the standard post-Stalinist party policy of promoting *sblizhenie*, the “drawing together” of Soviet nationalities, as well as the “further flowering” of Soviet nations.²⁷ Confirming the status quo, Gorbachev thus declared that both *sblizhenie* and the growth of Soviet national cultures would strengthen interrelations between nationalities. In other words, the party continued to assume that by promoting national development they removed the basis for antagonism between nations and provided the equal footing necessary for their merger.

²³ Gorbachev used the term in an article published in *Pravda* on November 26, 1989, “Sotsialisticheskaia ideia i revoliutsionnaia perestroika,” *Pravda*, November 27, 1989.

²⁴ Graeme Gill, “Political Symbolism and the Fall of the USSR,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 65, no. 2 (2013): 244-263.

²⁵ Mikhail Gorbachev, “Report to the 27th Party Congress” in Robert Maxwell, ed., *M.S. Gorbachev: Speeches & Writings* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1986), 89.

²⁶ Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization*, 58-59.

²⁷ Programma KPSS” in *Raspad SSSR: Dokumenty i fakty (1986-1992gg) Tom. 1 normativnye akty, Ofitsial’nye soobshcheniia* (Moscow: Wolters Kluwer, 2009), 91-92.

Nations would then naturally “draw together” through common Soviet ties that were increasingly sponsored and encouraged. Soviet internationalism entailed directing nations in this manner dialectically toward communism. The party thus had to pay heed to national interests that, ironically, could also conflict with Soviet *sblizhenie*. Gorbachev proclaimed, for instance, that the party would at once fight against “parochialism”—to check nationalism that threatened the Soviet project—while simultaneously accommodating the developing role of republics and autonomous territories.

At a June 1987 Plenum of the Central Committee, Gorbachev would announce a transition from the “excessively centralized, command system of management to a democratic one,” which would eventually lead to the introduction of competitive elections.²⁸ By 1988, the governmental structure of the Union was altered through the creation of the Congress of People’s Deputies. Each republic established a Congress of People’s Deputies to which deputies were now competitively elected, though the Communist Party continued to dominate the nominations as only the Communist Party was allowed to sponsor candidates.²⁹ These changes mobilized the population to an unforeseen extent. The March 1989 elections to the Congress of People’s Deputies encouraged demonstrations, mass rallies, and election campaigns as some Communist bureaucrats were defeated and nationalist and democratic political leaders elected.³⁰ By early 1989, the public had become involved in the elections to the Congress of People’s Deputies, yet their mobilization had the unintended consequence of contributing to nationalist movements. A “parade of sovereignties” accompanied a “war of laws” in 1989 and 1990, in which republics

²⁸ “Gorbachev’s June 1987 report on the reforms.” Marxists Internet Archive. Accessed February 22, 2023. <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/writers/marcy/perestroika/perehtml/4.htm>

²⁹ See Edward W. Walker, *Dissolution: Sovereignty and the Breakup of the Soviet Union* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).

³⁰ See Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR, and the Successor States* (New York: Oxford University, 2011), 495-497.

passed laws and policies in contradiction to those of the center, in violation of the Soviet constitution. Gorbachev's democratization campaign further contributed to social tensions by lessening fears of engaging in unsanctioned political activity, thus inadvertently buttressing nationalist movements.

The Russian Republic, which previously did not have a constituent Communist Party (nor its own Academy of Sciences, interior ministry, Komsomol, or trade-union structure) now had burgeoning mechanisms in place to overshadow central organs. The contested elections for the new national legislature also provided the right for the parliament to choose its own leader. This required another major shift in policy, which permitted the Russian Republic (that was previously denied a separate Communist Party and Communist Party leader) the right to elect its own parliament and formal leader. In effect, Gorbachev's democratization campaign, which necessitated the existence of democratizing political processes in each region, granted the Russian Republic powers it did not have previously. As a result, the Russian Republic, which included more than half of the USSR's population and by far the majority of its landmass, established leverage to eclipse other republics.³¹ Therefore, when Boris Yeltsin was elected as the first chairman of the new Russian Republic's parliament, he developed authority capable of usurping those of the smaller republics if, for instance, they should choose to veer from Yeltsin's preferred direction. Gorbachev, who also created a new Union leadership position, that of President of the Soviet Union (and who sought to preserve the USSR), was thus directly challenged by Boris Yeltsin, who pushed for more radical reforms, and eventually, Russian secession from the Union. Gorbachev's reforms, in consequence, significantly weakened central Soviet control.

³¹ See Henry E. Hale, *Patronal Politics: Eurasian Regime Dynamics in Comparative Perspective*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2015), 54-55.

The changes initiated through Gorbachev's reforms had everyday implications. The "friendship of the peoples," Soviet *sblizhenie*, and the promotion of the Soviet identity were all centralizing principles that relied on the promotion of the Russian language. In as late as 1985, a manual, *Cultivating Soviet Patriotism and Socialist Internationalism in the Process of Studying the Russian Language and Literature* was published for the sole purpose of guiding discussion on this front in Soviet classrooms.³² By the late 1980s, when nationalism accelerated and national movements emerged, the contradictory aspect of Soviet nationality policy in the classroom was finally addressed. At the February 1988 party plenum "On the course of restructuring secondary and higher schools and the tasks of the party for its implementation," the Second Secretary of the Communist Party, Egor Kuz'mich Ligachev, raised concerns that the dogmatic Soviet education of the past had contributed to Soviet youth's apoliticism and growing "nationalistic delusions."³³ "True Socialism," Ligachev advanced, meant more diversity of opinions, a "multi-voiced reality" in which the "truth is not dictated, but revealed by democratic means." "All-round democratization of public education" thus became the Party program.³⁴

The party's shortsighted vision of its democratization campaign, which began to extend to public education, assumed that it would more naturally foster engaged and interconnected Soviet citizens. The discussions held in the party plenum, however, revealed that the idea of Soviet *sblizhenie* and the Soviet *narod* was losing ground among many disenchanted youths who often turned, instead, to emerging national movements. Time and again, the state wrongly assumed that socialist ties would overpower national ones through more efficient, and now more democratic, international consciousness raising. The push for democratizing Soviet classrooms,

³² I. V. Varannikova and M.V. Cherkezovoi, eds., *Vospitanie Sovetskogo patriotizma i sotsialisticheskogo internatsionalizma v protsesse izucheniia russkogo iazyka i literatury* (Prosveshchenie: Leningrad: 1985).

³³ Materialy plenuma tsentral'nogo komiteta KPSS: 17-18 fevralia 1988 goda (Moscow: Politizdat, 1988), 39-40.

³⁴ Ibid, 64.

however, would likely only further prevent the state from achieving the end goal of its nationality policy.

The Precursor: Alma-Ata Demonstrations and Non-Kazakh Grievances

As we have seen, extraterritorial and nontitular populations wrote letters to central organs to report rising nationalism and problems with titular authorities prior to perestroika. After Gorbachev's reforms, however, extraterritorial and nontitular appeals to central authorities became exceedingly more vociferous and frequent. The Alma-Ata demonstrations of December 1986 (which spread to different parts of the Kazakh SSR) sparked anxieties, anger, and, in some cases, long-standing frustration about growing titular nationalism. Earlier letters, as previously demonstrated, evoked internationalism or socialist principles to condemn titular nationalism and to call on central oversight. Some letters similarly claimed that the actions of titular nationals amid the Alma-Ata demonstrations stood in contradiction to the principles of internationalism. At this stage—before national movements began to proliferate across the USSR—a common complaint was that local, regional, and republican institutions did not allow for the (proportional) participation of some demographic groups.³⁵

“Nationalist propaganda has reached the point that 5 to 6-year-old Kazakh children in kindergartens (not to mention schoolchildren) utter the same words of hostility as adults” around twenty workers of the Kazvodokanalproekt (Kazakh Water Canal Project) and Promtransniiproekt (Research and Development Institute of Industrial-Transport Projects) wrote

³⁵ According to Article 48 of the 1977 USSR constitution, all Soviet citizens had the right to participate in the “management of state and public affairs and in the discussion and adoption of laws and decisions of country-wide and local significance.” See “Konstitutsiia (osnovnoi zakon) Soiuza Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh respublik (priniata na vneocherednoi sed'moi sessii Verkhovnogo Soveta SSSR deviatogo sozyva 7 oktiabria 1977 g.).” Sait Konstitutsii Rossiiskoi Federatsii. Accessed January 26, 2023. https://constitution.garant.ru/history/ussr-rsfsr/1977/red_1977/5478732/

to central organs.³⁶ These frustrations were targeted at mid-December demonstrations in Alma-Ata in 1986, the capital of the Kazakh SSR (present day Almaty). In December, to combat corruption in Kazakhstan, Gorbachev had removed its First Secretary, Dinmukhamed Akhmetuly Kunaev, who had retained the post for over two decades. Under Brezhnev, Kunaev and the Kazakh Communist Party had been privileged with “de facto autonomy.”³⁷ By 1989, those who identified as Kazakh held only a slight overall majority over self-identified Russians in the republic, 39.7% compared to 37%, respectively.³⁸ Yet Kazakhs held the majority in the Central Committee of the Kazakh Communist Party and over 60% of the posts within the Council of Ministers. Removing Kunaev and replacing him with a Russian, Gennady Vasilevich Kolbin, was counter to the political valence established throughout the preceding decades, but Kolbin also had no prior relationship to the republic and so his placement to the republic’s top political post was an affront to many. Organized by Kazakh State University students, the Alma-Ata demonstrations drew up to ten thousand citizens to protest against the replacement, which resulted in up to 2,400 officially reported arrests, 459 injuries and five fatalities, though numbers vary.³⁹ Ninety-nine people received prison sentences, though half were rehabilitated by 1990.⁴⁰ The suppression of the Alma-Ata demonstrators would later spark the movement *Zholtoksan* (December) to commemorate victims of the protests and to demand the release of those imprisoned for the unrest. In June 1989, a Kazakh, Nursultan Nazarbayev, would finally succeed

³⁶ RGANI f.100, op. 5, d. 429, ll. 2-3 (Letters and telegrams from the Kazakh and Uzbek SSR about nationalist demonstrations in Alma-Ata in December 1986 and in the Fergana region in 1989).

³⁷ Bhavna Dave, *Kazakhstan: Ethnicity, Language and Power* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 84.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 15-16.

³⁹ The numbers vary according to sources. The number of arrests and injuries is from Mark R. Beissinger’s *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State*, 73-74. The number of fatalities (which is higher than Beissinger’s) is from Nari Shelekpáyev’s “Rethinking Transfers of Power and Public Protest in Kazakhstan, 1959-1989,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 74, no. 5 (June 2022): 857-871.

⁴⁰ Shelekpáyev, “Rethinking Transfers of Power,” 857-871.

Kolbin, and Nazarbayev would retain the top political post in the republic, and then in independent Kazakhstan, for about 30 years.

Using common party jargon, *Pravda*, the Communist Party's official newspaper, briefly reported on the Alma-Ata demonstrations.⁴¹ On December 17, 1986, the day the demonstrations began, *Pravda* reported that the Central Committee of the Kazakh Communist Party had convened to review an organizational issue, relieving Kunaev of his duties as First Secretary in connection with his retirement, and appointing Kolbin, First Secretary of the Ul'ianovsk oblast' in the RSFSR, to the post.⁴² On December 19th, a *Pravda* article, published prior to the official liberalization of the press in June of 1990, reported that a group of young students "incited by nationalist elements" took to the streets to express their disapproval of the decision.⁴³ Though this article acknowledged nationalism, *Pravda* attributed the unrest (like many former Soviet renditions of social disturbance) to "hooligans," "parasites" and "persons otherwise against normal society [*antiobshchestvennye litsa*]" who encouraged "illegal actions against representatives of law and order." The latter, the brief *Pravda* article noted, included arson of grocery stores, cars and other "offensive actions against citizens of the city." The *Pravda* article concluded that past meetings—at factories, universities, in workers collectives and Party and Komsomol organs—had approved of the First Secretary appointment. According to *Pravda*, these citizens, who disapproved of the "unjust" demonstration, had then worked to restore complete order in the city.

⁴¹ Zholtoksan was registered as a social movement in May of 1989. Dave, *Kazakhstan*, 90.

⁴² "Plenum Tsk Kompartii Kazakhstana" *Pravda*, December 17, 1986.

⁴³ "Soobshchenie iz Alma-Aty," *Pravda*, December 19, 1986. On the 1990 liberalization of the press, see "O pechatii i drugikh sredstvakh massovoi informatsii." Biblioteka normativno-pravovykh aktov Soiuza Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh Respublik. Accessed February 22, 2023. https://www.libussr.ru/doc_ussr/usr_16715.htm

Many nontitular and extraterritorial communities in Kazakhstan did, in fact, voice concerns about the demonstrations, and some of their complaints revealed long-standing resentment toward the increased consolidation of Kazakh control. The Kazakh extraterritorial and nontitular population was predominantly composed of self-identified Russians, many of whom had spent generations in the territory. Their letters relayed a sense of growing uncertainty about their future in the republic. Unlike the Russian speaking communities of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan, where Russian speakers were concentrated mainly in urban centers, in Kazakhstan (as in Kyrgyzstan and Moldova) they resided in both dispersed and compact communities. Especially concentrated in the northern region of the Kazakh SSR, Russian speaking communities were established over the course of generations. The latter included Cossack settlement along the imperial Russian southern border. Derived from the same Turkish verb *qaz*, “to wander,” Cossacks and Kazakhs shared an entangled history; both had historically established stakes in the region. In fact, about 20% of the Kazakh SSR rural population identified as Russian in 1989 (6.9% as German and about 4% as Ukrainian), as “Cossack” was not included on the census.⁴⁴ Self-identified Russians continued to predominate in urban centers, though their demographic dominance was shrinking.⁴⁵ The Russian share of the urban population fell from 58.4% in 1970 to 51.3% in 1989; the Kazakh urban population, on the other hand, had rapidly risen, from 17.1% in 1970 to 26.7% in 1989, but was still underrepresented proportionally.

Many letters claimed that the growing consolidation and autonomy of the Kazakh population was tangibly felt at every level—politically, socially, culturally—from the republic to

⁴⁴ *Itogi vsesoiuznoi perepisi naseleniia 1989 goda*, tom 1 (Alma-Ata: Republic Information Publishing Center, 1991), 25.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 22. Self-identified Germans, Ukrainians and Tatars also made-up smaller percentages of the urban population compared to 1970, but their overall proportion of the urban population had not diminished so drastically.

the district level. Disproportionate Kazakh representation in republican institutions, according to these observations, was connected to widespread titular favoritism and nepotism during Kunaev's long-held regime. These concerns reflected fears that they were being pushed out of their native spaces, or that, as the "elder brother" in the Soviet "brotherhood of nations," they were losing certain privileges. Alma-Ata, the republic's capital, became the site where these tensions came to a head. The Alma-Atinskaia oblast', which encompassed Alma-Ata, the republic's capital, had been more resistant to change. Though the Alma-Atinskaia oblast' witnessed the same trends, they were less drastic. The urban population was still overwhelmingly non-Kazakh in 1989. Russians made up a majority of the urban population (55.8%) while Germans, a deported nation, also had a disproportionately large urban presence (10%).⁴⁶ Self-identified Kazakhs thus had significantly less access to the republic's most privileged urban space in its central province.

Extraterritorial and nontitular reactions following the Alma-Ata demonstrations—the first mass demonstration of a national character in the USSR's southern tier—reflected a sense of assertive entitlement if also growing insecurity. These letters often condemned putative nationalists by painting a damning picture of the climate permitted in republican institutions as corrupt, unhinged, and backward. One anonymous letter addressed from December 19, 1986 demanded, for instance, that "all to the last student and participant" must be excluded from educational institutions if they had "to any degree contributed to these demonstrations," and had "even once" been present in the crowd, even if these measures meant shutting down institutions for the year.⁴⁷ "If this is not done," the letter warned, ironically threatening violence, "we will

⁴⁶ Ibid., 36-37.

⁴⁷ RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 429, ll. 39-42.

burn these snake nests down.”⁴⁸ In fact, the suppression of the demonstrations was severe. Some who were arrested were not demonstrating at all but were out looking for missing friends or relatives.⁴⁹

In January 1987, a self-identified group of Communists from the Russian section of the Union of Writers of Kazakhstan offered their own analysis of the Alma-Ata events: corrupt practices established under Kunaev led to popular nationalism among the Kazakh population. In detail, the group outlined systematic nepotism permitted by Kunaev.⁵⁰ They asked, “in this corrupt environment what kind of international education could the rector of KAZGU [Kazakh State University], Zhaldasbekov, lead?” It was not uncommon to witness nationalist boasts among the general Kazakh population, they claimed.⁵¹ A pensioner who claimed to represent the “general opinion of Russians and other non-Kazakh nationalities” similarly declared that nationalism and chauvinism “visible to the naked eye” developed long ago.⁵² Not only did Kazakhs occupy all leadership positions, the pensioner remonstrated, but institutes and technical schools began to “accept only Kazakhs,” whom he claimed were “sometimes incompetent and stupid.”⁵³ Similar allegations were repeated by others, who pointed to the “flourishing” Kazakh hegemony “[*protsvetanii zemliachestva*],” and “cronyism and protectionism” amongst Kunaev’s elite inner cycle.⁵⁴ Workers of the Central Asian Glass Installation Department, *Soiuzsteklomontazh*, protested that Kazakh nationalism had simply besieged the Central Committee, the Council of Ministers, the Prosecutors Office—“everywhere!”⁵⁵

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Shelekpayev, “Rethinking Transfers of Power,” 857-871.

⁵⁰ RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 429, ll. 30-32.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 429, l. 21

⁵³ RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 429, l. 21

⁵⁴ Ibid., ll. 35-37.

⁵⁵ Ibid., l. 58.

These concerns also reverberated outside of the Alma-Atinskaia oblast'. An anonymous letter addressed to Kolbin in mid-1987 outlined corruption at the regional party level in the Kokchetavskaia oblast', a northern region of Kazakhstan near its border with Russia, which had a large non-Kazakh population. The head of the obkom, the letter contended, was a "rabid [*iaryi*] nationalist."⁵⁶ The letter underscored a common concern about the placement of personnel in the administrative bodies of the region. Though the Kazakh population, the letter attested, was not in the majority in the oblast', many top officials in the region at the district level, including the Department of Justice, the Regional and City Prosecutor, and the head of the KGB, were all headed by Kazakhs. With entitled rhetoric, the letter claimed that the positions had gone to unqualified Kazakh candidates, "by far not the smartest of lawyers." In the city of Kokchetav, the letter warned, leaflets were distributed promoting a nationalist agenda: "death to Kolbin, down with Gorbachev, etc." The leaflets had probably appeared, the letter suggested, under the support of regional authorities. The letter, left unsigned due to safety concerns, claimed that local officials were attempting to "remove unwanted people and finish them off [*raspravit'sia s nimi*], especially people of European nationalities." The republic's central committee conducted a *proverka* (verification) that revealed no merit toward the complaints about the region's leaders but validated the authors' concerns regarding administrative representation. "An unreasonably large number" of titular peoples, the *proverka* showed, were represented in the administrative bodies of the region.⁵⁷ Though Kazakhs made up 30.6% of the region's population, the *proverka* showed that titular nationals represented 57% of district and city prosecutors, people's judges, and heads of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. This problem was attributed to the fact that law

⁵⁶ RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 408, l. 98 (letters on the manifestations of nationalism in various republics of the USSR, volume 2 1980-1987).

⁵⁷ Ibid., ll. 93-95.

schools had mainly accepted titular peoples (82% of law students at the Kazakh State University were Kazakh, according to the *proverka*), which skewed their representation in regional administrative bodies. The republic's central committee sought to address this issue of fair representation by issuing a resolution on January 6, 1987.

Letters revealed that many extraterritorial and nontitular collectives contested their perceived subordinate status vis-à-vis the titular nation and that they demanded central intervention, sometimes employing internationalism. The pensioner called for the replacement of all administrators and for the implementation of measures that would allow for the “selection of personnel not by nationality, but by ability.”⁵⁸ The Kazvodokanalproekt and Promtransniiproekt workers claimed that students had been spreading nationalist propaganda and that steps, like the shutting down of institutes of higher learning, needed to be taken immediately. Kazakhstan, they maintained, was a “multi-national republic.” In a list of recommended actions, the Russian Section of the Union of Writers in Kazakhstan demanded for the provision of a “strict observance of the principle of proportional representation of nationalities living in the Republic in all governing bodies.”⁵⁹ These measures, they believed, would “serve as an international education of workers” that would ultimately benefit Kazakhs as well by creating more “wholesome collectives.”

Distortion, rumors, and misinformation about the demonstrations and the unfolding events also generated manifold anxieties among extraterritorial and nontitular populations. The Kazvodokanalproekt and Promtransniiproekt workers claimed that “pogroms, massacres, and murders” had ravaged the Soviet capital for three days.⁶⁰ “Now we understand the local

⁵⁸ RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 429, l. 21

⁵⁹ Ibid., ll. 30-32.

⁶⁰ RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 429, ll. 2-3.

population's preparations for these events," they wrote, implying that past trends of titular favoritism ultimately led to violence. The pensioner professed that there were three thousand fatalities, including "babies from birthing homes and children from orphanages and kindergartens."⁶¹ Rumors of continued unrest also circulated. An anonymous writer in February 1987 wrote of perpetual conflict in Kazakhstan. The unrest, the anonymous writer(s) noted, was related to the 1986 demonstrations, where "167 people were killed, 1521 injured, and soldiers and firefighters had, for no reason, raped 78 Kazakh girls" in a nearby district.⁶² The Soiuzsteklomontazh workers were concerned that national conflict reached a point of no return, writing, "how many people wrote that real nationalism, chauvinism had already begun, why did everyone stay silent, why did it have to come to war?"⁶³

Some believed that they had devoted their lives in service to a republic according to internationalist principles, and now faced unwarranted retribution for doing so. A Russian woman writing on behalf of her family expressed that her husband had been sent to Alma-Ata for work, but her children and grandchildren had been born and raised in the republic.⁶⁴ Their family, she claimed, put forth all their efforts in "developing" the republic and had been "raised [*tak nas vospityvali*]" as "internationalists," she continued:

"We thought until the last day that we have the Soviet power on which we counted on, that in a difficult hour it will always protect us. What happened? Two days of rampant fascist nationalists. They have killed our children, silenced our humanity, smashed, burned everything in their path. And we were told that we could not even have a stick in our hands for defense. And the Russian people, who have borne all the hardships on their shoulders, remain subordinate everywhere [*v zaloge*]. Their lot is the position of the negroes in America. And in this tense time, when at any moment the worst thing can happen—war, again the main burden will fall on the Russian people. So how long will we be bullied? When will we have equality not on paper, but in reality?

⁶¹ RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 429, l. 21.

⁶² RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 429, l. 20.

⁶³ Ibid, l. 58.

⁶⁴ RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 408, l. 77.

Soviet “Refugees”: The Sumgait and Baku Pogroms

The demonstrations across the Kazakh SSR associated with Kolbin’s placement to the Republic’s top post were harshly repressed, and it would not be for another couple years that national movements across the country proliferated. The conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh that escalated in 1988 became the first episode of mass lethal unrest and displacement fueled by nationalism during perestroika. It sparked widespread anxieties as national communities living outside of or without “their own” territory were persecuted, and because Moscow failed to stop the escalating nationalist violence. Violence first began in Sumgait, an industrial town near Baku, Azerbaijan’s capital, and then spread to Baku and other parts of Azerbaijan. Letters began to reflect fear, desperation, and distress as central authorities struggled to address mounting titular nationalism and violence. These episodes triggered the phenomenon of mass Soviet “refugees,” many of whom ended up in the Soviet metropole. The advent of Soviet “refugees” further symbolized the growing impotency of the center and amplified the conflict’s impact. Titular nationalism and violence in the region continued to contribute to flight.

By the late 1980s, central authorities progressively lost control to national popular fronts in the Caucasus, which in mirroring the Baltics, organized mass support for sovereignty. In 1987 Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh taking advantage of perestroika liberalization began to mobilize public support to transfer the Azeri autonomous territory to Armenia. A petition sent to the Central Committee had been backed by 75,000 signatures; in early February of 1988, however, its demands had been rejected by a low-level official.⁶⁵ The failed petition only further propelled grievances in Nagorno-Karabakh. Unauthorized meetings in Stepanakert, the autonomous region’s capital, as well as soviet resolutions, continued to press for the transfer.

⁶⁵ Arsene Saparov, *From Conflict to Autonomy in the Caucasus: The Soviet Union and the Making of Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabakh* (London: Routledge, 2015), 165-168.

Momentum swiftly passed to Armenia as hundreds of thousands of demonstrators took to the streets in Erevan to demand unification with Nagorno-Karabakh. Clashes against demonstrators ensued as a result of an Azerbaijani backlash. The conflict continued to spiral until it was revealed that two Azerbaijanis died. The latter revelation, made on Baku Radio on February 27th, led to a three-day long pogrom against the Armenian population in Sumgait, in which an estimated 32 people died.⁶⁶ Throughout 1988, mass expulsions of Azeris in Armenia also transpired.⁶⁷

The violence mainly targeted the Armenian population, but others, including members of mixed families, were deeply affected. In April 1988, Zinaida Konstantinova, a Russian woman in a mixed family who had lived in Sumgait's center during the pogrom, expressed, "I haven't been myself for an entire month, I've been in this trance, it's as though I'm completely numb... the whole affair so inconceivable."⁶⁸ She continued:

"We were just murdered in our sleep, so to speak. You just can't imagine what it's like to sit there and wait for them to come for you, to sit by the door holding an axe. We knew that it was hopeless, they weren't going around alone or in twos, they were moving in huge mobs, they would have made quick work of us regardless. I still can't understand why we, the people of Sumgait, became the victims of crimes. In what name and why they were committed. I still don't understand that, even now... We lived in friendship with our neighbors, we always said, 'hello' and 'goodbye,' one of the neighbor women used to come and use our telephone, and when she saw the demonstration headed by the city leaders, you know, she welcomed it, saying 'that's right, they're doing the right thing.' Why? Because the Armenians allegedly had the best apartments and the best jobs. I was really struck by that. She herself has a wonderful apartment, her rights were in no way encroached upon; if anything, the reverse was true. She's a cook. And her husband works at a plant. An average family. They have a dacha [cottage]. What harm had been done to her? And now this malicious delight. Incidentally, I think that by and large the Armenians had apartments on the lower and top floors, they didn't have the best apartments. That's what I suspect. Earlier I never thought about where the Azerbaijani families were and where the Armenian families were, I'm no nationalist, I don't even know the meaning of the

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Thomas de Waal, *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan Through Peace and War* (New York: NYU Press, 2013), 16. See RGANI F. 100, op.5, d. 361-363 (letters and telegrams to the Central Committee of the CPSU and the XIX Party Conference with various proposals on perestroika and social issues in the country, and on Nagorno-Karabakh; vol. 1-3).

⁶⁸ Samvel Shahmuratian, ed., *The Sumgait Tragedy: Pogroms Against Armenians in Soviet Azerbaijan, Volume I: Eyewitness Accounts* (Cambridge, MA: Aristide D. Caratzas and Zoryan Institute, 1990), 257-264.

word, but when I was walking down the street and saw the looted Armenian apartments, they were on the lower floors.⁶⁹

Zinaida highlighted a central issue propelling the unrest: the belief that other nationalities had capitalized on better housing, jobs, and social positions. The situation continued to deteriorate as the country struggled to absorb economic and political reform. The lifting of censorship following glasnost' also stoked a burgeoning religious revival that further aggravated the internal state of affairs. Measures enabling religious worship were passed throughout 1988. On April 9, 1989 (ironically the same day that the Soviet Army intervened in national demonstrations in Tbilisi, Georgia), legislation banning religious activities was canceled.⁷⁰ On October 26, 1990, Gorbachev's liberalizing reforms made the observance of religion and the proliferation of religious organizations legal.⁷¹

Panic spread as the Sumgait conflict unfolded. The Sumgait pogrom drove fears that other vulnerable extraterritorial and nontitular populations would face similar acts of violence. A group of 32 workers in Moldova wrote to Gorbachev to report "uncontrollable" tensions they feared were "fraught with Sumgait" in early 1989, between Moldovans and the Russian speaking population (which they defined as all non-Moldovans in the republic "Ukrainians, Russians, Bulgarians, Gagauz, Jews, etc.")).⁷² On August 15, 1988, five members of the Ethnographic Institute of the USSR Academy of Sciences wrote to the Politburo in concern over the implications Sumgait had on the country's Jewish communities. There were rumors, the

⁶⁹ The standard prefabricated *khrushchevka* apartments, where millions of the Soviet population were housed, had five floors. My understanding is that, unlike the higher floors, the first-floor apartments were considered inferior because they did not have a balcony, had considerably more foot traffic from the building's residents, and were more exposed to looters and vagrants.

⁷⁰ Melanie Newton, ed., *The USSR in 1989: A Record of Events* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 199.

⁷¹ See: Irina du Quenoy, "Russia: The Stability Implications of State Policies Toward Religion and the Russian Orthodox Church," Katya Migacheva and Bryan Frederick, eds., *Religion, Conflict, and Stability in the Former Soviet Union* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2018), 159-180.

⁷² RGANI f. 100, op.5, d. 409, l. 72 (letters from citizens on nationalism in various republics of the USSR Volume 3, 1988-1990).

ethnographic experts warned, of an anti-Semitic pogrom. The rumors, the authors claimed, had overtaken many cities of the country and had become part of the “public conscious.”⁷³ The academicians noted that these rumors attempted to “throw people into a state of mutual suspicion, instability and fear.” Indeed, a letter from 42 Soviet citizens across the RSFSR sent to central organs and media outlets on May 1988 voiced anxiety about growing anti-Semitism. The letter expressed distress about the possibility of “bloody incidents” and rising anti-Semitism.⁷⁴ The “recent tragedy in Sumgait,” they wrote, “gives this issue a special urgency.”

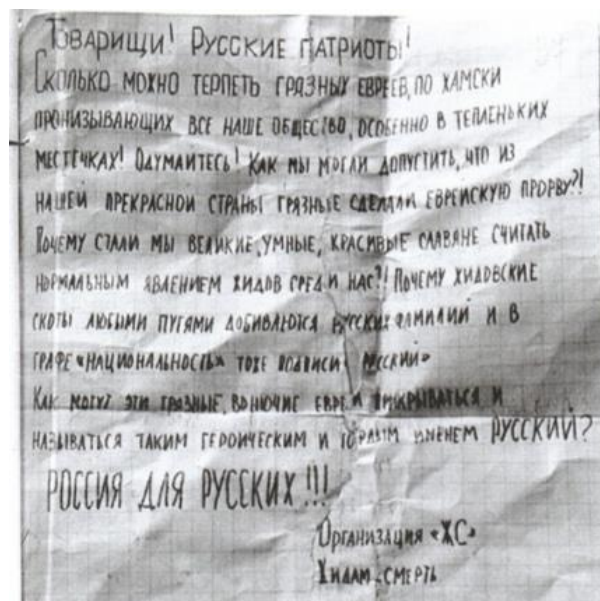


Figure 2. Flier, or letter, sent as photo documentation from the group of 42 Soviet citizens in May 1988 concerned with growing anti-Semitism. It shows how witnessing such material could create panic and propel migration. The flier reads: “Comrades! Russian patriots! How much longer can you tolerate the dirty Jews, rudely permeating our entire society, especially in privileged places [*v teplen'kikh mestechkakh*!]! Come to your senses! How could we have allowed our beautiful country to be turned into a dirty Jewish abyss?! Why have we, great, smart, beautiful Slavs, started to consider it normal to have kikes among us?! Why does the kike herd [*zhidavskie skoty*], by any means necessary, seek Russian surnames and in the nationality column the signature “Russian [sic].” How can these dirty, foul Jews hide behind and be called by such a heroic and good name RUSSIAN? RUSSIA FOR RUSSIANS!!! The organization ‘ZH.S.’ Death to the kikes [*zhidam smert'*].”

⁷³ RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 449, ll. 56-58 (letters from citizens about possible violent actions against persons of Jewish nationality, April 1988- January 1990).

⁷⁴ RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 449, ll. 30-38.

The ethnographic experts contended that the Sumgait pogrom made such fears not only tangible but warranted. They noted, “Sumgait shows that such a switch [to nationalist violence] is possible.”⁷⁵ “People began to believe in the possibility of Jewish pogroms in the 71st year of Soviet power after Sumgait,” they explained. “All the elements of a pogrom situation,” were visible, they asserted, including the inaction of authorities. The letter listed troubling anti-Semitic developments, including: the emergence of the Russian nationalist movement *Pamiat’* (memory), anti-Semitic leaflets (see figure 1), the desecration of Jewish cemeteries, and direct threats of violence. In proposing a solution, the academicians suggested one not uncommon among extraterritorial and nontitular groups: “full glasnost’,” or balanced media attention. In short, they believed that the dangers facing extraterritorial and nontitular communities should be underscored and brought to light in the media. Greater party and government concern—a strong state approach—was needed to curb nationalist violence, they pleaded.

Many despaired at the center’s inept response to titular nationalism and violence. “Sumgait is our source of endless pain,” wrote eight citizens of Russian and “other nationalities” from the “most international city in the entire Union—Baku.”⁷⁶ They similarly expressed indignation about the expulsions of Azeris from Armenia. “Is our state really unable to ensure the safety of its citizens and the inviolability of their homes?” they implored. “What are you waiting for?!” a collective from the “multinational Baku shoe factory no. 1,” wrote to central organs.⁷⁷ “Through the “bitter experience” of Sumgait, the “people lost faith in the government,” the workers concluded. On August 17, 1988, about six months after the Sumgait pogrom, the

⁷⁵ RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 449, l. 56-58.

⁷⁶ RGANI f. 100, op.5, d. 361, ll. 3-5.

⁷⁷ Ibid., l. 74.

USSR Central Committee reported that frequent letters and telegrams from “non-native” residents in both Armenia and Azerbaijan continued to cite titular harassment.⁷⁸

Gorbachev simultaneously admitted that the perestroika and glasnost reforms had unearthed myriad problems but assured the public that continuing with the reform measures would resolve them. On July 1, 1988, the party published a resolution “On interethnic relations.” It offered a remarkable declaration: “negative phenomena that have been accumulating for decades have been ignored for a long time, driven inside, and have not been properly evaluated by the party. Perestroika, democratization, and glasnost’ have exposed these phenomena and at the same time created the necessary conditions for their democratic overcoming.”⁷⁹ The Party thus admitted that the reforms brought serious disturbances to the surface while contradictorily claiming that the reforms would settle evolving conflicts. The main problem, however, was that the unleashed momentum described by the party was centrifugal. On June 15, 1988, the Armenian SSR flouted the official party line when its Supreme Soviet voted to incorporate Nagorno-Karabakh into Armenia.⁸⁰

The Sumgait pogroms, in which people perceived of as Armenian were mainly targeted, also spread titular nationalism and violence to other places in Azerbaijan. After a relative witnessed the tragic events in Sumgait, Armen and Vika, an ethnic Armenian couple who were raised in Baku, and Armen’s sister and law, Alena, fled the capital in 1988.⁸¹ Armen’s father had moved to Baku in the immediate postwar period for a job constructing the Baku metro. All three were the first generation to have been born in Baku, a city they praised as international.

⁷⁸ The state, and often Soviet citizens as well, employed the term “non-native” to denote extraterritorial and nontitular communities, though the former and the latter could also be native minorities or people born and raised in the territory of question. RGANI, f. 100, op. 5, d. 361, l. 73.

⁷⁹ *Raspad SSSR*, 119.

⁸⁰ Levon Chorbaijan, ed. *The Making of Nagorno-Karabagh: From Secession to Republic* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 81.

⁸¹ Oral interview with author. December 15, 2018.

Azerbaijanis, they noted, “made it clear we didn’t belong.” They felt further threatened when Armen had a glass jar thrown at him when he was out on the balcony of his apartment, and within the same span of time, someone ruptured their tire so that they couldn’t leave. They subsequently fled to Armenia. Armen and Vika described that panic in Baku had resulted in the impossibility of finding tickets for flights. Authorities, however, permitted departing flights to be packed “like a bus” with people standing in the aisles and behind seats. A month afterward, they faced the devastating 1988 December earthquake in Armenia, which killed more than 25,000 people and created thousands more refugees. In the fall of 1989, the crisis was intensified when Azerbaijan imposed a railway blockade, causing severe food and energy shortages. As Russian speakers, Armen, Vika, and Alena felt like outsiders in Armenia since they didn’t know the titular tongue. Therefore, it was difficult to land a job. “*Bakintsy* (Baku residents)” were classified separately, they noted, losing out in the hiring process over Armenian candidates. “All the documentation was in Armenian. We couldn’t read or write.” they explained. The devastating situation following the earthquake and the later Azerbaijani blockade of the land-locked country, had heightened tensions between refugees and permanent residents. Eventually, they made their way to Russia.

Communist authorities progressively lost influence to nationalists organized in popular fronts across the Caucasus. In August of 1989, thousands rallied in Baku in recognition of the Azerbaijani Popular Front national movement. On September 23, 1989, the Supreme Soviet in Baku declared Azerbaijan a sovereign state within the USSR. The tense atmosphere led to renewed clashes between Azerbaijanis and Armenians over disputed territories, as both the Armenian and Azerbaijan SSR declared sovereignty over Nagorno-Karabakh. Fearing backlash, central authorities perpetually stalled in bringing in security forces while renewed violence in

Baku left at least 90 Armenians dead. On January 19-20, 1990, days later, when most targeted in the Baku pogrom were already expelled from the city, Soviet troops finally initiated a brutal crackdown that killed over a hundred people and injured many more in what became known as “Black January.”⁸² By April 7, 1990, the USSR Council of Ministers in its decree “On measures to assist citizens forced to leave the Azerbaijani and Armenian SSR” reported that the failure of state authorities of the Azerbaijan SSR and the Armenian SSR to take “proper measures to stabilize interethnic relations” and to “ensure and protect the constitutional rights of citizens” resulted in over 400,000 internally displaced people.⁸³ Two hundred and thirty thousand of the displaced were located in Armenia, 200,000 in Azerbaijan, and tens of thousands in other republics, mainly in the RSFSR.

Throughout 1989 and 1990, letters described continual violence that affected members of other nationalities, mixed families, and Azerbaijanis who defended the attacked. Letters claimed that the Azerbaijani Popular Front had ordered, or was directly involved in, the raiding, looting, and occupation of apartments, as well as violence that resulted in forced evictions. Others were stuck in the crossfire by chance. Albert M., whose nationality was unclear, wrote to the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet that “extremists” by order of the Azerbaijani Popular Front had robbed “all the floors” of his apartment building in Baku, since Armenians were known to have lived there.⁸⁴ As a result, Albert M., a 69-year-old-pensioner, fled with his daughter. Afraid to return, they were now made homeless. “There is no return to the fascists,” he wrote, “I don't want my daughter to be killed or raped.” Vladimir T. who fled Baku to Stavropol

⁸² De Waal, *Black Garden*, 91.

⁸³ “O merakh po okazaniyu pomoshchi grazhdanam vyzhdenno pokinuvshim Azerbaidzhanskuyu SSR i Armianskuyu SSR ot 7 aprelya 1990g. N 329.” Biblioteka normativno-pravovykh aktov Soiuza Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh Respublik. Accessed January 20, 2021. http://www.libussr.ru/doc_ussr/ussr_16395.htm.

⁸⁴ GARF f. R9553, op.1, d. 5263, ll. 54-55 (materials related to Goskomtrud's Department of Migration and Resettlement).

Krai, alleged that on January 14, 1990, the Azerbaijani Popular Front led a pogrom on his apartment, where he and his wife were expelled from their home with people armed with “iron pipes, axes, sticks, steel hooks, metal garrotes” in their hands.⁸⁵ Vladimir, a pensioner, fled only in light undergarments, without documentation and his passport, and was at a loss as to how to transfer his pension.

The indifference of local and regional authorities to titular nationalism and violence, and in many cases, their reported collusion, created a sense of lost protection, and it became a common motive for flight. Reports of nationalism and violence were sent to central organs in previous decades, but in the USSR’s final years, they were received on an unparalleled scale. In a letter sent to numerous central organs on October 25, 1989, a collective of “refugees” who founded the “All-Union Council of Public Organizations of Armenian Refugees from Azerbaijan SSR,” claimed that the Azerbaijani “blackshirts” initiated a renewed wave of anti-Armenian terror.⁸⁶ The terror, the organization claimed, involved violence and murder. The list of victims contained members of mixed families, and others, including Azerbaijanis, who defended victims of threats and violence. In a detailed report that included victim statements, the organization provided an account of violent crimes against Armenians and members of other nationalities from August-October 1989.

In Baku, the report listed pogroms, involving looting, the robbing of apartments, violence leading to hospitalization, and the murder of people and children of all ages, including the

⁸⁵ GARF f. R9553, op.1, d. 5263, ll.71-72.

⁸⁶ The RGANI f.100, op. 5, d. 463, ll. 2-3 (letters from Armenian refugees from the Azerbaijan SSR requesting the lifting of the blockade from the NKAO, the end of a new wave of terror against the Armenian population living in Azerbaijan, November 13-December 26, 1989). The law allowing for the formation of public associations across the USSR did not pass until October 1990 and did not come into effect until 1991. The Russian Federation, however, was the only former republic of the USSR that did not require public associations to register, and unregistered associations (like this “refugee” association) likely proliferated earlier. On civil society in the post-Soviet space, see: Anders Uhlin, *Post-Soviet Civil Society: Democratization in Russia and the Baltic States*, (New York: Routledge, 2006)

disabled. It provided 64 accounts of separate incidents, many of which described multiple attacks. Zinaida G. witnessed how an 11-12-year-old boy was “torn to pieces” on December 5, 1988.⁸⁷ Her family was finally driven to leave when a Russian friend’s Armenian husband was attacked by strangers, which resulted in his “broken arms, legs and spine.” He was left covered in blood with no one coming to his aid, the account claimed. People ignited a container full of Zhanna P. belongings on fire with gasoline.⁸⁸ Viktoria V. alleged that her brother was beaten at work and her mother’s apartment had been broken into and robbed. “In the building where I live, she wrote, “it was impossible to stay, there were constant threats, break-ins and demands to leave the city.”⁸⁹ Finally, Viktoria claimed that she was attacked herself at the train station while attempting to flee Baku. “The militia did not come, though they saw everything,” she proclaimed.⁹⁰ One Baku resident appealed to leave the Republic after seeing fliers hung in the streets and on the walls of homes demanding “non-native people,”—“Russians, Tatars, Lezgins, and others”—leave the Republic before March 21, 1990, as afterward “measures would be taken as they were for Armenians.”⁹¹ The Baku resident noted that the fliers were reported to the militia who remained indifferent, stating that it was “the opinion of native people.”

Arkadii A. similarly exclaimed that “local authorities, police and district committees of the Party do not take undertake any measures” to quell unrest, thus concluding that “it is impossible to live and work in Baku in such an environment.”⁹² Suren G. fled Baku in November of 1988, when he returned later that month, he found his home broken into and his things robbed. When Suren G. later saw that his neighbor had acquired some of his stolen things,

⁸⁷ RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 463, ll. 4-20.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ GARF f. R9553, op.1, d. 5263, l.56.

⁹² RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 463, ll. 4-20.

he reported it to the militia, who, he alleged, accused Suren G. of robbing his own apartment and using his neighbors as false witnesses.⁹³ As a result of the aforementioned, he left Baku for good. Aidyn M. labeled a “soldier-internationalist” in the report, testified that he and his family were often “picked on” because his mother was Armenian.⁹⁴ The report added that a group of Azerbaijanis, whom he called Nazis, took Aidyn to “some kind of headquarters of theirs” in August and began insulting and beating him. They also allegedly painted “get out of here” on his apartment door. Aidyn M. fled thereafter with his mother and aunt. In August, an Azerbaijani man, Sobir I. was beaten to death while helping his friend, an Armenian man, move. According to the report, a group of Azerbaijanis had asked Sobir why he was helping an Armenian; he had responded that it was none of their business. They struck him on the spine, cut his stomach open with a crowbar and knocked his eye out.⁹⁵

Individual and collective letters from those who fled Baku and Azerbaijan described family separation in the process. Numerous Russian speakers from mixed families pleaded to change their nationality to Russian to assert their right to permanent residency in the RSFSR. One woman from Baku whose mother was Russian, claimed that her father was an “internationalist” Armenian.⁹⁶ She asked to change her nationality to Russian to permanently move to Russia with her children. “My whole family is Russian speaking,” she explained. According to Soviet policy, as a child of a mixed nationality family, she had to choose between the nationality of either of her parents at sixteen years old. She had chosen her father’s nationality as her “official” nationality.⁹⁷ Twenty years later, she asked to switch her nationality

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ GARF f. R9553, op.1, d. 5263, ll. 33-38.

⁹⁷ It was not possible to choose a hyphenated, or mixed, nationality, nor was it possible to choose more than one nationality. In Central Asia and the Caucasus, there was an expectation that children of mixed families (with at least one parent of a traditionally Muslim or “Eastern” culture) choose their father’s nationality, due to enduring

to that of her mother's, so that her children would then have the option of selecting Russian on their passports.⁹⁸ While simultaneously exclaiming that she couldn't "write all that is in the hearts of thousands like me," she also proclaimed that "we consider ourselves Russian and want to live in cities in Russia."⁹⁹ Such declarations not only depicted the complex nature of national identity, but they also revealed the psychological strain persecutions based on nationality had on "international" mixed families.

Another woman from Baku whose mother was Russian and whose father was Armenian detailed that her husband was Azerbaijani. In explaining her request to switch her nationality, she wrote that the lives of her family members were threatened. She claimed that her husband was forced to divorce her or leave the republic. For the same reason, she alleged, her child was banned from school.¹⁰⁰ She highlighted that she was forced to leave her job of 23 years, and due to various threats, she "hid" with her child at her husband's parents because she was "an Armenian in [her] passport", without, ironically, "knowing a word of Armenian." She hoped that switching her nationality to Russian would keep her family alive and protect them from "the persecution of extremists." Stella A., who was born in Baku, had been married to an Azerbaijani man for twenty years with whom she had two children. She petitioned to switch her official nationality to that of the titular nation, Azerbaijan, in 1990.¹⁰¹ Stella also asked to change her first name and patronymic (as her last name was already that of her husband's). Stella thus felt that changing her first name and patronymic, important markers of an individual's identity, would help her survive in the nationalizing republic.

patriarchal conceptions of the family. Saule K. Ualiyeva and Adrienne L. Edgar, "In the Laboratory of People's Friendship: Mixed People in Kazakhstan from the Soviet Era to the Present." Rebecca Chiyoko King-O'Riain, et al., eds. *Global Mixed Race* (New York: NYU Press, 2014).

⁹⁸ Though it was not mentioned, this request implied that the father of her children was not Russian.

⁹⁹ GARF f. R9553, op.1, d. 5263, ll. 33-38.

¹⁰⁰ GARF f. R9553, op.1, d. 5263, ll. 43-45.

¹⁰¹ GARF f. R9553, op.1, d. 5263, l. 46.

The dilemmas mixed nationalities faced continued to escalate. Out of 41,000 Soviet citizens registered as “refugees” from January-March of 1990 in the city of Moscow and Moscow oblast’ alone, 18,000 were reported as Russian, 15,000 Armenian, and 8,000 as mixed nationalities.¹⁰² In January of 1990, the Armenian Council of Ministers reported a deteriorating situation involving 300 Russian speakers in mixed families from the Azerbaijan SSR, who ended up in neighboring Armenia.¹⁰³ According to the report, Russian speaking families of Armenian-Azerbaijani, Armenian-Russian, Russian-Azerbaijani mixed marriages categorically refused to be relocated to Armenia. Instead, they occupied the Armenian SSR’s Council of Ministers’ government building, “sleeping in the hallways and foyer, right on the floor” to petition for asylum in Russia. Mixed families experienced additional challenges amid the USSR’s demise. Frequently unable to claim Russian as their official nationality to move to the Soviet metropole, they were encouraged by state and party authorities to appeal to “their” titular republic, which often did not make sense. Most of the families occupying the Armenian Council of Ministers building remained in “unbearable unsanitary conditions” through March of 1990, when the Armenian Council of Ministers reported that four children had been hospitalized. Ninety demonstrators succeeded, however, and were transferred to Russia.

The lack of coordination between central, republican, and local authorities made the refugee crisis increasingly calamitous. “Refugees” reported difficulties in receiving pensions and compensation, registering their children in schools, and finding employment and housing.¹⁰⁴ “Refugees” also appealed to the state collectively to use collective leverage to resolve their predicaments. Collective letters solicited the state to organize a resettlement of Russian speakers

¹⁰² Report by Goskomtrud Chairman from April 28, 1990. GARF f. R9553, op.1, d. 5263, l. 79

¹⁰³ GARF f. R9553, op. 1, d. 5263, ll.120-125.

¹⁰⁴ See GARF R9553, op. 1, d. 5263.

from Baku, to exchange their apartments in Baku with others located in Russia, and for compensation for material losses. A collective letter dated from January 24, 1990, from 84 individuals who proclaimed themselves Russian speakers “of all nationalities” from Baku, for instance, was sent to Goskomtrud with several demands.¹⁰⁵ These included, among other things, the provision of: 1) the evacuation of all Russian speakers who wanted to leave, 2) the registration of all “refugees”, and 3) equal housing in the regions of the country at the discretion of each person. Even as “refugees,” these individuals, still technically Soviet citizens, continued to push for their rights.

Many experienced helplessness in the face of unreliable and indeterminate policies. Up to 1992, the North Caucasus had received three-quarters of all refugees and forced migrants, particularly Krasnodar and Stavropol Krai as well as North Ossetia (see chapters three and five).¹⁰⁶ As housing became difficult to obtain in the south, parts of central Russia were deemed a favorable destination for many escaping conflict.¹⁰⁷ By 1991, comprehensive legislation was making its way through the USSR Council of Ministers, which would have granted “emergency powers” to local administrations with substantial in-migration.¹⁰⁸ A decree “On measures to assist citizens forced to leave the Azerbaijani and Armenian SSR” passed on April 7, 1990, and it required those displaced to provide written refusal of other housing to receive permanent residence elsewhere.¹⁰⁹ The April 7, 1990, decree also required that permanent employment and

¹⁰⁵ GARF R9553, op. 1, d. 5263, ll. 97-99.

¹⁰⁶ Hilary Pilkington, *Migration, Displacement and Identity in Post-Soviet Russia* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 90.

¹⁰⁷ In 1987, legislation had already restricted housing registration in dense areas of Crimea Oblast and Krasnodar Krai. “Ob ogranichenii propiski grazhdan v nekotorykh naselennykh punktakh Krymskoi oblasti i Krasnodarskogo kraia.” Parus Internet-Konsul’tant. Accessed January 30, 2023, <http://cons.parus.ua/map/doc/00UNV409CF/Ob-ogranichenii-propiski-grazhdan-v-nekotorykh-naselennykh-punktakh-Krymskoi-oblasti-i-Krasnodarskogo-Kraya.html?a=1JNLW>.

¹⁰⁸ Between the Ministry of Labor of the RSFSR and the government organs tasked with managing migration in other republics. GARF, f. 10121, op. 1, d. 30, l. 20.

¹⁰⁹ Permanent residence included apartments from the state public housing fund, or land allocation for the construction of individual or cooperative homes. See “O merakh po okazaniiu pomoshchi grazhdanam vyzhdenno

residence procured for those forced to leave the Azerbaijan and Armenian SSR exclude the Moscow city and Moscow oblast'. Out of the 41,000 refugees who were registered in the city of Moscow and Moscow oblast between January and March of 1990, only about 7,000 refugees were able to find work throughout Russia, however, through the assistance of the ministries of labor and social affairs¹¹⁰ For a group of 78 "Baku refugees" of an "initiative group" the decree felt like discrimination.¹¹¹ As Soviet citizens, they claimed to be in Russia "only because the central government is here," and many "Armenian refugees," they noted, were in mixed families. The word "internationalist" was disappearing, they despaired, and along with it, "entire territories, regions and cities were closing to the refugees for settlement." Like other Soviet "refugees," they demanded compact settlement near Moscow or in the more favorable southern portions of Russia.¹¹²

In attempt to win aid from central authorities, some evoked their years of service to the USSR. Ambartsum K., a 71-year-old disabled man who fled "international" Baku after his apartment was robbed, made his appeal to the USSR Department of Veteran Affairs and the Disabled. Ambartsum proudly noted that he "devoted his entire adult life to the service of his mother country."¹¹³ He attempted to plea "earnestly from one front-line soldier to another" for assistance, noting that he had "nothing left to live on." He detailed his service in "various command positions" in the Soviet army. As part of the 4th Guards Tank Army, he had valiantly

pokinuvshim Azerbaidzhanskuiu SSR i Armianskuiu SSR." According to the decree, the ministries and departments of the USSR, the RSFSR Council of Ministers, and Goskomtrud were to cooperate to prioritize finding employment for those "forced to leave the Azerbaijan and Armenian SSR." The RSFSR Council of Ministers and the executive committees of local Council of People's Deputies were to allocate housing, medical services, registration of children in school and other conditions necessary for the adaption of citizens in their new place of residence. By July of 1990, the USSR Goskomtrud was working with 25 ministries and agencies to provide refugees from Azerbaijan and Armenia with employment and housing. GARF f. R9553, op. 1, d. 5263, ll. 211-213.

¹¹⁰ GARF f. R9553, op. 1, d. 5263, ll. 201-232.

¹¹¹ GARF f. R9553, op. 1, d. 5263, ll. 147-151.

¹¹² Ibid., l. 151; Ibid., l. 225.

¹¹³ GARF f. R9553, op. 1, d. 5263, ll. 83-84.

passed through Kursk to Prague fighting against the “German Fascist Invaders.” In attempting to circumvent the influx of appeals to Goskomtrud, Ambartsum had leveraged his service to the state by appealing instead to the USSR Department of Veteran Affairs and the Disabled. To improve his chances of receiving assistance as a “refugee” from Baku—a label devoid of prestige—or perhaps just unsure of where to turn, Ambartsum pleaded to his fellow veterans. Ambartsum’s letter was routed to the USSR Goskomtrud, however, which recommended him to appeal to the local Executive Committee of the Council of People’s Deputies with the appropriate paperwork as required by the April 7th decree.

Conflicting red tape also left refugees unable to solve their dilemmas. “Refugees” were frustrated in their attempts to go through the proper channels in order to receive assistance due to bureaucratic difficulties. Artem G. who fled Baku to Stavropol Krai in September 1989, wrote to the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet in February of 1990 for help in determining a place of residency.¹¹⁴ Upon arrival in Stavropol, he was refused assistance from the Executive Committee of the Kursk District, who told him that residence permits were not offered to “refugees” in the area. Artem G. claimed that the Committee “mocked” him by asking for discharge documentation. “Everyone knows how it is there [Azerbaijan],” he begged, “so what should I do, because I am a Soviet person.” As a disabled man, he was left living in an “abandoned hut.”

When “refugees” occupied facilities but did not necessarily work for the affiliated enterprise or agency, it contributed to bureaucratic disorganization and set off grievances. The facilities that housed refugees also had associated enterprises, which in turn had overseeing ministries. Places of rest, youth camps, and health facilities “belonged” to these enterprises and were intended for the families of their specific workers. In March and April of 1990, the USSR

¹¹⁴ GARF f. R9553, op. 1, d. 5263, l. 76.

Ministry of Justice appealed to the ministries and agencies that administered the respective subordinate enterprises where many of the “refugees” had worked. The appeals did not yield any results, and thus many “refugees” lived in facilities that belonged to other industries.¹¹⁵ On June 4, 1990, the Minister of the USSR Shipbuilding Industry sent a complaint to the Deputy Chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers (who also served as the Chairman of the State Commission of the USSR Council of Ministers on emergency situations). The complaint included a list of the 199 “refugees” from 58 families who resided in three of its facilities who were not affiliated with the Ministry of the USSR Shipbuilding Industry. The Minister of the USSR Shipbuilding Industry, Igor Vladimirovich Koksanov, asked that the corresponding institutions employing the “refugees” instead “personally accept these citizens and take control of their travel and housing.”¹¹⁶ Only 19 out of 68 health facilities had returned to their intended use in the summer.¹¹⁷ On June 10, the funding for the maintenance of “refugees” in health facilities at the expense of such host organizations had stopped, further straining authorities, though this funding was later prolonged.¹¹⁸ From June to September of 1990, however, new waves of “refugees” had arrived in Moscow.¹¹⁹ One thousand five hundred newly arrived families were registered as “refugees.” One of the solutions presented by the USSR Goskomtrud by the end of September was to solicit the help of the RSFSR Civil Defense in the deployment of evacuation points for the rehousing of citizens.¹²⁰

Goskomtrud also resorted to pivoting potential migrants away from leaving, and other more drastic measures. On April 2nd, 1990, Tamara L.’s plea for help to leave Baku due to her

¹¹⁵ GARF f. R9553, op. 1, d. 5263, ll. 365-368.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., ll. 219-232.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., ll. 201-203.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., ll. 219-221.

¹²⁰ Specifically, this measure was intended for those who needed extended time to find employment elsewhere. GARF f. R9553, op. 1, d. 5263, ll. 231-238.

family's imminent danger, received the following sober reply from Goskomtrud: "The possibility of moving to the RSFSR is limited due to the lack of free housing in the cities of the Russian Federation."¹²¹ In June 1990, Goskomtrud reported that, in accordance with the April 7th decree, three thousand people who were registered as "refugees" in Moscow and the Moscow Oblast' and who were not sent by various ministries to different regions of the country had been "taken (vyvezeny)" to Armenia. It was unclear to what extent this was made voluntary.¹²² By August of 1990, 21,000 refugees had returned to Azerbaijan, 15,000 of whom had not received benefits. Goskomtrud noted that the "refugees" who remained in health facilities at that point were causing a "serious problem."¹²³ Increased efforts to resituate these "refugees" in other regions, or in Azerbaijan, had failed.

Goskomtrud blamed the local and republican authorities for worsening the situation and contributing to the growing "refugee" problem. The temporary *propiska* (housing registration) available to "refugees" and the Moscow City Council (Mossovet)'s intent to accept temporary refugee status, Goskomtrud argued, made matters worse.¹²⁴ This decision, Goskomtrud posited, would not only "legalize" the refugees but also "drastically increase their influx from other parts of the country."¹²⁵ The new arrivals, Goskomtrud claimed, came to Moscow with applications [likely for the temporary *propiska*] in hand. However, only 200 new arrivals were able to receive help, and the rest, the Ministry of Labor complained, complicated the "already tense situation in the city." In August, Goskomtrud raised alarm about citizens unlawfully residing in hotels, dormitories, and other residential areas.¹²⁶ The Deputy Chairman of Goskomtrud, noted that "It

¹²¹ GARF f. R9553, op. 1, d. 5263, l. 90.

¹²² GARF f. R9553, op. 1, d. 5263, ll. 201-232.

¹²³ Ibid., ll. 219-221.

¹²⁴ Ibid., ll. 211-213.

¹²⁵ Goskomtrud blamed the lack of resolutions regarding the "refugee" problem on the Temporary Commission on Refugee Problems under the Presidium of the Moscow City Council. Ibid., ll. 201-203; 231-233.

¹²⁶ Ibid. ll. 219-221.

is more humane not to attract “refugees” to Moscow,” giving them “unfounded hopes,” than to later evict them.¹²⁷ Indeed, one refugee lodged at the Severnaia Hotel in Moscow described that “In Moscow, party organs do not work at all.”¹²⁸ Instead, “everyone tries to blow you off [otfutbolit’], just not to solve the problem.”

Even as the intransigence of nationalizing republican authorities added to the “refugee problem,” Goskomtrud pushed “refugees” to return to their places of origin. Goskomtrud proposed that the Council of Ministers hold a meeting with the leadership of the Azerbaijan and Armenian republics to address the “mutual distrust” between the Azerbaijani SSR and the Armenian SSR.¹²⁹ Its work on implementing a mechanism of compensation payments to refugees from Azerbaijan and Armenia had been complicated by the refusal of the Azerbaijani SSR to consider Russian speakers as “refugees.” At the same time, however, Goskomtrud led “roundtable” talks with refugee committees to “explain the measures taken to stabilize the situation in the Azerbaijani SSR and to ensure the safety of returning citizens.” Goskomtrud thus actively encouraged “refugees” to return to the places they fled even amid growing signs of concern. The USSR’s policy of “managing” the migrant problem had ultimately become one that did not validate the fears of the displaced, and like Gorbachev’s politics, it continued to ignore the reality of accelerated nationalization in the USSR.

Georgia for Georgians: After April 1989

Nationalist movements also developed in the third Caucasian republic: Georgia. In Georgia, 20,000 national demonstrators first gathered in Tbilisi, the Georgian republic’s capital, to demonstrate against Abkhazian appeals for secession from Georgia.¹³⁰ Demonstrators soon

¹²⁷ Ibid., ll. 231-233.

¹²⁸ GARF f. R9553, op.1, d. 5263, ll. 52-53.

¹²⁹ Ibid., ll. 198

¹³⁰ Melanie Newton, ed. *The USSR in 1989*, 173.

called for a range of demands—from greater republican autonomy to independence and the withdrawal of the Russian presence.¹³¹ The Soviet Army intervened on April 9, 1989, the sixth day of mass demonstrations in Tbilisi, leaving about 20 people killed and numerous others injured. On April 10th, while *The New York Times* reported that Georgians had been threatened by Moscow’s attempts to “unify the country under a homogenized Soviet culture,” an article in *Pravda* stated that “extremists” had taken advantage of the situation to “escalate an unhealthy mood” in the city and republic.¹³² The protestors, *Pravda* proclaimed, promulgated nationalist, anti-Soviet banners “inciting ethnic strife” and threatened to “crack down on Communists and the authorities.” The latter actions, *Pravda* established, caused a stampede in the crowd that led to 16 deaths and numerous injuries, including members of the military and police, and eventually amounted to 20 fatalities.¹³³ The deaths spurred more protests, however. A mass demonstration followed in Moscow on April 15th, which demanded punishment for those responsible for the deaths.¹³⁴ The state had attempted to contain the escalation by revising articles to the 1958 USSR law “On Criminal Liability for Crimes against the State,” which decriminalized private commentary against the state, but it also passed a new penal code article to prohibit “Public Calls for the Betrayal of the Motherland or for the Commission of a Terrorist Act of Sabotage.”¹³⁵ The latter article, which drew heavy criticism, was repealed soon after, however, by the Congress of People’s Deputies.¹³⁶

¹³¹ Ibid., 196-198.

¹³² “K obstanovke v Tbilisi.” *Pravda*. April 10, 1989. Esther B. Fein, “At Least 16 Killed as Protesters Battle the Police in Soviet Georgia,” *The New York Times*, April 10, 1989.

¹³³ On April 13, the TV program *Vremya* would report that the number of deaths had risen to 20. Melanie Newton, ed. *The USSR in 1989*, 197.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 205.

¹³⁵ On April 11th. Melanie Newton, ed. *The USSR in 1989*, 201.

¹³⁶ “Toward the Rule of Law: Soviet Legal Reform and Human Rights Under Perestroika.” U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee. December 1989. Accessed January 29, 2023.
<https://www.hrw.org/legacy/reports/pdfs/u/ussr/ussr.89d/ussr89dfull.pdf>

The Tbilisi demonstration and its violent crackdown stirred tensions between the Georgian and non-Georgian population in the Georgian SSR's capital. Some groups argued that perestroika and glasnost' brought on a double victimization: national movements took new latitudes while extraterritorial and nontitular concerns remained unrepresented in the republican and central media. Some collectives of military servicemen, veterans, and their families stationed outside of "their own" titular territories blamed nationalism and weak central oversight for the snowballing issues they faced. One group of military servicemen in Tbilisi identified themselves as Russian speaking "employees of the Soviet Army - Russians and Georgians, Greeks and Jews, Armenians, Ukrainians and others who had not forgotten the ideals of socialism, internationalism and patriotism."¹³⁷ In attempt to provide a "more accurate picture" about the incidents that affected extraterritorial and nontitular populations in Tbilisi since April 9th, they documented some of the alleged slogans that had appeared. These included, "down with the Russian occupiers," "Georgia for Georgians," "foreigners [*inorodtsy*] get out of Georgia!" and "death to the foreigners [*smert' inorodtsam*]." A group of thirty military veterans on reserve and retired in Batumi, the capital of the Adzhar autonomous republic (ASSR) in Georgia, highlighted the importance of preserving Russian as the state language for multinational Soviet peoples.¹³⁸ During their service, they wrote that up to 25 nationalities served in their units and that "all were as one family." We didn't even really know which of us was what nationality, but we were "one for all and all for one." Baffled at the precipitous pace the USSR was devolving, they marveled, "As the forest is chopped, the chips fly."

¹³⁷ RGANI, f. 100, op. 5, d. 428, ll. 44-48 (Letters from citizens living in Georgia about the intensification of ethnic tensions, about the persecution of the Russian-speaking population, especially military personnel in the Georgian SSR. February 1986 - September 1989).

¹³⁸ RGANI, f. 100, op. 5, d. 428, ll. 53-56.

By calling for the defense of their families, some women's collective voices attempted to humanize the problems extraterritorial and nontitular populations faced in Georgia. Women's (and mothers') protests have a long history in the USSR, as elsewhere. Collectivization, for instance, threatened to significantly alter family and everyday life for peasant women, and it sparked riots among them, sometimes based on concerns for their children.¹³⁹ In a similarly transformational moment for the Soviet Union, some women banded together to draw the attention of central organs to the problems non-Georgian and mixed families faced. A group of 37 military wives from Tbilisi on one occasion chose to address Raisa Gorbacheva, Gorbachev's wife. The central press, they wrote, "silences" the "rampant nationalism" and "terrorism."¹⁴⁰ Families of military service members, they lamented, were compelled to leave to take their children away from the city.

Another collective letter signed by 57 self-identified Russian women, some of whom were also from military families, described the growing animosities they faced since the turn of events on April 9th. These included threatening letters, phone calls, ominous "marks in the form of crosses" on apartment doors, and "provocative anti-Russian, anti-socialist slogans" on the walls of homes.¹⁴¹ The tense atmosphere, the women wrote, transferred to schools, where there were numerous cases of attacks on Russian students. This had led to the "mass sending of children away from Tbilisi." Though Russians were the primary targets of such attacks, the women noted that it had affected people of other nationalities. Currently, the women wrote, leaflets were distributed with the slogan, "let everyone with a Russian mother be cursed!" The latter implied that mixed families were also potentially subject to such persecution. Such

¹³⁹ Lynne Viola, "Bab'i Bunty and Peasant Women's Protest during Collectivization." *The Russian Review* 45, no. 1 (1986): 23-42.

¹⁴⁰ RGANI, f. 100, op. 5, d. 428, ll. 50-53.

¹⁴¹ RGANI f. 100, op.5, d. 428, ll. 37-40.

collective letters depicted fear of a further decline of all-Union institutions, but some hope that the situation, however tenuous, was still salvageable. The letter concluded, “We women are at the edge of despair and demand urgent measures to ensure the legal protection of our families.” They asked for an investigation into the decision behind the Soviet Army’s intervention in the Tbilisi demonstrations, which had escalated tensions in the Republic. *Pravda*’s official claim was that the republican leadership had made the decision to interfere in the demonstrations, though the decision was likely approved by the center.¹⁴²

The Fergana Valley Massacre and its Regional Aftermath

Demonstrations, protests, and strikes occurred almost daily in 1989 and 1990 across the USSR, which, when intensifying, provoked further violence and forced migration.¹⁴³ Central authorities, as I have shown, struggled to address the growing refugee crisis. In Uzbekistan, tensions were first flared by the *Birlik* (Unity) Movement, which was organized in Tashkent in 1988 by a group of Uzbek scholars to bring attention to the environmental issues created through the extremes of Soviet planning. *Birlik*’s protests then spiraled to focus on making Uzbek the state language, and by fall 1989, on republican sovereignty, secession, and an Islamic revival.¹⁴⁴ *Birlik* had attracted tens of thousands of followers, and some of their demonstrations started to take on a controversial stance—protesting the Soviet deportation of Meskhetian Turks to the region.¹⁴⁵ From February to March 1989, more than 66 thousand Meskhetian Turks left the Uzbek SSR (or 62% of those who had lived there) due to fear of ethnic violence, harassment and

¹⁴² The deadly disturbance had resulted in a series of resignations at the republican level, which included the resignation of the Georgian Party First Secretary, Jumber Patiashvili, the chairman of the republic’s Supreme Soviet and the chairman of the Georgian Council of Ministers. “K obstanovke v Tbilisi.” *Pravda*. April 10, 1989.

¹⁴³ Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization*, 88.

¹⁴⁴ Islamic references were incorporated into the *Birlik* program, a factor which was used against the movement by Uzbekistan’s first president Islam Karimov’s anti-Islamic revival campaign. Karimov was the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan since late June of 1989. Vitaly V. Naumkin, *Central Asia and Transcaucasia: Ethnicity and Conflict* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1994), 120.

¹⁴⁵ Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization*, 258-260.

discrimination.¹⁴⁶ In early June 1989, exacerbated by a rapidly destabilizing economy, growing tensions erupted into a massacre of 110 people (most of whom, reportedly, were Meskhetian Turks), and 1011 injuries in Uzbekistan's Fergana Valley, a historically diverse border region inhabited by Uzbeks, Kyrgyz, Tajiks, and other ethnic groups who also migrated to the region as part of the Soviet modernizing project or were deported there.¹⁴⁷

Mass unrest dragged on for weeks. Two witnesses of the ethnic violence in Fergana generalized that "Uzbeks" believed the "Turks" deserved to be "'humiliated' because they allegedly seized the dominant positions in the economy of the region and behaved, 'defiantly.'"¹⁴⁸ Labeling Meskhetian Turks as "defiant" signified a perception that they did not act appropriately vis-à-vis the titular nation who claimed dominance in the region, or republic. In other words, it was not "their" territory, and Meskhetian Turks should have acted accordingly. The Meskhetian Turk presence in Uzbekistan, however, was the result of Stalinist-era deportations, and they had been unable to "return" to their historic homeland in Georgia. As a result, they were more susceptible to stigma, and they lacked the recourse and resources historically available to other nations. On June 15th, the First Secretary of the Uzbek Communist Party, Rafiq N. Nishanov warned that *Birlik* was "distort[ing]" Uzbekistan's social situation, blaming the worsening of the population's standard of living on "migration to the republic of individuals from other regions of the country."¹⁴⁹ When a "refugee" camp was finally attacked,

¹⁴⁶ GARF f. R9553, op.1, d. 5263, ll. 336-340.

¹⁴⁷ The number of casualties and injuries is from the USSR's Prosecutor's Office. RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 474, l. 64 (letters from different nationalities about interethnic relations in Uzbekistan, from December 1987-November 1989), Newton, ed., *The USSR in 1989*, 292-296, Madeleine Reeves, "Travels in the Margins of the State: Everyday Geography in the Ferghana Valley Borderlands," Jeff Sahadeo and Russell Zanca, eds., *Everyday Life in Central Asia: Past and Present* (Bloomington, 2007), 284.

¹⁴⁸ Marks Lur'e and Petr Studenkikin, *Zapakh Gari i Gorja: Fergana, Trevozhnyi Iiun' 1989g.* (Moscow: Kniga, 1990), 6-30.

¹⁴⁹ "Report by R. N. Nishanov, First Secretary of the Uzbekistan Communist Party Central Committee, at the Meeting of the Republic's Party and Economic Aktiv on June 15," *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 41, no.24,

the USSR Supreme Soviet ordered a mass evacuation of Meskhetian Turks to the RSFSR.¹⁵⁰ Somewhere between 13.6 to 17 thousand Meskhetian Turks are estimated to have lived in the region; about 16-17 thousand were consequently evacuated from Uzbekistan to central regions of Russia.¹⁵¹ Some were received poorly, however, compelling them to move on. Within the year, more than 90,000 Meskhetian Turks fled Uzbekistan, many under continued pressure, to Russia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine.¹⁵²

The Fergana Valley Massacre, and the state response to it, triggered an outpouring of concern from other extraterritorial and nontitular peoples—a heightened sense of group feeling among them—rooted in Soviet internationalism. In their efforts to mobilize, or to call on the center to act, petitions often evoked rhetoric used for years under internationalist practices to flag and report incidents of alleged “extreme,” or unorthodox nationalism. To confront Uzbek “extremists,” for instance, an “inter-movement”—international movement—formed in Fergana oblast’ after the massacre, mirroring similar “interfronts” across the Baltics and Moldova.¹⁵³ The inter-movement’s leaders stated that what transpired with the Meskhetian Turks could have happened to representatives of any national group. The “extremists,” they believed, needed “a warning shot.”¹⁵⁴

(July 12, 1989), 7. Some have claimed, however, that *Birlik* was used as a scapegoat following the events (the national movement was subsequently suppressed). See Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization*, 258-260.

¹⁵⁰ Newton, ed., *The USSR in 1989*, 292-296.

¹⁵¹ Alexander G. Osipov and Olga I. Cherepova, *The Violation of the Rights of Forced Migrants and Ethnic Discrimination in Krasnodar Territory: The Situation of the Meskhetian Turks* (Moscow: Memorial Human Rights Center, 1996.), 7-8, Newton, ed., *The USSR in 1989*, 296. See also Irina Levin, “Caught in a bad romance: displaced people and the Georgian state,” *Citizenship Studies* 22, no. 1 (2018): 19-36.

¹⁵² Sergei Riazantsev, *Sovremennyi demograficheskii i migratsionnyi portret Severnogo Kavkaza* (Stavropol: 2003), 129-142. See also Osipov and Cherepova, *The Violation of the Rights of Forced Migrants*.

¹⁵³ Lur’e and Studenikin, *Zapakh gari i goria*, 30-31, Newton, ed., *The USSR in 1989*, 292-296. On (Baltic) interfronts, see Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization*, 392, and Keiji, “Mobilization of Non-Titular Ethnicities,” 141-157.

¹⁵⁴ Lur’e and Studenikin, *Zapakh gari i goria*, 30-31.

The Fergana Valley Massacre stoked fears and requests for transfers among different communities in Uzbekistan, including privileged Russians, many of whom reported threats of violence. One petition to Gorbachev gained 60,000 signatures from people throughout Fergana Oblast horrified with the brutalities committed against Meskhetian Turks, which they alleged included torture, rape, dismemberment of children, and the burning of families in their homes.¹⁵⁵ “All this is done during the day, in front of the local authorities and the police, with their tacit consent,” the petition declared. The letter stated that the many nationalities who lived in Fergana Oblast, including Russians, on whose behalf the petition was sent, were equally imperiled. “We hear such threats at every turn,” it warned. The petition demanded further oversight and the right of relocation to Russia.

A letter from seven Russians in Fergana, most of whom were born and raised in Uzbekistan after their parents had been evacuated there during the war, proclaimed that panic arose within the diverse border community two to three months before the onset of the Massacre as tensions flared.¹⁵⁶ “With the Turks gone,” their letter stated, the Uzbeks openly declared “to take us Russians on,” and many began to leave. As second-generation residents of the republic, they begged, “but what if there is nowhere to turn?” In a collective petition, eighty-eight female workers from Fergana Oblast noted that it had become “scary” to live there.¹⁵⁷ They pleaded for central intervention to guarantee the security of “non-native residents” of Fergana Oblast, which included the “organized departure” of those who now wished to depart for other republics. The USSR Ministry of the Interior reported a slew of collective letters from “non-native residents” of different oblasts recounting a “sense of uncertainty and suppression (*podavlennost*)” after

¹⁵⁵ RGANI, f. 100, op. 5, d. 474, ll. 35-38.

¹⁵⁶ RGANI, f. 100, op. 5, d. 474, l. 38.

¹⁵⁷ RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 474, ll. 67-71.

Fergana Valley and a desire to leave.¹⁵⁸ Ironically, the state's use of the "native" and "non-native" binary to describe the divide between titular and extraterritorial and nontitular populations further reinforced the primordial sense that only one nation was the "real citizen" in its ethno-federal territories. The "non-native" category, as it was employed by the state and citizens alike, however, included native populations as well.

The Fergana Valley Massacre was another episode of mass titular violence that marked the waning of centralizing functions and their ability to counteract growing nationalism, which for decades had been curbed and monitored under Soviet practices. Collective letters from extraterritorial and nontitular communities thus marveled at the state's use of evacuation to defuse titular nationalism and violence. Seventy-three "Russian speakers" from Fergana criticized the state for its inability to "ensure the constitutional rights of Meskhetian Turks" and its decision to evacuate them, which they claimed aggravated interethnic tensions and gave new impetus to nationalist "extremists."¹⁵⁹ "We believe that in order to restore faith in the Soviet government," they wrote, "it is necessary to return these unfortunate Meskhetian Turks, who suffered innocently, to their homes."

The Fergana Valley Massacre and the evacuation of Meskhetian Turks signaled the center's decline, and it set off more cycles of conflict and out-migration. In Dushanbe, Tajikistan in February 1989, "group clashes" were reported between Tajiks and Russians.¹⁶⁰ From April-July later that year, after the Fergana Valley Massacre, conflict spread throughout Tajikistan between Tajiks, Kirghiz, and Uzbeks in the northern Leninabad and the southern Khatlonskaia in

¹⁵⁸ RGANI f. 100, op.5, d. 474. ll. 61-63.

¹⁵⁹ RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 474, l.57.

¹⁶⁰ RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 422, ll. 71-72 (letters from citizens of Tajik nationalities in connection with the aggravation of interethnic relations in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan).

which two people died and 28 were injured.¹⁶¹ On August 31, 1989, a Politburo report testified to serious aggravation of interethnic relations in the Tajik SSR and the “Central Asian region as a whole.”¹⁶² In detailing the situation in the Tajik SSR, the Politburo added that tensions had “especially intensified” in connection to Fergana and the evacuation of Meskhetian Turks.¹⁶³ These anxieties were further flamed by “discrimination of citizens of non-native nationality in the workplace and in everyday life,” it reported, and widespread “rumors of physical violence,” including “public demands” for the “eviction of the Russian speaking part of the population from the Tajik SSR.” The report cautioned that “all this causes people to feel insecure, socially vulnerable, and leads to an increase in a desire to migrate.” In mid-September, a Soviet report published in *Izvestia* stated that 10,000 non-Tajik-speaking individuals fled Dushanbe during the first half of 1989.¹⁶⁴ The interior ministry tried to respond to the rippling problems by introducing a special training program to handle interethnic conflict.¹⁶⁵

This small measure did not, however, quell the growing concerns of some toward the violence Meskhetian Turks had faced, as well as the perceived Soviet acquiescence to nationalism. In July of 1989, a collective letter from 163 Soviet citizens in Dushanbe seeking the protection of “non-native persons” [*litsa nekorennoi national’nosti*] accused the Tajik SSR government for covering up the extent of the crisis between “native” and “non-native” populations. They condemned the Soviet government for evacuating the Meskhetian Turks from Central Asia after the June 1989 Fergana Valley massacre, decrying that the “evacuation of an entire nation for the sake of another is not an option.”¹⁶⁶ The collective wrote that they were

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d.422, ll. 71-72.

¹⁶⁴ Melanie Newton, ed. *The USSR in 1989*, 499.

¹⁶⁵ At the end of June 1989. Melanie Newton, ed. *The USSR in 1989*, 96-198.

¹⁶⁶ RGANI, f. 100, op.5, d. 422, ll. 77-80.

“losing confidence” for their safety of our lives and, especially, for the lives of their children who were “persons of non-native nationality.” They appealed for central oversight, and as a final resort, compensation for migration to “any corner” of the RSFSR.

At the end of June, disturbances were acknowledged in Gur’evskaia Oblast in the Kazakh SSR between Kazakhs, Armenians, Georgians and Azerbaijanis in which four were killed, 53 injured, and 57 detained.¹⁶⁷ *Izvestiia* reported that Kazakhs in the town of Novyi Uzen demanded that non-Kazakhs move out of the city and that cooperatives run by people from the Caucasus shut down.¹⁶⁸ “Refugees” crowded the Novyi Uzen airport in attempt to flee while others formed a committee called “Solidarity.”¹⁶⁹ Offering one interpretation of the events, Nikolai I. Baev, the First Secretary of the Shevchenko City Party Committee, shifting blame to Moscow, wrote, “The evacuation and expulsion [*vyselenie*] of tens of thousands of Meskhetian Turks served as a negative example for the whole country. Many perceived this as an opportunity to solve their problems on the back of other nations and nationalities.”¹⁷⁰ Though the evacuation and plight of Meskhetian Turks certainly didn’t provide the only impetus for what transpired, Baev’s comments acknowledged that the Fergana events, and the center’s handling of them, became a point of enduring tension. In December of 1989, legislation offered Caucasian populations targeted in the Gur’evski Oblast conflicts in the Kazakh SSR support for resettling in the

¹⁶⁷ Newton, ed. *The USSR in 1989*, 314.

¹⁶⁸ Gorbachev’s reforms introduced the expansion of cooperative forms of production at the January 1987 Plenum. Party and state officials believed that cooperatives, in addition to the current system of state-owned enterprises, could organize small-scale production of popular goods while reacting more flexibly to changes in consumer demands. See Roman Kirsanov, “Rasvitie kooperativnogo sektora v period perestroika i ego rol’ v stabilizacii potrebitel’skogo rynka v SSSR.” *Vestnik Volgogradskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta* 19, no. 4 (2014): 30-36; Newton, ed. *The USSR in 1989*, 314-315.

¹⁶⁹ Newton, ed. *The USSR in 1989*, 314-315.

¹⁷⁰ Stefan Guth, “USSR Incorporated Versus Affirmative Action Empire? Industrial Development and Interethnic Relations in Kazakhstan’s Mangyshlak Region (1960s–1980s),” *Ab Imperio* 4 (2018): 171-206.

Chechen-Ingush and the Dagestan ASSR.¹⁷¹ Over 8,000 families left for Dagestan as a result. Hundreds unable to find homes and facing a poor reception, however, stayed on the move.¹⁷²

Following the Fergana Valley Massacre and the events in Novyi Uzen, Gorbachev denounced growing titular nationalism and violence while, at the same time, presenting understanding for the impetus behind nationalist mobilization. On July 1, 1989, Gorbachev addressed the nation on central television to give a speech “on interethnic relations.”¹⁷³ He spoke about interethnic violence, forced migration, and emerging nationalism, begging the question, “is it possible to remain indifferent and disinterested in the fate of the refugees who have appeared in our country”? Their fate, which included the elderly, women, and children, he noted, is “broken for life.” The General Secretary blamed the deteriorating situation on stagnation and on the failures of Soviet nationality policy over the course of the past decades to meet the needs of national interests. The rise of national consciousness and the breakdown of internationalism, he posited, was the result of this problem.

According to Gorbachev’s argument, had the state paid more attention to national development in the past decades, ensuring more equal conditions for all nations, then citizens would have been more amenable to the aims of internationalism. Economic conditions and the push for national rights clearly mobilized national movements, but as letters from extraterritorial, nontitular, and mixed families show, the idea that the titular nation had become the “real citizen” also played a major role in violence, harassment, and expulsions. The party believed that national consciousness would fade once each Soviet nation achieved an equal level of development. Even

171. Law from December 11, 1989. N 1100 “O merakh po okazaniiu pomoshchi sem’iam bezhentssev, vynuuzhdenno pokinuvshikh postoianno mesto zhitel’sstva v Gur’evskoi Oblasti Kazakhskoi SSR.” Informatsionno-spravochnaia Onlain Sistema Tekhnorma. Accessed January 30, 2023. http://tehnorma.ru/doc_ussrperiod/textussr/usr_16070.htm.

172 “O sostoianii i merakh po usileniu pomoshchi bezhantsam iz Gur’evskoi oblasti Kazakhskoi SSSR”

M.M. Guboglo and V.F. Gryzlov, *Dagestan: etnopoliticheskii portret. Ocherki. Dokumenty. Khronika. Tom. I. Etnopoliticheskaiia situatsiia v ocherkakh i dokumentakh gosudarstvennykh organov* (Moscow: RAN, 1993).

173 *Raspad SSSR*, 403.

when national movements (and their repercussions) became increasingly prominent throughout the country, Gorbachev still seemed unwilling to admit that national ties had also become more salient than the party had expected.

The relocation of refugees, and rumors regarding their resettlement across the USSR, further exacerbated parochialism and the consolidation of national movements. In January 1990, rumors began circulating about the alleged arrival of thousands of Armenian refugees in Dushanbe.¹⁷⁴ Rumors spread through different channels—youth meetings, propaganda during prayers, and leaflets in local higher education institutions—purporting that Armenian refugees would receive housing at the expense of Tajik families already on waiting lists. An open protest against the alleged refugee resettlement was called for February 11, 1990, in front of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. The crowd swelled to about 5,000 active demonstrators calling for clarification on the issue when the protest restarted the next day. Clashes between security forces and protestors, which escalated into troops opening fire, expanded the scale of confrontations. As a result, the demonstrations turned into a mass anti-government protest. The Ministry of Health of the Tajik SSR reported that 25 people had died: 16 Tajiks, 5 Russians, 2 Uzbeks, 1 Tatar and 1 Azeri, and that 813 citizens had required medical treatment, 56.5 percent of whom were ethnic Russian and 43.5 percent Central Asian.¹⁷⁵ The Dushanbe Riot and its aftermath deepened conflict and created political instability, intensifying the conditions that led to the outflow of Russian speakers from Tajikistan.

Meskhetian Turk refugee arrivals further aggravated tensions in the Azerbaijan SSR as well as in Krasnodar and Rostov Krai, regions where a “refugee problem” had already existed

¹⁷⁴ Parviz Mullojanov, “February 1990 Riots in Tajikistan. Who Was Behind the Scenes? Review of the Main Existing Versions,” *Cahiers d’Asie centrale* 26, (2016): 247-272.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

(see chapter five), while concern over their in-migration raised eyebrows in Georgia.¹⁷⁶ The historic homeland of the Meskhetian Turks was located in Meskheta, a southwestern region of Georgia. The rumored arrival of Meskhetian Turks to Georgia thus also became a contentious issue there. Though some prominent dissidents and human rights activists argued that Georgia should welcome back its “lost brethren,” most contemporary Georgian local and republican newspapers decried that Georgia did not have enough land or resources to support the population and that returning the Muslim community to a predominantly Orthodox Christian republic would stir tensions.¹⁷⁷ Some letters went further, with authors writing that Muslims or “so-called Meskhetians” were the “sworn enemies of the Georgian nation” who should not be allowed to return. Anticipating the resettlement of Meskhetian Turks to Georgia, for example, a labor collective of the Tbilisi branch of “Luch,” an academic research institute of aviation systems, voiced a “unanimous” opposition to the resettlement of Meskhetian Turks in the Republic.¹⁷⁸ They argued that after 45 years outside of Georgia, Meskhetian Turks had “lost even the rudiments of mutual assimilation with the indigenous population of Georgia.” In March of 1990, Gorbachev created a state committee on “nationality policy and interethnic relations” in an attempt to resolve the multiplying crisis, created, partially, by its evacuations.¹⁷⁹ In a resolution from April 20, 1990, “On the Meskhetian Turk population problem,” the USSR Supreme Soviet’s newly created committee pushed for the Georgian SSR to take “concrete steps” in the Republic for the “return” of Meskhetian Turks.”¹⁸⁰ It also established as “unacceptable,” the

¹⁷⁶ GARF f. R9553, op.1, d. 5263, ll. 336-340.

¹⁷⁷ Levin, “Caught in a bad romance,” 19-36.

¹⁷⁸ RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 462, ll. 17-20 (Letters with suggestions and comments to the draft CPSU platform “National Party Policy in modern conditions” from the Union republics (except the RSFSR and the Azerbaijan SSR).

¹⁷⁹ “Soiuz Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh Respublik. Zakon. Ob obrazovanii soiuzno-respublikanskogo Gosudarstvennogo komiteta SSSR po natsional’nym voprosam.” Elektronnyi fond pravovykh i normativno-tekhnicheskikh dokumentov. Accessed January 30, 2023. <https://docs.cntd.ru/document/499009308>

¹⁸⁰ GARF f. R9553, op.1, d. 5263, ll. 336-340.

“further forced migration of this population to other parts of the country.” The latter resolution thus acknowledged that, instead of resolving them, the plight of refugees had created further complications in an already tense national climate.

By the fall of 1990, amid the country’s decentralization, Goskomtrud lamented the lack of response from republican and local authorities to resolve the “refugee” crisis. In a complaint to the USSR Council of Ministers, Goskomtrud criticized Moscow for not fulfilling a July resolution adopted by the RSFSR Council of Ministers “On additional measures to assist in the accommodation of refugees arriving in the RSFSR.”¹⁸¹ The complaint centered on the lack of migration services formed in the city of Moscow and Moscow oblast’.¹⁸² The Goskomtrud Deputy Chairman wrote “refugees” continued to attempt to “gain a foothold in the capital,” attracting other migrants from “hotbeds of ethnic tension,” with “unfounded illusions about their own prospects.”¹⁸³ As a result, the state was unequipped to handle the increasing inflow of refugees. The accruing refugee problem, and the failure of authorities to successfully resolve it, was epitomized by the formation of a “tent city” of refugees that had formed near the Hotel Russia in Moscow.¹⁸⁴ By April 15, 1991, 156,613 Soviet citizens of different nationalities were registered in the RSFSR as “refugees,” by far the most, including 43,983 Armenians and 48,805 Meskhetian Turks, were those affected by the Nagorno-Karabakh pogroms and the Fergana Valley Massacre.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸¹ Ibid., ll. 252-253.

¹⁸² Migration services that would, with the coordination of ministries and agencies of other regions, handle appropriate situations in the case of that the employment of refugees in other regions of Russia was refused Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ GARF f. 10121, op. 1, d. 32, l. 24 (Council of Ministers of the RSFSR on the problems of migration. Vol. 3. July 3, 1991 – December 29, 1991)

The Party's Response and its Backfired Effects: The September 1989 Party Plenum "On Nationality Policy of the Party in Modern Conditions"

"Soviet citizens should feel at home anywhere in the country," Gorbachev emphasized at the Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party held on September 20, 1989.¹⁸⁶ The Plenum, "On nationality policy of the Party in modern conditions," was the first serious attempt to tackle the foundational issues behind the country's emerging conflicts: deteriorating center-republic relations, titular nationalism, parochialism, and growing ideological divides. It also directly addressed the increasingly vulnerable and problematic status of Soviet citizens who lived outside of or without "home" territories.¹⁸⁷ In collective letters intended for the Plenum's consideration, extraterritorial and nontitular populations voiced their concerns about their security and the Union's future.

The Plenum voted on a proposed Communist Party platform that would inform a new constitutional declaration to strengthen equal rights in the country.¹⁸⁸ This new declaration was intended to simultaneously "renew Soviet federalism" and resolve "emerging issues"—i.e., titular nationalism and calls for sovereignty that were in contradiction to Soviet federalism. The proposed platform emphasized the importance of maintaining Russian as the Soviet *lingua franca* to prevent discrimination on the basis of language or nationality. In order to strengthen the equal rights of Soviet citizens across the country, the proposed platform highlighted the need to adopt a law guaranteeing the "rights of citizens of the USSR living outside their national-territorial entities or not having them." The development of a political mechanism for securing

¹⁸⁶ "Platforma KPSS ot 20 sentiabria 1989g: Natsional'naia politika partii v sovremennykh usloviakh." *Raspad SSSR*, 436.

¹⁸⁷ The proposed platform was praised as "the result of analysis and comparison of opinions" provided by: Party committees, Soviet bodies, scientific institutions, the general public and various social organizations, scientists, press materials, and people of various nationalities who wrote in to the Central Committee of the CPSU. Ibid., 423

¹⁸⁸ *Raspad SSSR*, 433.

representation of all nationalities living outside of “their own” republics and autonomous territories (or not having them) was also proposed.¹⁸⁹

Though the Soviet constitution provided the right of political participation for all Soviet citizens, the proposition was intended to enact a check on political titular empowerment by guaranteeing representation for extraterritorial and nontitular groups. On the following day after the Plenum, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet announced “priority measures” increasing legal acknowledgment and rights to extraterritorial and nontitular populations, and the equal rights of citizens regardless of race and nationality, while strengthening the legal status of union republics and autonomous territories.¹⁹⁰ On April 26, 1990, a law, “On the free national development of Soviet citizens living outside their national entities, or not having them” was passed.¹⁹¹ Its first article read: “Any direct or indirect restriction of the rights and freedoms of citizens of the USSR on the grounds of nationality, language, settlement, type and nature of occupation, attitude to religion, place of residence and other circumstances is not allowed. Citizens of the USSR who live outside their national-state entities or do not have them on the territory of the USSR are guaranteed legal equality and equal opportunities in all spheres of public life.”

The platform had also attempted to address rising anxieties by calling on the media, who had been blamed for contributing to the unrest by countless letters addressed to central organs. The platform emphasized the “special role” and the “growing responsibility” of Communists working in the mass media.¹⁹² The Plenum pleaded for balanced media assessments. In the era of

¹⁸⁹The ideas offered included the creation of councils of representatives of all national groups under the Supreme Soviets to grant legislative rights to all nationalities living in republics and autonomous territories. *Raspad SSSR*, 448.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 440.

¹⁹¹ See *O svobodnom natsional'nom razvitii grazhdan SSSR, prozhivaiushchikh za predelami svoikh natsional'no-gosudarstvennykh obrazovaniy ili ne imeiushchikh iz na territorii SSSR.*” Biblioteka normativno-pravovykh aktov Soiuz Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh Respublik. Accessed February 21, 2023. https://www.libussr.ru/doc_ussr/usr_16492.htm

¹⁹² *Raspad SSSR*, 439.

glasnost' and the lifting of Communist Party censorship, the latter was a desperate appeal to prevent further provocation. The platform advanced that "radical changes" were needed in cultivating "internationalist consciousness."¹⁹³ The latter was likely an admission that the legitimacy of Soviet internationalism was in rapid decline, both in concept and in practice. The September 20 Plenum generated myriad letters from extraterritorial and nontitular populations across the Soviet Union. The draft project of the CPSU platform "On nationality policy in modern conditions," was published in the press, and, according to a Politburo report, "discussed with interest" in labor collectives, party organizations, and places of residence.¹⁹⁴ Meetings were held to debate interethnic issues, and collective letters were subsequently drafted and submitted to the Plenum outlining suggested measures.

Letters to the Plenum, after the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh and the Fergana Valley Massacre had already erupted, showed that the outlook of some extraterritorial and nontitular across the country had grown increasingly bleak. Two collectives located in republics where no mass unrest had yet occurred, for instance wrote to central organs to voice their trepidation about the future. Communists of the Kyrgyz Cable Factory held a meeting on September 5, 1989, in connection to the upcoming Plenum.¹⁹⁵ The workers voiced anxiety about "the fate of all people in the national republics as well as the fate of the Soviet Union." The Kyrgyz Cable Factory Communists resignedly stated that it was "necessary to take into account the very possible consequences of the deterioration of interethnic relations within the Republic." Expressing concern over the "current rise of nationalist, separatist trends" in Central Asia and the Caucasus, the letter concluded by bringing attention to the July 1989 session of the Supreme Soviet of the

¹⁹³ Ibid., 438-349

¹⁹⁴ RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 422, ll. 71-72.

¹⁹⁵ RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 462, ll. 65-72.

Kyrgyz Republic, which, to their estimation, included statements with “nationalist overtones.” In September, the Central Committee of the CPSU received a letter that voiced concern from “Communists of the First Party Organization of the Military Unit of Ashgabat.”¹⁹⁶ The unit from Turkmenistan voiced growing worry for the future of those located outside of their constituent ethnic territories. They stressed that military personnel are sometimes “born and serve their entire lives outside of the republics which they consider their homeland.” They, therefore, proposed for the right of military personnel to “freely choose” their residency. Instead of demanding central intervention to remain in their place of origin, this collective was, contrastingly, preparing the necessary precautions to leave.

The dynamic between autonomous territories and their constituent republics continued to complicate the state of affairs in the country, and some letters claimed that the Plenum had made things worse. In March of 1989, workers of the Tkvarcheli City Party Committee Komsomol, a town in Abkhazia, fretted that the impending Plenum had spurred conflict between Abkhazians and Georgians (indeed demonstrations broke out in the republic’s capital the same month). According to the Tkvarcheli Komsomol workers, the Plenum aggravated tensions in Abkhazia as issues of the ASSR’s sovereignty were raised. In Abkhazia, an autonomous republic in Georgia, the Abkhaz, the sub-republican titular population, were a significant minority in comparison to Georgians, the titular population of its constituent republic. In 1989, self-identified Russians made up 14.3 percent of the Abkhaz ASSR population while 17.8 percent of the autonomous republic’s population consisted of self-identified Abkhaz. About 46 percent of the population identified as Georgian in 1989, up from 39 percent in 1959.¹⁹⁷ Abkhaz letter campaigns to

¹⁹⁶ RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 462, l. 64.

¹⁹⁷ Celine Francis, *Conflict Resolution and Status: The Case of Georgia and Abkhazia 1989-2008* (Brussels: Brussels University, 2011), 67.

central authorities regarding the “violation of Leninist nationality policy” in Georgia, stretched back decades.¹⁹⁸ One 25-page collective letter from 1978 argued that the “Georgification of Abkhazians and Abkhazia” was the reason behind the mass assembly of Abkhazians in 1957, 1967, and 1978. Republican authorities, this collective complained, pursued these policies both openly and secretly (*skryto*), and attempted to silence petitioners.

The Komsomol workers claimed that the Plenum (re)mobilized Abkhazians who were holding large meetings on nationality policy issues while Georgians were demonstrating with anti-Soviet, anti-Abkhazian, and anti-Russian slogans. The Komsomol workers asked for intervention from the central authorities to calm the situation.¹⁹⁹ In connection to the Plenum, a group of Russians born in Abkhazia wrote to support the Abkhaz and to criticize the “Georgification” of Abkhazia.²⁰⁰ In expressing their allegiance to Abkhazians, who they proclaimed were “people with a deep, distinctive culture,” they asked for the possibility of Moscow administering Abkhazia. In the face of rising Georgian nationalism, this group of Russians presented Abkhazians as a vulnerable population in “their own” autonomous republic. Their purported solution was a full legal transfer of the territory to the RSFR. Such calls clearly threatened Georgia’s sovereignty over the ASSR, and as discussed earlier, they would fuel national demonstrations in Tbilisi that set off a cycle of problems in the republic.

In addition to vocalizing concern about titular nationalism, some took advantage of the Plenum to solicit support for their own national rights. Soviet internationalism granted the right to ethnic particularism as a necessary mode of development. One’s support for the Union or its

¹⁹⁸ RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 410, ll. 2-26. See RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 410; 411 (Letters of citizens of the Georgian SSR of Abkhazian nationality on the deterioration of interethnic relations in the republic, 1967 – 1989. Volumes I & II).

¹⁹⁹ RGANI f. 100, op.5, d. 424, ll. 9-13 (letters from citizens of the Georgian SSR and the Abkhaz ASSR in connection with the deterioration of interethnic relations).

²⁰⁰ RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 424, ll. 5-8.

ideals, therefore, did not necessarily preclude national solidarity or identification, which were also sometimes strengthened in reaction to titular nationalism and violence, and by perestroika-era freedoms. Representatives of the Public Council of the Dungan Population of Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan wrote in July of 1989 to advocate for the “resolute” suppression of nationalism and the “protecting of everyone.”²⁰¹ At the same time, however, they recommended the development of cultural, educational, and media institutions for “small peoples,” or nations with small populations.

Intercommunal “groupness” as a reaction to titular nationalism and violence, did not negate one’s ethnic identification or the opportunity to also engage in national group-making. To organize or demonstrate vis-a-vis accelerating titular nationalism, threatened nontitular groups sometimes adopted different strategies. The Moldovan “Interclub” movement, for example, integrated Turkic-speaking Gagauz activists while the latter also moved to form a separate autonomy movement.²⁰² In the spring of 1989, Kurds from nine different republics rallied the USSR Supreme Soviet for protection, which they ultimately envisioned through (re)gaining autonomy.²⁰³ The nontitular peoples had become the targets of “extremists,” they alleged, in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, where they cited “onslaught (*napadenie*)” on Kurds, calls of “liberate our territory,” and harassment. Encouraged by the response they received from the Chairman of the Council of Nationalities, August Voss, one group member proclaimed, “We trust the international policy of the party.”

When national movements emerged, precipitating the decline of the USSR, diverse extraterritorial and nontitular communities, often drawing on internationalism, underwent a

²⁰¹ RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 462, ll. 22-24.

²⁰² See also Keiji, “Mobilization of Non-Titular Ethnicities,” 141-157.

²⁰³ GARF, f. R9654, op. 10, d. 369, ll. 119-124.

parallel mobilization of collective action. Though some communities were more persistently or systematically targeted by titular nationalism and violence across the southern tier, other groups, including privileged Russians and Russian speakers, often mobilized in response. Conflict in which one extraterritorial or nontitular group was the main target of titular violence also often affected, or directly embroiled, other communities. Members of different extraterritorial and nontitular communities united (sometimes in multinational collectives) to seek central oversight, to chastise state policies that they perceived yielded to nationalism, or to call for mass organized relocation. In their requests, many referenced the need to broadly safeguard “non-native” populations or to restrain “extremist” nationalism writ large. As Soviet “refugees,” extraterritorial and nontitular groups also used collective leverage to petition for the rights that they believed were still owed to them as Soviet citizens, and on behalf of others who wanted to leave nationalizing territories that had become of threat to them. The clashes that began with Alma-Ata in 1986 show, however, that some turned to bigoted and sometimes violent rhetoric in their complaints about emerging national movements.

In the USSR’s final years, the tensions between nationalization and the Soviet project reached a point of climax. The center’s growing impotency had a multitude of repercussions for extraterritorial and nontitular communities who arguably depended on its institutions the most. Many faced family separations, displacement from their homes, violence, and harassment. The center, which fostered the Soviet identity, intermarriage, cross-republican movement, and legitimated the presence and rights of diverse peoples across the USSR, did not know how to resolve the problems it created. For many of these Soviet citizens, like Vladimir P., who represented 250 displaced families from Baku, a nationality-based identity had become incongruent with their sense of self. As Soviet “refugees,” they had been told to either return to

their place of origins—where they were persecuted—or to turn to their titular nations, which did not make sense to many raised outside of them. In attempt to make their identities legible in the nationalizing climate of the USSR's final years, members of mixed families also appealed to change their official nationality to Russian, or to the titular nationality, in attempt to avoid or prevent harassment—or to find new homes in the RSFSR.

THREE

A COLLECTIVE EFFERVESCE IN THE NORTH CAUCASUS: THE REHABILITATION OF REPRESSED NATIONS AND THE LEGACY OF SOVIET NATIONALITY POLICY

In the late Soviet Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR), social tensions came to parallel the fate of a statue commemorating General Aleksei Ermolov in Grozny, the ASSR's capital. Ermolov was an imperial Russian commander of the Caucasus who led incursions into the Caucasian highlands. He founded Grozny—meaning “formidable” or “fearsome”—as an imperial bulwark in 1818. A bust of Ermolov was constructed adjacent to a dugout where the General had lived for five months in 1888, but it was removed in 1921 as a reminder of oppression of the non-Russian nationalities of the region. The statue commemorating Ermolov symbolized the historic presence of Russians in the territory as well as the imperial violence that had established it. In 1951, after Chechnya-Ingushetia had been dissolved and many North Caucasian nationalities branded as fifth column nations had been deported, the bust was rebuilt. With the restoration of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR under Nikita Khrushchev and the “return” of many its titular nationalities—some of whom were born and raised in the cordoned “special settlements” they were exiled to—Chechen and Ingush peoples began sending letters of protest to newspapers and magazines about the monument.¹

Contention over the statue mirrored growing interethnic animosities in the ASSR's capital, which culminated during Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms. It was blown up and desecrated several times, becoming a tangible site of tension, while complaints about the statue continued

¹ Return migrations could involve people who were not born in, or who had not been raised outside of, their historic homelands.

into the 1980s.² In 1988, a group of Chechen-Ingush students, taking advantage of the perestroika and glasnost' reforms, openly demonstrated against the Ermolov monument.³ In fear of a possible retaliation on the part of the Russian population of Grozny, the First Secretary of the Chechen Ingush Regional Committee (obkom) refused to dismantle or transfer the monument.⁴ Contrastingly, no memorial commemorating the tragedies of forced deportation had ever been erected as it remained a taboo topic into the late Soviet period.⁵

Many nationalities deported under Stalin resided in the Caucasus (about 600,000 people), and after their exile to "special settlements" it was mainly Russian speakers who moved, mostly forcibly, into the places they left behind.⁶ The dissolved national units were then incorporated into neighboring territories with different ethnic compositions, while postwar industrialization also brought many Russians to these spaces in the 1950s.⁷ Under Nikita Khrushchev, on January 9, 1957, territorial autonomy was restored to the Chechens, Ingush, Kalmyks, Karachaevtsty, and Balkars who were permitted to return to their historic homelands from specialized settlements (other nations, like Meskhetian Turks, were not given this right).⁸ Some, in fact, had already begun spontaneous movements back to their historic homelands when certain restrictions were

² RGANI, f. 100, op. 5, d. 415, ll. 48-54 (letters requesting the separation of Ingushetia from the Chechen-Ingush ASSR, the rehabilitation of the Chechen people, and the resettlement of Chechens in their former places of residence. April 1971 – May 1989).

³ RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 415, ll. 53-54.

⁴ RGANI f. 100, op.5, d. 415, ll. 48-51.

⁵ Jeronim Perovic, *From Conquest to Deportation: The North Caucasus under Russian Rule* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2018), 319.

⁶ Altogether, about six million people suffered forced resettlement from the early 1930s to the early 1950s. At least 1.2 million died as a result. Yaacov Ro'i, "The Transformation of Historiography on the 'Punished Peoples.'" *History and Memory* 21, no. 2 (2009): 150-76. Russian speaking settlement into these regions also hastened assimilation of the "small peoples" who remained. On "compensatory forced migration," see Polian, *Ne po svoei vole*, 131-136.

⁷ Sergei Riazantsev, *Sovremennyyi demograficheskii i migratsionnyi portret Severnogo Kavkaza* (Stavropol: ISPI RAN, 2003), 108-111.

⁸ Other repressed nations whose national autonomies were not reinstated included the Crimean Tatars, Volga Germans, and Koreans.

lifted in 1955.⁹ Returnees were confronted with innumerable challenges in reclaiming their homes. Those who resided in disbanded national spaces, who had been coercively relocated there as well as those who arrived as part of the Soviet modernization project, meanwhile, encountered the prospect of (repeat) dislocation. As a result, senses of injustice regarding Soviet actions and nationality policy in the region were manifold. This included resentment toward state attempts to erase the national and cultural institutions—the historical memory—of the ethnic groups deported from the region. Many also had to face the legacy of deportation as purported fifth column nations. This often entailed continued stigmatization by local communities sometimes both in places of exile and in reinstated territories.¹⁰ Other communities residing in the spaces left abandoned by the deportations also often felt wronged by changing policies that threatened their livelihood. In the Caucasus, restoration of autonomous territories was coupled with the overall decline of investment in the USSR's southern tier, which began at the turn of the 1960s. These changes, combined with a comparatively higher birth rate for non-Russians, and out-migrations, corresponded with a decline in the Slavic population in the region.

After Khrushchev's reinstatement of ethno-territories, national rights, particularly territorial claims, became of essential concern to many in the North Caucasus, which was home to most of the repressed nationalities in the USSR. Though repressed nations experienced the trauma of Soviet ethnic cleansing under Stalin, many continued to negotiate for their rights by appealing to central organs. Some attempted to shed light on the continued challenges they faced following deportation. The desire for greater autonomy or for other national rights, however,

⁹ V. A. Kozlov, *Mass Uprisings in the USSR: Protest and Rebellion in the Post-Stalin Years* (London: Routledge, 2015), 87-88.

¹⁰ On stigmatization of "special settlers" in Kazakhstan, for instance, see Michaela Pohl, "It cannot be that our graves will be here": the survival of Chechen and Ingush deportees in Kazakhstan, 1944-1957," *Journal of Genocide Research* 4, no. 3 (September 2002): 401-430.

could also set off tensions with the center. By the late 1980s, gradually, and for the first time, these issues became openly discussed. With the onset of perestroika and glasnost', as I show, the issue of the rehabilitation of repressed nations became of paramount importance and a source of social conflict in the region. Political and social aims often revolved around "full" rehabilitation, or the reinstatement of former ethnic territories and the restoration of borders, even if they had only briefly existed prior to deportation and had been resettled by other groups. Though their national rights were denied for years under the directives of central authority in "special settlements," the attainment of improved status in the Soviet hierarchy of nations was still viewed by many as essential to national advancement. Repressed nations in the North Caucasus thus often pursued rights that lay within the framework of the Soviet hierarchy of nationalities: (enhanced) territorial autonomy within the RSFSR and improved language and cultural rights. Though these perestroika movements were comparatively restrained, they should not be dismissed. Soviet citizens here leveraged and reshaped the Soviet and more distant past in a moment of heightened group-making that had significant consequences. In fact, as I argue in this chapter, the rehabilitation of repressed nations was an important and multifarious social movement that had roots in the late Soviet period. It drove ethnic mobilization, which intensified with the center's dissolution, it interconnected with Chechen and Russian nationalism, and it prompted conflict and mass flight. All of this irrevocably changed life in the border region, and ultimately affected Russian nation building (see the last chapter).

This chapter highlights how Soviet nationality policies backfired in major ways. The Soviet hierarchy of nations and the problematic legacy of Soviet nationality policy in the North Caucasus legitimated contested claims over territory and played a critical role in fomenting ethnic mobilizations. In the borderland, titular status was remarkably fraught and complex as

entire nations were deported and “their” autonomous ethno-territories were revoked, allocated to other regions with different demographic characteristics, and otherwise altered. Upon return, this legacy became a major source of contestation as repressed peoples attempted to regain their rights (as titular status provided numerous national privileges) and access to historic homelands. Other residents were confronted with a different set of challenges, including tensions over national space, and leaving behind their homes. The legacy of state repression in the North Caucasus made tensions over the Soviet hierarchy of nations especially volatile. The application of Soviet nationality policy was, furthermore, lumbered in the historically diverse borderland. Several territories shared titular status, for instance, which also sparked or influenced resentments.

Scholarship on repressed nations, however, has focused mainly on the operation or experience of deportation and has largely overlooked how state repressions were interlinked to enduring contention and social movements.¹¹ Few scholars have concentrated on the return of repressed nations to reinstated territories or to their historic homelands in the Russian North Caucasus borderland.¹² Scholars of Soviet nationality policy, moreover, have generally emphasized how Soviet ethno-federalism inadvertently led to the country’s demise by territorially consolidating nationalities (and constructing affiliated national institutions and

¹¹ See Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (New York: 2001); Kate Brown, *A Biography of No Place: From Ethnic Borderland to Soviet Heartland* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 2004); Pohl, “It cannot be that our graves will be here,” 401-430. Krista Goff provides an examination of nontitular peoples and their advocacy for increased national rights vis-à-vis titular empowerment, but does not specifically focus on deported peoples, nor their social movements. See Krista Goff, *Nested Nationalism: Making and Unmaking Nations in the Soviet Caucasus* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2020). Some exceptions include some works on the Crimean Tatars whose national autonomy was not restored. See Edward A. Allworth, *The Tatars of Crimea: Return to the Homeland* (Durham: Duke University, 1998) and Great Lynn Uehling, *Beyond Memory: The Crimean Tatars’ Deportation and Return* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

¹² One exception is a chapter from Kozlov’s, *Mass Uprisings in the USSR*, 87-111, which focuses on the 1958 Riots in Grozny upon the return of deported Chechen and Ingush peoples.

cadres), while, paradoxically, also enforcing restrictions on national development.¹³ The latter and the former did encourage the rise of national movements, but the enduring influence that state repression has had on mobilizing nations (even upon return to reinstated territories) has been poorly understood.¹⁴ Repressed nations endured years of what was essentially “internal exile,” so they lacked historical national benefits provided to titular nations.¹⁵ Communal tragedy and a shared historical memory, however, also influenced ethnic solidarity, sponsored collective action, and sustained national attachments to historic homelands. Cultural and religious traditions, for instance, were often strengthened during exile, and they became an important source of national empowerment.¹⁶ The social movements of repressed nations who were denied return to their historic homelands and whose national autonomies were not restored (e.g., Crimean Tatars, Volga Germans), though, arguably became more pronounced or more visible, and therefore the available scholarship on repressed nations has largely concentrated on these groups.¹⁷

Western scholars have largely discounted the significance of the North Caucasus borderland to the social and spatial history of the Soviet collapse.¹⁸ This chapter deploys archival

¹³ See Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford: 1993); Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin (eds.), *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2001).

¹⁴ See footnote 11.

¹⁵ Lewis Siegelbaum, “Virgin Lands Campaign.” Seventeen Moments in Soviet History: An on-line archive of primary sources. Accessed February 6, 2023. <https://soviethistory.msu.edu/?s=virgin+lands>. Often, deportees were widely dispersed, which broke up nations into “small and weak groups without the ability to communicate with each other,” an especially bitter memory for some. See Pohl, “It Cannot be that our graves will be here,” 401-430.

¹⁶ See Pohl, “It Cannot be that our graves will be here,” 401-430.

¹⁷ See, in addition to the works cited in footnote 10, Ann Sheehy, *The Crimean Tatars, Volga Germans and Meskhetians: Soviet treatment of some national minorities* (London: Minority Rights Group, 1973), Brian G. Williams, *The Crimean Tatars: The Diaspora Experience and the Forging of a Nation* (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

¹⁸ Most accounts of migration, for instance, have concentrated on the post-Soviet period or on migration to Russia from other Soviet republics. See Hilary Pilkington, *Migration, Displacement and Identity in Post-Soviet Russia*, 1998, Moya Flynn, *Migrant Resettlement in the Russian Federation: Reconstructing Homes and Homelands*, 2004, and Cynthia J. Buckley, et. al., *Migration, Homeland, and Belonging in Eurasia*. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 2008.) See footnote 33 from the introduction for literature on conflict in the North Caucasus, which has also generally come from outside the historical field.

letters, as well as government documents, newspapers, and oral interviews, to show how the rehabilitation of repressed nations dramatically affected local and everyday life in the borderland. Though many repressed nations in the North Caucasus regained titular status under Nikita Khrushchev, they still collectively organized, self-advocated, and fought for national rights. Here, where national autonomy was reestablished for many, repressed nations did not receive the prolonged advantages of the titular designation, and some continued to face significant impediments to national advancement. Restored national territories, moreover, were altered, and some lands and borders remained contested. For many, Stalinist deportations underscored the instrumental (though unfair) role ethno-territorialization played in fostering national development. Repressed nations' activism was also sometimes motivated by the desire to be rid of the stigmas of deportation. Contention over national space and status in the North Caucasus became increasingly heated after repressed peoples returned and it finally exploded during perestroika. This would have profound everyday consequences for hundreds of thousands of (former) Soviet citizens whose lives were upended.

Problems endemic to the southern tier also contributed to social tensions. As elsewhere in the late Soviet south, some claimed that local and regional authorities had become increasingly corrupt and discriminatory. Others complained of persistent underemployment. As discussed in earlier chapters, skilled Russian speaking laborers (often hired externally) enjoyed privileges in all-Union industries, which sometimes relegated titular nationals to manual labor or agricultural jobs in "their" ethno-territories. This contributed to tensions, even as titular nations consolidated and their representation in administrative positions grew. In the postwar period, the language of instruction in many of the RSFSR's autonomous territories, including the reinstated Chechen-Ingush ASSR, however, was limited to Russian to enhance Russification, despite

evidence of resistance to it in areas of “special settlement.”¹⁹ Between 1959 and 1989, the Russian share of the urban population began to rapidly decrease while indigenous populations became more mobile, a trend that was especially intensive in Chechnya-Ingushetia, Dagestan, and Kabardino-Balkaria.²⁰ In the North Caucasus, the reinstatement of national autonomies became a major complicating factor in social relations. Some protested the reinstatement of repressed peoples’ territories, while others fled. Residents of Chechnya-Ingushetia, for instance, “flooded Moscow with collective appeals rejecting any possible compromise or even joint habitation in the same territory with the repatriated.”²¹

This chapter shows how internationalism, as a Soviet nationality policy meant to mediate and moderate the titular nationalism it sponsored, struggled against ethnic mobilizations fueled by a legacy of state repression. As this dissertation has argued, internationalism served to legitimate and safeguard the presence of many extraterritorial and nontitular populations living in another group’s nationalizing territory across the USSR. The emergence of national movements during perestroika inspired a moment of reckoning between internationalism and accelerated titular nationalization. Extraterritorial and nontitular populations of unexpected backgrounds developed common anxieties, and in some cases, formed allegiances grounded in internationalist

¹⁹ The Chechen-Ingush ASSR, the Karachay-Cherkess Autonomous Oblast, the Kabardino-Balakria ASSR, and the Adygei Autonomous Oblast only had Russian language instruction in schools with the native language as a separate subject. See Robert J. Kaiser, *The Geography of Nationalism in Russia* (Princeton: Princeton University 1994), 257-258. By 1989, however, both the Chechen and Ingush reported nearly 100 percent rates of native language retention. Kaiser, *The Geography of Nationalism*, 273-274. This may be due to local resistance to Russian as the language of instruction. In areas of “special settlement,” for instance, Caucasian groups resisted Russian language instruction. See Pohl, “It Cannot be that our graves will be here,” 401-430. On local resistance to nationality policy as it applied to language education, see also Matthew D. Pauly, *Breaking the Tongue: Language, Education, and Power in Soviet Ukraine, 1923-1934* (Toronto: University of Toronto: 2014).

²⁰ The share of the Russian urban population shrunk in Chechnya-Ingushetia by nearly 33 percent in this period. See Galina Soldatova and Irina Dement’eva, “Russians in the North Caucasian Republics,” Vladimir Shlapentokh, et. al., eds., *The New Russian Diaspora: Russian Minorities in the Former Soviet Republics* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe), 122-140.

²¹ Kozlov, *Mass Uprisings in the USSR*, 90.

practices. Indeed, many of these communities came to identify and mobilize according to the socialist concept—especially when nationalist movements emerged.

The unique history of Soviet nationality policy in the North Caucasus complicates this narrative. Here, contestations revolved less around fears over the center's decline and its implications for extraterritorial and nontitular communities, and more around the multitude, and multiplying, indignations that stemmed from a troublesome history of Soviet nationality policy in the region. Past tragedies sometimes combined with avowals of socialist principles for equal rights (like internationalism) to motivate repressed peoples' collective action. In the region, therefore, the state endeavored to restrain ethnic mobilization and "extreme" nationalism that was often provoked not by state-sponsored titular empowerment but by a legacy of state repression and a failed nationality policy. Despite troubled experiences with Soviet nationality policy, some still deployed the logic of Soviet internationalism (which provisioned for the equal right to national development) in their pleas to central organs. Petitioners often envisioned the solution to their problems as lying within higher status in the Soviet hierarchy of nations—through greater autonomy, cultural-linguistic rights, or representation in industry and in party and government structures. Many repressed peoples negotiated for the full restoration of "their own" ethno-territories, which would provide increased access to historic homelands, but also enhanced legitimacy, protection, and status in the Soviet hierarchy of nations. With the USSR's decline, these ethnic mobilizations intensified, and tensions grew. This chapter thus emphasizes how titular space could become heatedly contested by (former) Soviet citizens. The perestroika government added to existing tensions by affirming the right of repressed peoples to fully reclaim "their" territories and national rights, which gave repressed nations state-legitimated (in addition to historical) territorial claims.

What does this case-study of the North Caucasus borderland reveal to us more broadly about the late Soviet period? It complicates the feedback loop between Soviet nationality policy, national mobilization, and flight that began to affect everyday life for hundreds of thousands by the perestroika period. Unlike the republics, where tensions more often emerged between supporters of central oversight and nationalist movements, adversarial mobilizations here more often shared a common springboard: a history of state repression and a botched Soviet nationality policy that sparked intense contestations over “native” or “titular” territory (and the legitimacy of these categories). In this way, the movements that developed in the North Caucasus resembled the frustrations of border communities who contested their lack of titular status in other territories of the USSR. In the North Caucasus, however, Soviet deportations were declared crimes under perestroika and repressed nations were given legal rights to their former boundaries. This gave obvious momentum to ethnic mobilizations and territorial reclamations. Though there were signs of mass unrest in the region prior to the 1980s, it was the onset of perestroika liberalization that finally transformed the rehabilitation of repressed nations into a major social movement.

During the perestroika period, local ethnic groups in the North Caucasus, some of whom developed international or cross-regional connections, vied for control over territory, memory, and their national communities. The dissolution of the center, as my analysis here underscores, typified what Emile Durkheim referred to as “collective effervescence.”²² Durkheim wrote, “In certain historical periods, under the influence of some great collective upheaval, social

²² The sociology of social solidarity and intra-group dynamics were critical to Emile Durkheim’s work. Durkheim used “collective effervescence” to describe moments, or rituals, that create instances of intense social activity or unity in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (Oxford: Oxford University 2001), 158-159. Rogers Brubaker builds on this notion by arguing that “groupness” is a “contextually fluctuating conceptual variable.” In other words, group-making is a continual historical process with moments of “waxing and waning.” See *Ethnicity Without Groups* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 2004).

interactions become more frequent and more intense. Individuals seek each other out and assemble more often. The result is a general effervescence characteristic of revolutionary or creative epochs...People live differently and more intensely than in normal times...they can be assuaged only by violent, extreme acts of superhuman heroism or bloody barbarism.” The perestroika reforms influenced an exceptional historical moment that vividly depicted centripetal (and centrifugal) social forces at work. In short, the USSR’s demise sparked frenetic group-making processes in the borderland. Perestroika and glasnost allowed for the rehabilitation of repressed nations, a formerly taboo topic, to come to the surface and have monumental impact as a social (and group-making) force in the region. Even as the center unraveled, national groups organized in support of, or in reaction to, rehabilitation movements. Fears, tensions, violence, and out-migrations often ensued. In the process, however, repressed nations became increasingly institutionalized as a social category and a social issue the state had to contend with. In April of 1991, the Law on the Rehabilitation of Repressed Nations was finally passed. Chechens, by far the largest group of repressed peoples in the North Caucasus, were at the heart of continued unrest throughout the region. Chechnya’s eventual calls for independence were the exception in the region. This national movement, nevertheless, would come to have a vast domino effect in the region, triggering myriad conflicts and migration.

Mobilization After Reinstatement: Enduring Problems with Soviet Nationality Policy

The North Caucasus’ history involving the formation, disbanding, and redrawing of borders by way of Soviet policy is exceptionally complex. Since 1957 the Soviet North Caucasus encompassed the majority Slavic territories of Stavropol and Krasnodar Krai as well as Rostov Oblast’ and six autonomous territories (three of which were bi-national, and one multinational): Adygea, Karachay-Cherkessia, Kabardino-Balkaria, North Ossetia, Chechnya-Ingushetia, and

Dagestan.²³ To further complicate these territorial designations, the Circassians (*Cherkesy*), an ethnic group native to the Caucasus, had been split between differently named national groups (the Cherkes, Kabardians, Adygeis, Shapsug), and territories. In 1921, the Karachaevo-Cherkess United Oblast' was created. When a dispute broke out between the Karachays and Cherkes in 1926, the oblast' was divided into the Karachay Autonomous Oblast and the Cherkess National Okrug, which became the Cherkess Autonomous Oblast' in 1928.²⁴ Two other Cherkes groups were also united into the Cherkess (Adygei) Autonomous Oblast in 1922, which was renamed the Adygei Autonomous Oblast soon after to avoid confusion with the Karachaevo-Cherkess National Oblast'. The former titular nationals would hence become known as the Adygeis.²⁵ The Shapsug National District was also established in 1924 for Circassians along the Black Sea coast.²⁶

The Dagestan ASSR, which had been the Dagestan Oblast' under the imperial government, was also unique in that it was a multi-ethnic territory that had no eponymous nation. In Dagestan, "privileged political representation and national cultural support" was shared between select "principal *narodnosti*," a category that the Soviet state used to classify more

²³ According to the 1970 census, over 90% of the population of Stavropol and Krasnodar Krai as well as Rostov Oblast' was Slavic. Riazantsev, *Sovremennyi demograficheskii i migratsionnyi portret Severnogo Kavkaza*, 110. The Cossacks, who had a historic presence in these regions, were considered a subethnic group and were not included on the census in Russia until 2002.

²⁴ Richmond Walter, *The Circassian Genocide* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University, 2013), 142.

²⁵ Francine Hirsch devotes minimal attention to Soviet border making in the North Caucasus despite the dramatic border decisions and contentions here over them. Hirsch notes that the North Caucasian Krai, which was established in 1924 (containing the Adygei, Ingush, Kabardino-Balkar, Karachai, North Ossetian, Cherkes and Chechen autonomous oblasts and the Dagestan ASSR), was a "compromise solution" as the original plan for the region "fell apart in the face of local demands for national self-determination." Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2005), 98. Circassian scholar Richmond Walter argues that the Soviet government grouped the Circassians, which they labeled Cherkes, as distinct from the Kabardians (a Circassian people), which ignited tensions in the region as the Karachay and Circassians were united into a shared territory. This is contrary to a point Hirsch makes, which skews the reality of historical dynamics in the region. Hirsch notes that the Kabardians and Circassians were united into a "Circassian group" by administrators and experts, which was evidence that they were "on the road to national consolidation." See Walter, *The Circassian Genocide*, 142, Hirsch, *Empire of Nations*, 135.

²⁶ Aleksandr Danil'chenko, "Korennye narody Adygei: istoriia, Kul'tura i byt drevnikh shapsugov," Argumenty i Fakty Adeigea. Accessed February 21, 2023. <https://adigea.aif.ru/culture/details/1311177>.

“backward” nations on the Marxist timeline of development who were intended to merge into more developed nationalities (*natsional’nosti*).²⁷ In Dagestan, several peoples were categorized as principal *narodnosti*, including Avars, Lezgins, Dargins, Kumyks, and Laks, which further complicated the socio-political landscape.²⁸ In Dagestan, smaller ethnographic groups were presumed to merge into these main national groups. As A. D. Daniialov, the First Secretary of Dagestan from 1948 to 1967, asserted at the 1956 Twentieth Party Congress:

The most noteworthy result of Soviet rule in Dagestan is the process of consolidation of tribes and ethnic groups...On the basis of the growth of the national economy and culture the small ethnic groups are consolidating around the larger nationalities of Avars, Dargins, Kumyks, Lezgians [sic] and Laks. In turn the process of increasing rapprochement of these peoples is moving forward. They now form a single fraternal family of Dagestanians, builders of a communist society.”²⁹

While not all nations in the border territory underwent deportation, the North Caucasus was home to most of the USSR’s repressed peoples, which resulted in a particularly complicated web of emergent issues. In December 1943, about 600,000 people from the North Caucasus nations were forcibly resettled, mainly to Central Asia: 362,000 Chechens, 134,000 Ingush, 68,000 Karachay and 37,000 Balkars.³⁰ The neighboring Kalmyk ASSR was also liquidated and turned into Astrakhanskaia oblast’ and 92,000 Kalmyks were deported to Western Siberia. In 1957, the Soviet government restored the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Republic and the Kabardino-Balkar Autonomous Republic, it formed the Kalmyk Autonomous Oblast’, and

²⁷ According to leading Soviet ethnographer Iulian Bromlei, for instance, the tribe was the “predominant form of ethnosocial organization” for “primitive social formations,” the *narodnost’* for slave-owning and feudal formations,” and the “nation for capitalist and socialist organizations.” Hirsch, *Empire of Nations*, 314.

²⁸ Goff, *Nested Nationalism*, 148.

²⁹ Ibid., 147-149.

³⁰ By August 1, 1948, 23.7% of deported North Caucasians had died, which was a higher average mortality rate than for all the deported peoples. Ro’i “The Transformation of Historiography on the “Punished Peoples,” 150-76. Terry Martin has argued that “popular ethnic hostility” in the interwar period (as well as in the Tsarist period) contributed to the stigmatizing of these North Caucasus ethnic groups during WWII. He states that Dagestan had been the site of intense ethnic conflict but that there were no deportations there. This overlooks the Chechen-Akkins deportation and the contributions this had to social tensions in the ASSR. Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, 342.

restructured the Cherkess Autonomous Oblast' (and former Karachay Autonomous Oblast') into the Karachay-Cherkess Autonomous Oblast'.

Soviet nationality policy in the historically diverse North Caucasus established territories in which the titular status was, for the most part, shared, and that often stirred tensions and created problems. One of the allegations brought against the Balkars to support their deportation was, for instance, that they had raised qualms about this practice by aspiring to unite Balkaria with the Karachay Autonomous Oblast'.³¹ Although the Balkars and the Karachay were closely associated peoples, the Balkars were joined with the Kabardians in an autonomous unit. Another glaring discrepancy was the fact that the titular population was not always the majority ethnicity in "their" territory. Some titular groups also perceived others with shared titular status as achieving greater authority and/or as discriminatory towards them, which added another layer of nuance to complaints and conflicts. A major complicating factor in social tensions throughout the region after the restoration of national autonomies was the fact that some had (state recognized) "native" or historical territorial claims but did not have "titular" status. Some Chechen territory, for instance, remained in Dagestan, while one-sixth of Ingush lands were left in North Ossetia.³² The groups who underwent deportation to "special settlements," thus had to endure "return" to altered, and sometimes still inaccessible, historic homelands. Restored national territories were sometimes also compensated by the adjoining of lands where other national groups resided.

These processes made the North Caucasus a particularly complex site where titular status, and one's place in the Soviet hierarchy of nations, was often contested. As already mentioned, repressed nations sometimes suffered more than a decade-long removal of their national and cultural institutions and the denial of their national rights (made worse by the fact that as

³¹ Ro'i, "The Transformation of Historiography on the "Punished Peoples," 150-76.

³² Ibid., 150-76.

constituent parts of union republics, autonomous territories already had weaker institutions in comparison to the union republics). Other national groups, including Russians, were often forcibly resettled into the spaces left behind by deportation. Ossetians, peoples from Dagestan, and Russians (from Rostov Oblast' and Dagestan), for instance, were "thrown [*brosheny*]" into the dissolved former territories of Chechnya-Ingushetia.³³ Village and town names were sometimes switched to Russian names.³⁴ Postwar industrialization campaigns in the USSR's southern tier brought further influxes of peoples.

Despite increased out-migration from the autonomous territories in the North Caucasus and a reduction in their natural increase, self-identified Russians remained a major component of these populations by 1989.³⁵ Though Kabardians and Balkars were the eponymous nations of the Kabardino-Balkaria ASSR, Balkars only made up 9.4% of the ASSR's population compared to 32% of self-proclaimed Russians.³⁶ Only Kabardians had a larger presence at 48.2%, according to the 1989 census. Similarly, in the Karachay-Cherkess Autonomous Region, the Cherkes only composed 9.7% of the population in comparison to the 42.4% Russian majority, while the Karachay made up 31.2% of the population. The same pattern followed suit in the Chechnya-Ingushetia ASSR. When the Chechen-Ingush ASSR was dissolved, most of the former autonomous territory (two-thirds) became Grozny Okrug (then becoming Grozny Oblast') within Stavropol' Krai—a bordering majority ethnic-Russian territory.³⁷ The southwest part of the former ASSR formerly inhabited by the Ingush was annexed by North Ossetia and by Georgia, while some areas in the east and southeast went to Dagestan. By 1989, self-identified Chechens

³³ Polian, *Ne po svoei vole*, 131-136,

³⁴ Ro'i, "The Transformation of Historiography on the "Punished Peoples," 150-76

³⁵ Soldatova and Dement'eva, "Russians in the North Caucasian Republics," 122-140.

³⁶ Mustafa Aydin, "Geopolitics of Central Asia and the Caucasus: Continuity and Change since the End of the Cold War," *The Turkish Yearbook of International Relations* 32 (2001):178.

³⁷ Ro'i, "The Transformation of Historiography on the "Punished Peoples," 150-76.

composed the ASSR's majority (57.8%), but self-proclaimed Russians (23.1%) here still superseded the Ingush population (12.9% of the population). Seventy-two percent of the Slavic population in the ASSR, however, resided in Grozny, where they made up 56% of the Chechen capital's total population in 1989 (Chechens and Ingush composed about 36%).³⁸ Social dynamics were further complicated by the region's historic Cossack presence. These former imperial border guard communities underwent their own history of repression, and they also mobilized for national autonomy and other rights (see the final chapter).

The category "Russian" could also be ambiguous. There were numerous irregularities in categorizing nationality. Censuses were designed to elicit subjective responses, which were skewed toward nationalities, like Russian, with clear advantages. Education practices, which were geared toward Russian especially after Khrushchev's language reforms, resulted in potential assimilation, or Russification, which "small nations" and repressed nations were especially victim to.³⁹ In the areas of deportation, the children of repressed nations, for example, were taught in Russian schools in an effort to enforce Russification, though many Caucasians resisted.⁴⁰ Census practices also sometimes restricted self-identification to recognized nationalities. Those who identified as purported subethnic groups (for example, Cossacks, or the Digor people of North Ossetia) were reclassified by language.⁴¹ Some census workers interfered

³⁸ Soldatova and Dement'eva, "Russians in the North Caucasian Republics," 131-132.

³⁹ Ro'i, "The Transformation of Historiography on the " Punished Peoples," 150-76. In an effort to liberalize, the Soviet education reform of 1958-9 allowed parents to choose between Russian and non-Russian schools for their children. It has been argued, though, that this move created more social pressure for the use of Russian as the language of instruction. In the RSFSR, parents in minority areas maintained the right to choose a Russian or non-Russian school for their children. See Mervyn Matthews, *Education in the Soviet Union: Policies and Institutions since Stalin* (London: George Allen, 1982). See also Jeremy Smith: "The Battle for Language: Opposition to Khrushchev's Education Reform in the Soviet Republics, 1958-59," *Slavic Review*, 76(4), 983-1002.

⁴⁰ See Pohl, "It Cannot be that our graves will be here," 401-430.

⁴¹ If Ukrainian Cossacks, for instance, shifted their native language to Russian while stating Cossack as their nationality, they were classified in the census as Russian. Brian D. Silver, "The Ethnic and Language Dimensions in Russian and Soviet Censuses," *Research Guide to the Russian and Soviet Censuses*, Ralph S. Clem, ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1986), 70-97. On

in the collection and reporting of data (both purposefully and accidentally) to deny minority identification.⁴² A census option for mixed nationalities was also omitted.

(Re)drawn borders, shifting demographics, and problematic nationality practices continued to create problems when repressed peoples began to return. In the post-Stalinist period, repressed peoples began to advocate for the equal rights still owed to them when reforms not only reinstated some former ethno-territories but, as discussed in the first chapter, also enabled letter campaigns and other grassroots advocacy efforts. Petitions often involved contested space—a problem that was difficult to resolve given that new communities had established themselves (through state campaigns) in the places left behind by deported peoples. Despite these challenges, central organs sometimes conducted or oversaw verifications (*proverkas*) in response to these petitions. Given the extensive complications in many of these cases, however, it was also unclear to what extent these checks (conducted at the regional or central level) were seriously performed.⁴³

The history of state repression and political, territorial, and demographic fluctuation in the region led to contestations and sometimes flight when deported peoples returned. The Chechen and Ingush, as deported peoples, had been denied decades of privileged mobility granted under Soviet nationality policy to the country's legitimated titular nations. Unlike the peoples who never regained "their own" micro-territories that were disbanded after the late 1930s, some repressed peoples, like the Chechen and Ingush, were granted reinstated, though altered, ethno-territories. This reversal of state policies set the stage for conflict. The Presidium of the USSR's Supreme Soviet officially restored Chechen-Ingush autonomy in January 1957

⁴² See Goff, *Nested Nationalism*, 166-178.

⁴³ Contrastingly, on resistance and challenges to formal evaluations of nativization in the early Soviet period, see Matthew D. Pauly, "'Tending to the 'Native Word': Teachers and the Soviet Campaign for Ukrainian-Language Schooling, 1923-1930." *Nationalities Papers* 37, no. 3 (2009): 251-276.

and renamed Grozny Oblast the Chechen-Ingush ASSR. The Prigorod district, however, which once belonged to the prewar ASSR, was left as part of the North Ossetian ASSR. Upon return, the Chechen and Ingush were furthermore confronted by a large Slavic presence in the capital of the ASSR. Conflict between Slavic populations, including “native” Cossacks, many of whom had roots in the region that stretched back to the imperial era, were particularly tense. Since the return of deportees, the Slavic population dropped. In the Chechen-Ingush ASSR, the Slavic population declined from 35.9% in 1970 to 24.3% in 1990.⁴⁴

Alina, a Jewish woman from Krasnodar Krai, who had survived evacuation to Central Asia during the Nazi invasion of the USSR, described the return of deported peoples as “like during war times,” with people arriving haphazardly and having nowhere to live.⁴⁵ In 1955, prior to the reinstatement of Chechnya-Ingushetia, Alina had moved to Grozny—a city she described as “international”—to join her husband after graduating from the Odessa Polytechnical Institute. The Chechens were not yet there, she noted. Their return, Alina had observed, was “so unorganized.” Some new arrivals resorted to squatting in the city square, she remembered. She learned that when Chechens or Ingush attempted to go back to their homes, places they may have buried their ancestors, they demanded that the new occupants move out. Some offered money. “Unrest and clashes (*stychiki*) with the Russian population began,” she recalled.

Some returnees, in fact, took advantage of destalinization to make spontaneous movements back to their historic homelands prior to the restoration of national autonomies. In December of 1956, one Ingush returnee reportedly showed up at his former residence in the village of Novyi Ardon (which was later renamed Ekazhevo) in the former Chechen-Ingush

⁴⁴ Riazantsev, *Sovremennyyi demograficheskii i migratsionnyi portret Severnogo Kavkaza*, 110.

⁴⁵ Interview with author. June 2019.

ASSR and announced that the house that was newly occupied belonged to him.⁴⁶ A fight broke out when a group of drunken collective farmers got involved in the argument. One Ingush was killed, and ten people were wounded, including three Ossetians. Bureaucratic plans to organize returns were frustrated by such extemporaneous migrations. According to Soviet plans, 17,000 families were intended to return in 1957 to Chechnya-Ingushetia, but twice the number, 34,635 families, had made their return by September 1, 1957.⁴⁷ In the village of Moksob, thirty-two Chechen families were temporarily housed in “terribly crowded conditions.” Efforts to convince the local Avars to share their homes, even an empty one, failed. On the contrary, they gathered to beat up one of the Chechens, while demanding that Chechens be removed from the village. The authorities, fearing the worsening of the climate, obliged. In April 1957, farmers of the Lenin Collective Farm in the Malgobek district located west of Grozny in Chechnya-Ingushetia complained that “everywhere you hear about outrages, insults, fights, thieving, intimidation—there is hatred and national hostility between Chechens and Ingush on one side and Russians, Ossetians, and Kumyki on the other.” They reported, for instance, that a Chechen plowed up a Russian-Ossetian Orthodox cemetery (the Tsarist government successfully pursued a policy of strengthening Christianity among Ossetians, but some continued to follow Islam).⁴⁸ The authors disclosed that “all of this is forcing us to leave,” and they requested relocation to the (more stable) North Ossetian ASSR. After receiving complaints about ethnic tensions, and an increasingly explosive situation three months after Chechen-Ingush autonomy was restored, the RSFSR Council of Ministers passed a special resolution to evacuate people from the reinstated

⁴⁶ Kozlov, *Mass Uprisings in the USSR*, 88.

⁴⁷ Kozlov, *Mass Uprisings in the USSR*, 88-89.

⁴⁸ “Verovaniia Osetin.” Kavkazskii Uzel. March 28, 2009. Accessed March 5th, 2023. <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/151623/>

territory on April 12, 1957. Authorities also resorted to manning large railroad stations along the path of repatriation from Central Asia to the North Caucasus with police forces.

In 1958, these tensions escalated into a riot in Grozny, the capital of the ASSR, once founded as a military outpost of the Russian empire that had become the social, political, and cultural heart of the ASSR. Most of Grozny's multinational population was employed by the oil industry, where a multinational community, connected by the Russian language had been established over time.⁴⁹ More than 50 percent of all crimes committed in the ASSR occurred in Grozny from 1956 to 1957, when Chechens and Ingush began to make both planned and unplanned returns, and widespread fighting was reported. It was a murder that took place in the city, however, that stirred mass unrest in 1958. According to reports, a young Russian man, E. Stepashin, was knifed to death by a group of young Chechens at a dance hall after an argument erupted over a woman.

Stepashin's funeral turned into a mass anti-Chechen demonstration where anti-Soviet statements were reported. Crowds, numbering up to 10,000 people, demanded, among other things: the expulsion of Chechens, that a delegation from Moscow be sent to Grozny, the removal of local party and government leaders, the renaming of Chechnya-Ingushetia back to 'Gronzy Oblast' or to a multinational Soviet socialist republic, and the revoking of Chechen-Ingush privileges. Some even called for Chechens to be beaten up, or evoked nationalist declaration, like "Great Russia [Rus] is waking up." Such rioters, searching for Chechens (likely to beat up), stopped automobiles in the streets. They broke into the offices of the regional party committee and occupied the building. Troops finally entered Grozny by midnight of the second day of the Grozny riots to suppress the disturbance, and the city was put under a curfew. As a

⁴⁹ Kozlov, *Mass Uprisings in the USSR*, 94.

result of the disturbances, thirty-two people had been wounded, including four Ministry of Internal Affairs employees and police officers. Two people died and ten were hospitalized, ninety-three people were detained, and 57 arrested. Nikolai Ignatov, a USSR Central Committee Secretary, decried that regional and local authorities in the rapidly transforming ASSR were disjointed and had failed to “seize the initiative and appeal to ‘party activists and to the workers.’” Soviet policies would continue to fail to address heated issues over territory and one’s national status in the North Caucasus.

For Alina, these events were stressful and unfortunate as they necessitated her family to abandon a city, jobs, and an apartment they cherished, but as a newcomer from a bordering territory where she had relatives, they were not existential problems.⁵⁰ When Alina went to visit her parents in Krasnodar Krai after the birth of her daughter in 1957, she received a strange telegram from her husband telling her, ominously, to stay put. After about a week, another telegram from her husband finally told her she could make her return to Grozny. Alina learned that mass unrest involving the intervention of armed troops and tanks transpired during her time away. Nothing about the “terrible events” was reported in the press, she recalled. The regional party committee, she described, had been “battered (*gromili*).” People barricaded in factories. All the nonlocals (*chuzhie*) from the factories fled afterward, Alina noted, as the riot revealed how unstable the ASSR had become. Single women, she perceived, were the first to leave. In 1962, Alina left Grozny as well, at first without her husband, who as a member of the Communist Party at a factory had to remain longer.

Tensions sometimes persisted for those who remained. The reinstatement of territories in the North Caucasus involved other problems. In some cases, the Chechen-Ingush ASSR

⁵⁰ Interview with author. June 2019.

continued to rely on external specialist labor (perhaps because many repressed peoples lacked proper training in exile) a fact that could also spark conflict and add to tensions.⁵¹ On July 13, 1972, an anonymous letter sent to Brezhnev reported that the flight of the Russian and Ukrainian population of Malgobek had taken on a “massive character” amid threats and murders on the part of the Chechen and Ingush.⁵² The letter claimed that the titular nation conducted crimes with impunity. “Take urgent action,” the letter beseeched, stating that the consequent departures “don’t stop.” The verification (*proverka*) regarding the alleged threats was conducted by the Chechen-Ingush Regional Committee (obkom) and overseen by the Central Committee. It revealed “serious shortcomings” in the Malgobek District Committee (gorkom), which included “poorly conduct[ed] international education” (*vospitanie*). This had led, the *proverka* concluded, to a high turnover rate of mainly the Russian nationality. Over half of the employees of the oil enterprises of the district (51%) left in 1969. Similarly, in 1970-1972, out of 180 teachers who arrived in the ASSR, 144 left, as well as 65 percent of arriving medical workers and 54 percent of agricultural specialists. Such newcomers, the report declared, were often greeted poorly, which they labeled the result of “hooliganism,” a term the party often used to conceal more worrisome interethnic tensions. These facts, and victims’ complaints, the *proverka* found, were not properly evaluated, responded to, and were indeed sometimes covered up by some village soviets and party organizations. The *proverka*, therefore, resulted in the firing of the First Chairman of Malgobek’s District Committee and the Chairman of its Executive Committee.

⁵¹ Reliance on external specialist labor in the North Caucasus could also be due to continued resistance to state campaigns or the use of the Russian language, or due to preference for other work. More research is needed on the employment of external labor in the North Caucasus, and in the southern tier in general in the late Soviet period.

⁵² RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 407, ll. 100-102 (letters on nationalism in various republics of the USSR: 1966-1990). In 1989, 19.6% of the Malgobek population was Slavic. Soldatova and Dement’eva, “Russians in the North Caucasian Republics,” 132.

Some returnees claimed that their rights were continually denied in favor of remaining Russian populations. “Are there really no personnel of local nationalities in the republic to be nominated for leadership positions in the field of agriculture and other ministries and bodies?” one letter complained about national representation in Chechnya-Ingushetia in 1969.⁵³ “Of course,” the anonymous author(s) responded, “there are also those with higher education and extensive work experience and organizational skills. But such cadres are hated, they are bullied, beaten, and injured (*kolechat*).” The letter hinted that Russians were, instead, taking on these leading positions by describing this “depriv[al]” of local cadres’ rights as “great-power chauvinism,” which the author(s) called a “gross perversion of the nationality policy of the party.” The Chechen-Ingush ASSR’s response to the complaint indicated that since its restoration work had been done to promote Ingush and Chechens to leading positions. These efforts apparently included sending Ingush and Chechens to party schools to train local cadres for leadership roles. Most of the graduates, it was reported, worked in the offices of district and city party committees, in soviets, trade union, and Komsomol organizations, and in managerial economic work. By March 1969, the titular populations’ representation in the nomenklatura of the ASSR was not yet a majority (at 48% of the leadership positions), yet it was trending toward it. As part of country-wide efforts promoted by Leonid Brezhnev, but likely also to placate existing tensions, the party committed to improving the international *vospitanie* of youth in the region from 1971-1981.⁵⁴

Even in Dagestan, where there was no eponymous nation, tensions over national space emerged. In addition to the lack of an eponymous nation, the Dagestan ASSR was also

⁵³ RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 407, ll. 35-45.

⁵⁴ Vladimir Emel’ianovich Naumenko, “Deiatel’nost’ Checheno-Ingushskoi oblastnoi partiinoi organizatsii po internatsional’nomu vospitaniiu trudiashchikhsia (1959-1971gg).” Ph.D. Dissertation, Dagestan Friendship of Peoples University (Makhachkala: 1984), 165-174.

distinguished by its size (it was the largest ethno-territory in the region) and by its remarkable ethnic diversity. According to the 1989 census, Avars, Dargins, Kumyks, Lezgins, Russians, and Laks made up the central ethnic groups.⁵⁵ In an unwritten rule since 1948, a “troika” of the three highest positions had gone to different ethnicities in the ASSR in an attempt to preserve a balance of power.⁵⁶ The latter, however, was far from equilibrium. Though the ASSR had not been disbanded during the war, some of Dagestan’s populations, like Chechen and Ingush residing in the republic, were deported.⁵⁷ Chechen-Akkins (who identify as Aukhovs from Aukh, a historical Chechen region in the DASSR) were deported only two weeks after their historic homeland became an autonomous district in Dagestan. Upon return to their native lands, Chechen-Akkins found their “small motherland” resettled by Laks and Avars. The Aukhovskii district (Aukh region) had been turned into Leninaul and Kalininaul that was added to the neighboring Kazbekovskii district to where Avars were moved, while the rest of the Aukhovskii district became the Novolakskii “New Lak” district, where Laks were resettled. The Chechen-Akkins were thus resettled in Khasaviurtovskii district, a territory neighboring Aukh, and provided with land allotments, to the chagrin of many.

Chechen-Akkin rehabilitation advocates, some complained, were silenced, while some who attempted to move back to their historic homelands were expelled. In 1966, for instance, a collective letter from 602 Chechen-Akkins noted that the Aukhovskii raion was not only *not* restored as an autonomous territory, but that it had become a “forbidden zone.”⁵⁸ They had “returned” from the Kyrgyz and Kazakh SSR to their historic homeland in Dagestan at their own

⁵⁵ Aydin, “Geopolitics of Central Asia and the Caucasus,” 167-216

⁵⁶ Robert Bruce Ware and Enver Kisriev, *Dagestan: Russian Hegemony and Islamic Resistance in the North Caucasus* (London: M.E. Sharpe, 2010), 36-37.

⁵⁷ See A.N. Iakovlev, *Stalinskie deportatsii 1928-1953: Dokumenty* (Moscow: Materik, 2005).

⁵⁸ RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 406, ll. 1-5 (letters on non-compliance with the provisions of the national policy in the selection and placement of personnel, April 1966-August 1987).

expense, the group of Chechen-Akkins proclaimed. Throughout the course of ten years, they had attempted to resettle in Aukh, their historic homeland, for which they proclaimed “boundless love and affection,” to no avail. The group of Chechen-Akkins wrote that “violent measures” were taken to oust them from Novolaksky district, including the demolition of their homes, imprisonment, expulsion, and that they were denied work in collective farms and enterprises, while their children were refused schooling. Their letter campaigns and advocacy led to the dispatch of a special commission to the region, which they claimed did not help to resolve the matter. One of their advocates, the group of over six hundred alleged, had been arrested in Moscow and escorted back to the North Caucasus involuntarily in November 1965.

Petitioners seeking national autonomy or improved national rights in Dagestan where no eponymous nation existed still sometimes accused local and regional authorities of bias or discrimination. The Chechens-Akkins claimed that while their rights were violated by the Lak residents of Aukh, the leaders of the district and the republic “constantly incite[d] Laks against them” (*postoianno natpravlivaiut laktsev...protiv nas-chechentsev*).⁵⁹ In other words, the Chechen-Akkin group asserted that local authorities sided against them, and purposefully inflamed territorial contentions. The RSFSR’s Central Committee shut down the complaint by noting that central organs had already tried to meet with Chechen-Akkins and evaluate the situation on location. No findings or resolutions were disclosed regarding the matter, however.

Similar tensions could also arise between other groups where a history of stigmatized deportation and territorial reclamation of historic homelands did not play a role. In 1983, central organs responded to a collective letter from a group of Nogai people in the ASSR who claimed that the Dagestan regional committee discriminated against the Nogai in favor of larger

⁵⁹ Ibid.

nationalities.⁶⁰ The letter implied that race played a role, as its authors claimed that the main difference between the Nogai and the other “native” populations was their “Asian type of face.” They furthermore asserted that “nobody was engaged in the development of Nogai cadres” and that “thousands of obstacles” prevented Nogai advancement in Dagestan’s capital, which included discrimination with education. The letter further proclaimed, “our children are publicly insulted as narrow-eyed, flat-faced, and are rudely called Mongol, Korean, Chinese, etc.” The letter asserted that discriminatory treatment limited many to “their own” “squalid [*ubogii*],” “remote” and overcrowded Nogai District of Dagestan, where, they noted, infighting often broke out as a result. The letter begged for the Central Committee of the USSR to send “2-3 uncorrupt [*nepodkupnikh*]” communists to investigate, as they claimed the Dagestan Regional Committee’s verifications and commitment to Soviet nationality policy were not to be trusted. They appealed for “equal” conditions, the formation of a (newly) designated region, or transfer to any other republic or territory where there were better national opportunities. The Central Committee, however, accused the Nogai of titular favoritism and of “poorly engag[ing] in issues of international education [*vospitanie*]” in “their own” district, the same complaint they filed against Dagestan’s larger nationalities.

The legacy of Soviet nationality policy in the borderland created cause for tense social relations. The reinstatement of repressed peoples’ territory was plagued with problems. The complex and incongruent application of nationality policy also aggravated tensions over status in the Soviet hierarchy of nations in the diverse North Caucasus. Sometimes people blamed local, regional, and central authorities for ignoring or inflaming these problems. In these challenging circumstances, Soviet internationalist practices had some effect in that they provided a system of

⁶⁰ RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 408, ll. 10-19 (letters on the manifestations of nationalism in various republics of the USSR, volume 2 1980-1987).

redress, which allowed petitioners to vocalize concerns. Verifications, however flawed, still provided hope of equality or fair intervention, especially at the central level, for some. Soviet internationalism also legitimated the rights of repressed nations who were, ironically, once stripped of them.

Internationalist practices were insufficient in mediating and moderating national tensions in the decades following the return of repressed peoples. Deeply rooted national problems, as many petitioners claimed, were not resolved, but rather continually swept under the rug. In March 1986, Magomed Yusupov, the First Secretary of Dagestan, conceded that people had once come from “many provinces of the Russian Republic and from other republics” to contribute to the development of Dagestan.⁶¹ This “internationalist upbringing,” he claimed, was “remembered in every city and district of Dagestan.” “Unfortunately,” he concluded, “attention to it fell off,” which had become a “very important problem.” Rather than “invigorating” internationalism, as Yusupov allegedly hoped, perestroika spurred ethnic tensions and mobilization by promoting the rehabilitation of repressed nations. The USSR’s decline created opportunities for national organizations and movements to form as many began to push for legally supported territorial claims and other rights. Conflict and flight would snowball in result.

Perestroika, the Rehabilitation of Repressed Nations, and Growing Voices of Unrest in the North Caucasus

“Our situation is worse than in Alma-Ata,” an anonymous Russian writer from Grozny proclaimed in a letter addressed to Gorbachev in June of 1987.⁶² “SOS! SOS! SOS! Save us! Save us! Save us! Help! Help! Help!” read the first three lines. The author begged for the administration of Grozny to switch to Stavropol Krai “as it was before,” when the ASSR had

⁶¹ M. Yu. Yusupov, “Speech by Comrade M. Yu. Yusupov, First Secretary of the Dagestan Province Party Committee,” *Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 38, no. 15 (May 14, 1986): 14-15.

⁶² RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 408, l. 120.

been liquidated due to Stalin's directives. The author believed that Grozny should not have been reinstated as part of Chechnya-Ingushetia, a switch that the author claimed had serious consequences for the Russian population. In exchange, the author suggested offering Chechens and Ingush other territories (likely proposing more vacant places—plentiful in Russia—as better options for them). “They don't have enough land,” the letter assessed, “so just give them land,” the author begged.

Though pointing to widespread youth unemployment in the ASSR, the anonymous author also referred to Chechens and Ingush as extremely backward. The author used bigoted rhetoric to stress their perceived violent nature by referring to the Chechens and Ingush as “savages” and “beasts.”⁶³ In gruesome graphics, the letter detailed rape of Russian girls, castration of Russian boys, other violent mutilations, beatings, and murders. The letter described violence that had been allegedly covered up by local authorities, including the burning of “entire families,” and the rape and murder of “old women.”⁶⁴ The letter described the alleged recent rape of a deaf woman and a young Russian girl, Ira. Her mutilated body had been later found tossed into a river. Though anonymous, the author of the letter avowed to tell the “black truth of the cry of the Russian soul” only because it was “now permitted under glasnost.” “We are even beaten for speaking in Russian, Russian boys are beaten to death and never seen again, this is the kind of democracy imposed on us,” the letter concluded.⁶⁵

The latter statement, a nod to the country's reform process and the center's decline, presented a conundrum not uncommon to this period. The author simultaneously blamed the

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid. Incidentally, when the Chechen and Ingush were evicted from their homes during the Stalinist deportations those who were inaccessible to authorities were sometimes simply burned alive in their homes. Ro'i, “The Transformation of Historiography on the ‘ Punished Peoples,’ ” 150-76.

⁶⁵ RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 408, l. 120.

Gorbachev regime for heightened tensions and violence in the autonomous republic while conceding that the reforms enabled the disclosure of long-standing grievances. Many letter writers struggled to reconcile the opportunities for public expression becoming available to them with the threat to the status quo they represented. Perestroika, glasnost', and Gorbachev's drive for democratization enabled a more open environment in which hope for the remedying of old wrongs—especially multifarious in the North Caucasus—emerged, mobilizing various groups. Ironically, letter writers in the North Caucasian autonomous territories often blamed perestroika and glasnost for growing ethnic unrest while welcoming the opportunities they provided for their own national development. In the North Caucasus, the reform climate often brought conflict that centered on issues created through state repression, especially as these histories (and their enduring problems) were more freely examined. As these questions arose, some groups began to vie over territories that had switched designations; others demanded long-denied rights or rallied against privileges they perceived as unfairly granted to others. Some blamed local and regional authorities for persistent discrimination. The reforms as they played out here thus inspired a reckoning about the legacy of Soviet nationality policy in the region, which pitted national groups who felt mutually wronged against one another.

Though it created ample opportunities for increased social tensions, the perestroika government did little to mediate the consequences. The March 1989 elections to the Congress of People's Deputies and the September 1989 Plenum "On nationality policy of the Party in modern conditions" created the arena for national interests to surface or amplify. The September 1989 Plenum sparked intensified debate on the national question throughout the country, as the previous chapter has shown. Public participation was solicited for the Plenum months in advance, and workers' collectives and various groups sent their suggestions to the state for the

Plenum's consideration. In a July 1989 television address on the topic of interethnic relations, Gorbachev had also repudiated the "lawlessness allowed in previous decades," specifically on the "eviction of entire peoples from their lands" and the "oblivion of the national interests of small nations."⁶⁶ These deeply rooted issues, Gorbachev assessed, had resulted in underlying tensions that had gone unaddressed. Gorbachev therefore proposed that "all the necessary prerequisites" must be provided for the "free development of language and culture." These issues, Gorbachev optimistically proclaimed, would be resolved through "democratic discussion."

In November 1989, the USSR Supreme Soviet issued the declaration "Acknowledging the Illegality and Criminality of Repressive Acts against the Peoples Subjected to Forced Deportation and Securing their Rights."⁶⁷ It conceded that in the period of "revolutionary renewal of Soviet society" the desire to "know the whole truth about the past is growing." The Stalinist acts of deportation were labeled "barbaric," and the Supreme Soviet affirmed that the policy of forced relocation had affected the fates of many. It "unconditionally condemn[ed]" the practice as a "grave crime" that contradicted the "foundations of international law and the humanistic nature of the socialist system." In fact, the Supreme Soviet guaranteed that "the violation of human rights and norms of humanity at the state level will never be repeated" in the USSR. Finally, the Supreme Soviet confirmed that it considered it "necessary to take appropriate legislative measures for the unconditional restoration of the rights of all Soviet peoples subjected

⁶⁶ "Vystuplenie General'nogo sekretaria TSK KPSS, Predsedatelia Verkhovnogo Soveta SSSR M.S. Gorbacheva po Tsentral'nomu televideniiu "o mezhnatsional'nykh otnosheniakh 1 iulia 1989 g." *Raspad SSSR: Dokumenty i fakty*, 403-408.

⁶⁷ "O priznanii nezakonnymi i prestupnymi repressivnykh aktov protiv narodov, podverghshikhsia nasil'stvennomu pereseleniu, i obespecheniiu ikh prav." Elektronnaia biblioteka istoricheskikh dokumentov. Accessed February 7, 2023. <http://docs.historyrussia.org/ru/nodes/165903#mode/inspect/page/1/zoom/4>

to repression.” Without setting clear guidelines on how these aims could be achieved, Gorbachev’s policies provided grounds for further disarray and conflict.

As interethnic relations across the Union continued to unravel, Gorbachev attempted to forestall a worsening crisis by creating the USSR State Committee on Nationality Policy and Interethnic Issues in March of 1990. By December of 1990, the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR began debating a decree “On the full rehabilitation of repressed nations.” In a memo promoting the measure, it argued that due to this “unsolved problem,” in many regions of the RSFSR and USSR interethnic relations had “sharply deteriorated in recent years.”⁶⁸ In 1991, the RSFSR law “On the rehabilitation of Repressed Nations” was finally passed. The law established the RSFSR’s commitment to “rehabilitate all of the repressed peoples of the RSFSR.”⁶⁹ “Repressed nations” were defined as “nations (nations, *narodnosti*, or ethnic groups and other historical culture-ethnic community of people, such as the Cossacks”) who had been subjected to “slander and genocide” at the state level, as well as forced relocation, the abolition of national units, the redrawing of national-territorial borders, or life under the “regime of terror and violence” in special settlements. The law proclaimed the right of repressed nations to “restore the territorial integrity that existed before the unconstitutional policy of forcible redrawing of borders, to restore national-state entities that existed before their abolition, as well as to compensation for damage caused by the state.” Repressed nations were also guaranteed the right to return to their places of traditional residence on the territory of the RSFSR.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ GARF, 10121, op.1, d. 4, ll. 27-30 (Instructions of the Council of Ministers of the RSFSR on the rehabilitation of repressed peoples and documents on their implementation. October 15, 1990 – December 25, 1990).

⁶⁹ Zakon RSFSR ot 26 apreliia 1991 g. N. 1107-1 “O reabilitatsii repressirovannykh narodov.” Accessed August 18, 2020. [https://gkmmn.rk.gov.ru/file/1107\(2\).pdf](https://gkmmn.rk.gov.ru/file/1107(2).pdf).

⁷⁰ It was noted that the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR would decide a potential “transitional period” for the implementation of “territorial rehabilitation.”

Perestroika liberalizations influenced the Chechen-Akkins of Dagestan to increasingly vocalize their frustration about the loss of titular status in “their” primordial lands as a consequence of deportation. Sometimes they deployed socialist principles and Soviet law vis-à-vis the center to push for territorial reclamation. In the late 1980s, they began addressing the issue publicly, by demonstrating in the republic’s capital and circulating petitions.⁷¹ The issue was problematic, however, because they also wanted to retain the land they acquired after their “return” from exile. The Chechen-Akkins’ cause became the first such public sign of mass frustration in Dagestan. Officials, therefore, sought to quell these public protests through conciliatory actions. The latter, however, triggered ethnic mobilizations, as other groups reacted with their own desires of redress. In July 1988, the Head of the Department of Organizational and Party Work of the Central Committee of the CPSU reported that Chechen-Akkins were sending in complaints regarding the violation of “Leninist principles of equality.” According to a *proverka*, in recent years, party and Soviet bodies had increasingly involved Chechens-Akkins (who made up 3% of the ASSR’s population) in the social and economic life of the ASSR. Unemployment amongst the Chechen-Akkins, however, was a persistent problem. The republic, the verification showed, also lacked cultural-linguistic resources for them.⁷² In short, Chechen-Akkins had accrued other grievances in Dagestan in combination, or in connection to, the loss of their historic homelands upon return. Though Chechen integration into the ASSR had allegedly improved, a history of state repression and accumulated grievances had the potential to sour interethnic relations in Dagestan.

Some used the reformist political climate to raise concerns about the failures of their rehabilitation. As a collective letter of 20 Soviet women who were Dagestani Chechens from the

⁷¹ Ware and Kisriev, *Dagestan*, 146.

⁷² RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 415, ll. 60-61.

village of Kalininaul proclaimed, “we don’t consider ourselves politically rehabilitated.”⁷³ All of the nationalities in Dagestan had “their own” ethnic districts (*raiony*), but they were denied theirs. Inspired by the reforms, and the potential they represented for further rehabilitation, they wrote “We feel like [real] people during these perestroika years.”⁷⁴ Though this collective of women now lived in Kalininaul, a territory that had been part of Aukh, they did not consider themselves rehabilitated without the full restoration of their national autonomy.

Some claimed that Soviet authorities, at the local, regional, and central level, were biased against them or simply refused to resolve the problem due to its complicated nature. A group of five Chechen-Akkin “residents of the Aukhovskii raion [district] DASSR [Dagestan] before deportation” but who currently resided in the Bonai Aul of the city of Khasaviurt sent a letter to the Politburo of the Central Committee in May 1989 to similarly express their indignation that the promises of territorial restoration had not been fulfilled.⁷⁵ To their frustration, the names of the Chechen district and villages of Dagestan had not been restored. Curiously, they blamed this lack of rehabilitation not on Moscow, but on the discrimination on the part of the Avar majority, and on local and regional authorities. Dagestani regional authorities, they alleged, were to blame for the local authorities’ “negative perceptions” of the Chechen-Akkins. They cited favoritism of larger nationalities in the republic, like the Avars, which they claimed could have detrimental consequences in the everyday. This lack of opportunity in the republic, they alleged, caused them to seek out other—more dangerous—forms of support. They wrote, “We must tell you that we are brought to the verge of crimes.” Ironically, the latter could fuel (additional) stigmas against them. In their experience, the long-suffered denial of rehabilitation had continual, and grave,

⁷³ RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 415, ll. 1-12.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 415, l. 112.

repercussions, which seemed more unfathomable in an era when human rights and democratization was advocated.

“When at last will our rehabilitation be resolved[?]” demanded a group of 26 Chechen-Akkin deputies from the Solnechnyi village Soviet of the Khasaviurtovskii raion in regard to the debate over Novolakskii raion.⁷⁶ These authors similarly asserted that the actions of Dagestan authorities prevented their rehabilitation. In 1985, they detailed, the Regional Committee passed the resolution “On the issue of those who want to live in their native villages,” which was discussed at all party meetings. The consequent discussions, they alleged, resulted in the framing of many Chechen-Akkins as extremists. The group thus implied that those who showed support for territorial rehabilitation were thereafter labeled as nationalists. According to another group of Chechen-Akkins, both Laks and Avars organized strikes in the summer and fall of 1988, respectively, making the Dagestani authorities give up on the matter.⁷⁷ The republican press, radio, and television, they continued, remained silent on the issue. They asked for the Plenum to review the issue of their rehabilitation, begging the question, “can we talk about internationalism and justice, about equality and fraternity, can we persuade and demand this from a people in relation to whom all these concepts are not observed, but trampled and abused?” They claimed that there was a blatant discrepancy between Soviet internationalism, perestroika’s principles, and their own experiences as repressed nations. In short, rather than promote or permit their national development—their right to “flourish”—these rights, granted to all Soviet citizens, they claimed, were denied. To insist that the center act on the issue, they indeed evoked, like other collectives, socialist principles and Soviet law.

⁷⁶ RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 415, ll. 120-124.

⁷⁷ RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 415, ll. 125-129.

As perestroika made the issues pertinent to repressed nations more openly discussed, they also deepened frustration about the state's continual inability to resolve rehabilitation problems. The USSR Central Committee expressed alarm at increasing tensions after receiving fifteen letters by citizens of the Chechen and Lak nationalities living in the Dagestan ASSR. The core of the problem the Department admitted, after conducting a *proverka* on location, was "the consequences of the arbitrariness committed against the Chechens-Akkins" who had lived in the Aukhovskii raion of the Dagestani ASSR, and who were deported to other parts of the USSR in 1944.⁷⁸ The issue was complex as, Laks, along with Avars, had been forcibly resettled to the area the Chechen-Akkins left while their former villages and means of livelihood were destroyed.⁷⁹ They were, therefore, also victims of state repression. In fact, they resisted cultivating the land until 1957 until a new resolution permitted Laks and Avars to stay in the territory and granted free housing to Chechen-Akkins in the neighboring Khasaviurtovskii raion.⁸⁰ This act of defiance was admirably sustained until some resolution had been created for all the nationalities involved.

Their historic homeland remained of vital importance to the Chechen-Akkins (as it did for most repressed nationalities); the Central Committee of the CPSU reported, in fact, that the majority of Chechen-Akkins supported return to their former territory.⁸¹ In a proactive move to avoid increasing unrest, meetings were allegedly held among Laks to avoid the incitement of Chechen nationalism. A majority of Laks thereafter decided that they would petition the Council of Ministers of the Dagestan ASSR to execute a planned resettlement of Laks to new territories

⁷⁸ Ibid., ll. 104-105.

⁷⁹ Glen E. Howard, ed. *Volatile Borderland: Russia and the North Caucasus* (Washington D.C.: The Jamestown Foundation, 2012), 79.

⁸⁰ Ware and Kisriev, *Dagestan*, 146.

⁸¹ RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 415, ll. 104-105.

suitable for farming with the preservation of the name and status of the district.⁸² The Regional Party Committee sent representatives to labor collectives in Novolakskii raion to facilitate the evaluation of territorial assets.⁸³ Officials also met with informal leaders of the Lak and Chechen communities, those who had sent in complaints, and took other decisive actions in attempt to maintain public order in the localities of the district. The Council of Ministers of the Dagestan Autonomous Soviet socialist Republic established a Commission to review Novolakskii raion's proposals, which was headed by the Chairman of the Council of Ministers Dagestani ASSR.

Though these moves revealed an attempt to address the deportations and their consequences without conflict, the execution of these plans would prove problematic, especially as they required abundant federal funds (as the republic could not afford it) that were increasingly lacking. Still, these proactive measures depicted a willingness amongst Laks to cooperate, even if that meant overcoming significant hurdles. These resolutions, however, soon came to appear as a “victory” for the Chechen-Akkins, which triggered ethnic mobilization in the republic.⁸⁴ Against the backdrop of weakening control from Moscow, ethnic movements were also founded to defend national interests against incursions from other groups. Dagestan began to unravel as a unified multi-ethnic entity when local leaders then pursued newly emerging—and divergent—national organizations. While the Laks had showed a willingness to resolve the issue by moving, the Avars in the region developed a determinacy to remain. Gadzhi Makhachev, an Avar who became the leader of the movement to push Avar interests in the territory, later helped to organize the Avar national organization, the Imam Shamil Front, named after the leader of the Islamic resistance in the Caucasus, who had, ironically, united mountaineers against imperial

⁸² The Laks rejected a proposal to return to their historic homelands due to the decades-long neglect of the territory and consequent infrastructural issues. Ware and Kisriev, *Dagestan*, 148.

⁸³ RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 415, ll. 104-105.

⁸⁴ Ware and Kisriev, *Dagestan*, 145-149.

Russian incursions. Kumyks, who began to voice their opposition over Lak resettlement with concern that they would be resettled onto their historic homeland (to the lowlands of the Makhachkala region), formed “Berlik,” their own national movement. The issue set off a series of ethnic disputes that resulted in the creation of many organizations. Nogai, Lak, and Lezgin national organizations soon followed those of the Chechen, Kumyk and Amar organizations.

The conciliatory move by the Soviet authorities stimulated (further) distrust and animosity of Dagestani ethnic groups toward Chechens. In May 1989, 40 Avars of the Leninaul and Kalinaul villages blamed the Chechens for conspiring with the local authorities against them.⁸⁵ They attested that life had generally been peaceful between the two nations and “After all,” they wrote, “the Chechens also understand what hardships the Avars suffered when they were forcefully relocated from their centuries-old mountain places to inhabit the spaces left behind by the Chechen deportation.” The group of Avars described that things had only more recently taken a turn for the worse. While the “over-saturation of labor resources” hampered their success with finding work, they also felt “harassed to the breaking point (*pritsniiut do predela*).” Their First Secretary of the District Committee of the CPSU Guseinov, they alleged, stirred up interethnic problems for the purposes of his own self-interest and personal gain. It was this meddling, the authors claimed, that created frictions that had reached “dangerous limits” between the two nationalities after more than 30 years. Guseinov, they contended, started to negotiate land reclamations with the local Chechens behind the Avars’ backs. “In our period of glasnost and democracy,” they wrote, the “the Chechen population gathers at night” conspiring with Guseinov to remove “people of other nationalities from the territory.”

⁸⁵ RGANI, f. 100, op. 5, d. 415, ll. 97-103.

This collective of Avars complained of a complicated plot against them caused by economic instability, the resurrection of territorial interests, corrupt local and republican authorities, and the lack of central oversight. They were especially baffled that this could happen in an era that espoused openness and democratization. The group of 40 Avars pressed that the First Secretary of the District was involved in a conspiracy in which he purposefully inflamed the territorial issue between ethnic groups for his own gain. They contended that there were rumors that Chechens had offered Guseinov a bribe of 40,000 rubles. To find the source of the rumors, Guseinov then allegedly worked with the regional head of the KGB conducting interrogations. The group of 40 Avars claimed that to better profit from or hide his operation, Guseinov had also begun attracting “Chechens from the outside,” instead of seeking bribes from the Chechens who had already been living there working on collective farms. To keep his end of the bargain with the Chechens, Guseinov had purportedly obtained the issuance of an order from the Council of Ministers of the Dagestan ASSR to (re)allocate 20 hectares from a collective farm. Though these Avars complained about the latter move, it was likely seen by many Chechens as an act of justice. In response, however, the collective farmers allegedly raised a revolt to stop the transfer of land. After the incident, a representative of the Presidium of the Supreme Council and Council of Ministers of Dagestan came to the area, they claimed, but supposedly left without offering up any resolution. Delegations from the two villages then appealed to the First Secretary of Dagestan, Magomed Yusupov, and demanded transfer to another district, or the immediate change of leadership. Despite their complaints, the authors contended that the Dagestani party continued to support Guseinov’s candidacy as First Secretary of the district.

Meanwhile, many Chechens complained about discrimination, harassment, and a deterioration of interethnic relations as distrust of Chechens spread in Dagestan or became more openly flaunted. A collective letter from Chechens had claimed that the authority of the Chechens had been “undermined.”⁸⁶ Rumors of Chechens acting as traitors—both to the USSR, and toward Imam Shamil, the Islamic hero of Caucasian resistance to Russian imperialism—were allegedly proliferating.⁸⁷ In the Café Caspian “and other places,” the authors claimed that songs proclaiming “...the Chechens betrayed Imam... Shamil” resounded. They continued to attest that in schools in the city of Khasaviurt and in Kalininaul “teachers in the classroom insult Chechen children.” These authors declared that Chechen children were blamed for their families’ alleged Nazi collaboration (unlike other groups, such as Cossacks, who were actively solicited by the German Army to serve as volunteers).⁸⁸ These Dagestani Chechens, therefore, claimed that the stigma of their deportation persisted, as they had been one of the few who were deported from the republic as purported fifth-column nations. In comparison to tensions elsewhere in the region over the reinstatement of territories and repressed peoples’ returns, this presented a unique set of social challenges. In belief that moving to a restored Aukhovskii district would grant the protection and legitimacy they needed, they beseeched the Politburo for help with their rehabilitation and return to their “native hearths.” By May of 1989, a collective letter complained

⁸⁶ RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 415, ll. 125-129.

⁸⁷ Seven hundred thousand to 1 million Soviet citizens served on the side of the Nazi Army. Due to Nazi strategy in the Caucasus, they included mainly non-Slavic groups and the (ethnically mixed) Cossacks, many of whom fought against the Bolsheviks amid the Civil War. Nazis invaded the Caucasus in June of 1942. To promote collaboration among the USSR’s nationalities, the Nazis amended their racial policies. See Iskander Giliyazov, *Na Drugoi Storone: Kollaboratsionisty iz povolzhsko-priural’skikh tatar v gody vtoroi mirovoi voyny* (Kazan: Master Lain, 2000), B.N. Kovalev, *Natsistskaia okkupatsiia i kollaboratsionizm v Rossii: 1941-1944* (Moscow: Tranzitkniga, 2004). During the Great Patriotic War, 1.2 million people of all nationalities also deserted from the army, and over 45,000 refused to serve. Ro’i, “The Transformation of Historiography on the ‘Punished Peoples,’” 150-76. Imam Shamil was an Avar. On the imperial conquest of the North Caucasus and resistance to it, see Michael Khodarkovsky, *Bitter Choices: Loyalty and Betrayal in the Russian Conquest of the North Caucasus* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2011).

⁸⁸ See Samuel J. Newland, *Cossacks in the German Army: 1941-45* (London: Frank Cass, 1991).

that though several commissions on the territorial issue had been formed, there still had been no progress.⁸⁹

As we have seen, perestroika enabled more civic debates, but this also created concern over the representation of repressed nations in the media. In December of 1988, a letter signed by 28 workers from the village of Ekazhevo in the Chechen-Ingush ASSR, the same village where violence had erupted in 1956, complained of an article that appeared in the Sunzhenskii district newspaper.⁹⁰ The region has a strong Cossack history, which included the formation of an autonomous Cossack district (okrug) as part of the Mountain ASSR that existed from 1921-1929, until it was allocated, along with neighboring Grozny, to Chechnya.⁹¹ The 28 workers attached the article, entitled “Protecting deserters and traitors.” The article penned by a group of several veterans stated that Chechens and Ingush had deserted by the thousands in the war. The article declared that they should “know today that their relatives did wrong during the war” so that they could “now live like all nations, honestly.” In language unthinkable prior to the reforms in the media, it continued, “All know how during the war they stole, hijacked cows, horses from Russians, and even killed Russians. They continue to steal with impunity to this day.” The article concluded by allegedly confirming that hundreds of veterans were interviewed, and that none of them met Chechens or Ingush in their units during the war.

The 28 workers from Ekazhevo argued that derisive media demonstrations upset social relations. After suffering deportation, they lamented, these “dirty labels,” as traitors, thieves, and inherently violent peoples, continued to follow them—even in “their” reinstated territory. To deflect from their own criminal activities, other groups in the growing shadow and criminal

⁸⁹ Resolutions on the territorial issue would be further relegated by the Chechen War. RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 415, ll. 125-129; 160.

⁹⁰ The Sunzha is a tributary of the Terek River. RGANI, f. 100, op. 5, d. 415, ll. 27-43.

⁹¹ Perovic, *From Conquest to Deportation*, 157-158.

economy since the mid-1980s also attempted to fashion a negative image of the Chechen people. The latter included not only old stereotypes of the Chechen as a “collaborationist” and “traitor” but also new ones—the Chechen as a “mafiaso” and “terrorist.”⁹²

Instead of fostering a shared moment of solace for past state crimes (as deportations and forced relocations were declared to be by the late 1980s), perestroika and glasnost’, letters showed, often intensified disputes over territory, national rights, and historical memory. A letter addressed to Gorbachev, the President of the USSR Academy of Sciences, and the Dagestan Regional Committee, for instance, recoiled at how territorial claims were increasingly flouted in Dagestan to persecute Russians and “other nationalities.”⁹³ Although suggesting that these trends had begun earlier, the writer stressed that they had more recently intensified. This author believed that local authorities were easily able to manipulate the reforms for their own personal benefit, or for national aims. Life and conditions in the republic, the letter claimed, were becoming “unbearable,” with Russians “forced to leave,” while other locals were left with nowhere to turn [*nekuda devat’sia*].⁹⁴ One collective similarly asserted that Russians in Dagestan were often told aloud “to get out to Russia!”⁹⁵ As Soviet citizens, the anonymous collective claimed that they had “never attached importance” to nationality before, but now interethnic fights were breaking out as the Dagestan Regional Committee failed to address growing tensions. Writing with entitlement as the once “elder brothers” in the Soviet “brotherhood of nations,” the authors proclaimed, “Everything that Dagestan owes to the great Russian people is forgotten!” Still, in Dagestan, the coexistence of diverse ethnic groups was an established order, and it was

⁹² D. A. Efendieva, *Chechenskie sobytiia i Dagestan: Posledstviia i istoricheskie uroki* (Makhachkala: DNTs RAN: 2002), 11.

⁹³ RGANI, f. 100, op. 4, d. 408, ll. 63-69.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 406, ll. 26-29.

perhaps this fact that prevented further escalation of conflict. In fact, Soviet citizens in neighboring territories, including groups of Lezgins from Azerbaijan, drew on Dagestan, where Lezgin communities also lived, as a favored nationality policy model in their letters during the perestroika period.⁹⁶

Like the Chechen-Akkin cause in Dagestan, many Ingush mobilized for the return of their native lands that remained in North Ossetia, as well as for increased autonomy, amid the intensifying perestroika climate. A group of 90 Ingush from Tiumenskaia Oblast'' in the Ural region sent a letter intended for the Plenum to plead for Ingush autonomy and the restoration of the borders prior to deportation in 1989. They wrote, "our poor people are divided into three parts. Some of the Ingush are living in the Chechen-Ingush ASSR. Some of the Ingush are living in the NOASSR (North Ossetian ASSR). And some of the Ingush still live far from their homeland in Kazakhstan and elsewhere in the country because they have nowhere to return (they are still in exile)."⁹⁷ The movement for Ingush separation from Chechnya was also undeniably developing. The Central Committee of the CPSU reported receiving letters and telegrams encompassing ever "broader swaths" of Ingush society petitioning for the separation from the Chechen-Ingush ASSR.⁹⁸ In April of 1989, a group of Ingush arrived in Moscow with a petition to the Central Committee signed by 50,000 people. The petition called for the creation of an Ingush ASSR within the RSFSR and the reinstatement of historical borders with Ordzhonikidze (present day Vladikavkaz) as the capital. When the Ingush were deported, the suburb

⁹⁶ RGANI, f. 100, op. 5, d. 488, ll. 26-29; RGANI, f. 100, op. 5, d. 488, ll. 60-64; RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 488, ll. 26-36 (Appeals to the Plenum of the Central Committee of the CPSU on the national question, letters from citizens of various nationalities demanding recognition of their nation, language, culture. February 1989 – July 1990).

⁹⁷ RGANI, f. 100, op. 5., d. 453, ll. 64-65 (Letters from citizens of the RSFSR with suggestions and comments on the draft platform of the CPSU "National Party policy in modern conditions" February 1989 – October 1989).

⁹⁸ RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 415, ll. 44-47.

“Prigorodnyi” (Prigorod District) and parts of the capital Vladikavkaz had been handed over to North Ossetia where it is believed 60,000 Ingush had lived.⁹⁹

Some evoked internationalism in their hope for increased territorial and national rights, presumably believing that the reformist government would finally adhere to the ideology that legitimated their claims. In a letter received by the CPSU in April 1989, 24 mothers from Nazranovskii raion in the Chechen-Ingush ASSR, all of whom were “mother-heroines” with 10 children or more, pleaded for Ingush autonomy and for the borders that existed prior to deportation. “Their children demanded to know,” they added, “why the full rehabilitation and restoration of territorial and legal rights had not been implemented.” Employing Soviet international principles and Soviet law, they added, “No stronger argument exists in life for education in the spirit of patriotism and internationalism than equality in practice.” They had remained silent before, they noted, until the current day, which was when “the party and the government have heard the call of millions of hearts.” They beseeched, “restore our Leninist rights, restore our homeland, our autonomy.”¹⁰⁰ In July, a few months later, Gorbachev would speak on television about the wrongs committed against repressed nations. In the fall, the state would pass its declaration on “Acknowledging the Illegality and Criminality of Repressive Acts against the Peoples Subjected to Forced Deportation and Securing their Rights,” which announced that the “unconditional restoration” of repressed peoples’ rights were warranted and would be addressed.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Official Soviet figures from 1989 list 32,800 Ingush residents in the territory as only those with official registration were counted. Helen Krag and Lars Funch, *The North Caucasus: Minorities at a Crossroads* (Minority Rights Group, 1994), 34.

¹⁰⁰ RGANI, f. 100, op. 5, d. 415, ll. 44-47.

¹⁰¹ “O priznanii nezakonnymi i prestupnymi repressivnykh aktov protiv narodov.”

With the movement for territorial rehabilitation escalating, disputes over the Prigorod District also began to boil over. Other nationalities within the Chechnya-Ingushetia ASSR feared Ingush consolidation would lead to conflict, and the Ossetians feared retaliation. In May 1989, a telegram from the “whole population of the village of Sunzha” in the Prigorodnyi District (another village located on the Sunzha river just south of Sunzha in Chechnya-Ingushetia) alerted North-Ossetian First Secretary and Gorbachev to “provocative actions” committed by the Ingush against Ossetians in the territory.¹⁰² The village had been established by Cossacks, the telegram declared, which stated that other than Ossetians, other nationalities resided in the territory, including, Russians, Armenians, Turks, Georgians, and Greeks, who were all allegedly unnerved by the unrest. The telegram, by pointing to the Cossack origins of the town, attempted to contest Ingush claims to it. The telegram described that the Ingush had been making “regular visits” to the village and had taken to “walking the streets with provocative goals and intimidation.” The Ingush made threats, such as “you cultivate gardens in vain build houses in vain all this and the land will be ours and we will kill you on May 7th [sic].” The telegram had warned of the conflict worsening on the Muslim holiday Uraza Bayram (Eid al-Fitr), which was occurring on May 7th of that year. It petitioned for “urgent measures” to “prevent a repeat of events”—likely a nod to violent conflicts occurring in the Caucasus over the Nagorno-Karabakh territory. One hundred twenty-three names were attached as signatories. The urgent telegram prompted a response from the USSR’s Central Committee.¹⁰³ The Regional Committee, reacting to the center’s recommendations, enforced certain measures to prevent an outbreak of conflict. The latter included enhancing internationalist practices, like assigning party personnel to districts with “mixed populations” and the sending in of the “most effective lecturers, propagandists, and

¹⁰² RGANI, f. 100, op. 5, d. 415, l. 138.

¹⁰³ RGANI, f. 100, op. 5, d. 415, ll. 68-71.

authoritative people” to labor collectives and localities of the Prigorod District. The Central Committee advised the Regional Committee of the ASSR to “carefully study public opinion” and to “actively influence” the “spirit of friendship and fraternity between peoples.” “Every manifestation of nationalism,” the Central Committee demanded, needed to be monitored and “promptly” resolved.

The use of Soviet internationalist practices to forestall interethnic conflict (ironically fueled by a legacy of state repression) ultimately fell short as perestroika and glasnost¹⁰⁴ paradoxically encouraged the mobilization of repressed nations. A cascade of issues related to the Prigorod District were unleashed. In the fall of 1990, the Department of Interethnic Relations reported on a series of complications in the North Caucasus.¹⁰⁴ In North Ossetia, the Terek Cossacks were petitioning to be included in the list of repressed nations, as the November 1989 declaration only specifically referenced the Balkars, Ingush, Kalmyks, Karachays, Crimean Tatars, Germans, Meskhetian Turks, Chechens, Koreans, Greeks, Kurds, and loosely referred to “other people” who had undergone forced relocation.¹⁰⁵ In 1920, however, nine Terek Cossack settlements had been liquidated, and 15,000 people were deported.¹⁰⁶ By the early 1990s, about half a million Cossacks lived in the autonomous territories of the North Caucasus, and in North Ossetia, they constituted one-fourth of the total Russian population (about 47,000 people).¹⁰⁷ The Terek Cossacks would claim Ordzhonikidze, which became Vladikavkaz in 1990, the capital of North Ossetia—an already contested space between Ingush and Ossetian groups.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ RGANI, f. 100, op. 5. d. 415. ll. 63-64.

¹⁰⁵ “O priznanii nezakonnymi i prestupnymi repressivnykh aktov protiv narodov.”

¹⁰⁶ Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*, 61.

¹⁰⁷ Soldatova and Dement’eva, “Russians in the North Caucasian Republics,” 122-140.

¹⁰⁸ RGANI, f. 100, op. 5. d. 415. ll. 63-64.

A central television program on the “Soviet Russia” channel in North Ossetia made tensions on this front even more complicated.¹⁰⁹ The participants of the program had openly advocated for Ingush autonomy and the return of the right bank part of Vladikavkaz and the Prigorod District, causing outrage in Ossetia. Petr Reshetov, the first Deputy Chairman of USSR Radio and Television, published a telegram in the newspaper *Socialist Ossetia* attempting to assuage the escalating situation. It reportedly did “not calm public opinion.” On September 14, 1990, an emergency session of the Supreme Soviet of the North Ossetian ASSR regretfully conceded that the program caused tension and promised to “fix the situation in the near future.”

The program, however, pushed the territorial issue into the open. A delegation from Chechnya-Ingushetia had also participated in the emergency session, kindling the start of negotiations between the Supreme Soviets of the republics. During these talks, the fate of thousands was left hanging in the balance. The session was therefore streamed live on the North Ossetian ASSR republican tv and radio and a transcript of the session was published.¹¹⁰ Faced with a stalemate created through Soviet actions, the attending deputies requested that Boris Yeltsin, who at the time was Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR, intervene. Approximately a year later, however, Chechnya would declare independence, provoking conflict and mass migration across the region.

Perestroika and glasnost’ transformed the rehabilitation of repressed nations into a major movement in the North Caucasus that led toward a power struggle—symbolic and territorial—between nationalities. For many North Caucasian repressed nations, grievances focused on territorial rehabilitation. Letters abounded with requests to restore historical lands and borders, while others disputed these claims, or mobilized behind other national aims. Sometimes, internationalism and perestroika’s democratization— and the ideals for equal rights they represented—were used to legitimize these ambitions. Internationalism, as a policy in practice, was ultimately futile in preventing escalations. These tensions would multiply, and some would deteriorate into open warfare.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

The Chechen Conflict and its Chain Reactions

Chechens, the largest non-Russian ethnic group in the North Caucasus, accumulated grievances that were particularly detrimental to their national development in accordance with Soviet standards. By 1989, only one quarter of Chechens lived in cities, though they made up almost 60% of the ASSR's population.¹¹¹ By comparison, the Ingush who accounted for 12.9% of the population composed 35.4 percent of the ASSR's urban population (in total titular nationals composed 46% of the urban population by 1989, a dramatic rise from 9% in 1959).¹¹² Other major non-Russian ethnic groups in the North Caucasus had much higher urban population rates in comparison to the Chechens—43 percent of Kabardians were urban dwellers, 59.2 percent of the Balkars and 63.9 percent of Ossetians. Despite that a representative of the titular nation generally presided as the first secretary of an autonomous territory via an unspoken rule, Russians occupied the majority of the ASSR's top posts in the party apparatus, as well as in state enterprises and local industry. It was not until 1989 that the position of the first secretary of the ASSR went to a Chechen—Doku Gapurovich Zavgaev. Chechens and Ingush had also experienced higher birth rates during the relative security of the Brezhnev years. Higher birth rates, combined with a lack of integration into local industry, resulted in tens of thousands of unemployed Chechen youths in the 1980s. The unemployed turned to migration, to illicit activities, and some joined organized crime groups. Chechens also had, in comparison with the other major non-Russian ethnic groups in the Caucasus, the lowest level of education. By 1989, just 5% of Chechens had a high-school diploma and 15% had no schooling at all.¹¹³ With the threat of compounding economic insecurity due to perestroika, this comparatively poor quality of

¹¹¹ Perovic, *From Conquest to Deportation*, 316-318.

¹¹² Kaiser, *The Geography of Nationalism*, 220-221.

¹¹³ Perovic, *From Conquest to Deportation*, 319.

life in the ASSR was subject to further decline. It was precisely this generation of increasingly unsettled Chechen youth that would help foment the armed resistance against Russia.¹¹⁴

Chechen mobilization ultimately evolved into the region's most fervent national movement. By the late 1980s, religious communities also began to play a vital role, and some, like the party the Islamic Way, became radicalized. Meetings between Chechen and Ingush leaders in 1989 and 1990 eventually resulted in the ASSR's split into two ethnically differentiated republics. In the spring of 1990, the retired Soviet General Dzhokar Dudaev claimed leadership of the Executive Committee of the National Congress of the Chechen People, a radicalizing national liberation movement. After the August 1991 Moscow coup, Boris Yeltsin encouraged the overthrow of local communist leaders, and the regime headed by Dudaev installed itself in Grozny.¹¹⁵

The coup also precipitated the breakup of the USSR in December 1991, which impelled conflict and migration throughout the North Caucasus. Throughout Dudaev's reign, from November 1991 to April 1996, more than 300,000 people of different nationalities fled Chechnya—most to neighboring territories.¹¹⁶ On October 27, 1991, a referendum confirmed Chechnya's formal separation from the Russian Federation, electing General Dudaev as its first president. After the USSR declared the election illegal, Dudaev defied the state's position by declaring Chechnya independent in November 1991. At this point, Yeltsin changed his tone. He declared a state of emergency and sent in special units, which were forced out by the Chechen National Guard. Russia also initiated an economic blockade to try to force Chechnya back into the Russian Federation.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 318.

¹¹⁵ Krag and Funch, *The North Caucasus*, 33.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

These moves hastened social and political transformations in the region. Ingushetia, following Chechnya's declaration of independence, was permitted to become a republic within the Russian Federation. Ingushetia's leadership, though, would claim the Prigorod District in North Ossetia. Dudaev meanwhile began a process of nation-building. Impressively, Dudaev was able to build military forces, including a national guard, defense units, and divisions of internal affairs in the former ASSR, which enabled the regime to defeat opposition forces.¹¹⁷ On November 13, 1991, Dudaev stated that there would be no compromise with Russia until the economic blockade was lifted and his government was legally recognized. Dudaev had developed a position from which to negotiate. He boasted that the national guard had swelled to the ranks of 63,000, while a people's militia included 300,000 people.¹¹⁸ Dudaev, according to a KGB report, claimed that there were enough weapons to supply the entire male population in Chechnya ages fifteen and higher. The conflict grew more severe, gradually setting the stage for war, and the social situation in the republic continued to deteriorate.

The developments in Chechnya began to spur conflicts across the region as well, some of which began to encompass international actors. According to the KGB, separatist tendencies in the other North Caucasian republics had "noticeably strengthened" since Chechen independence and anti-Russian sentiment in the former Chechnya-Ingushetia ASSR had increased.¹¹⁹ Many Dagestani Chechens also began preparing for a looming armed conflict.¹²⁰ The leaders of the Karachay organization "Dzhamagat," who supported the creation of a sovereign Karachay Republic, also established close contacts with the leadership of the National Congress of the

¹¹⁷ Sergei Riazantsev, *Sovremennyi demograficheskii i migratsionnyi portret Severnogo Kavkaza*, 26-58.

¹¹⁸ GARF, f. 10026, op. 5, d. 778, ll. 5-25 (Operational reports of the KGB of the RSFSR, the Federal Security Agency of the Russian Federation, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation on the situation in the Chechen-Ingush Republic. October 17, 1991 – March 28, 1992).

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

Chechen People.¹²¹ According to a KGB report, Dzhmagat was planning to use “the Chechen option” to achieve their own goals, which included the restoration of the rights for the repressed Karachay nation and their full national autonomy (as they now shared titular status with the Cherkes). Karachay people were reportedly meeting in an effort to demand, in accordance with the “rehabilitation of repressed nations,” the former borders of their liquidated territory. In the Karachay-Cherkessia SSR (formerly the Karachay-Cherkessia Autonomous Oblast’), however, the titular populations were slightly smaller in number than the other self-identified nationalities residing there, which included 182,000 Russians, largely with Cossack heritage.¹²² A Cossack movement was, therefore, also consolidating in the Karachay-Cherkessia SSR. A group called *Kazakchii krug*, or Cossack Circle, had formed. It was concerned with territorial redistribution, the infringement of their rights, and potential displacement. The Cossacks of the Zelenchuksky and Urupsky districts in the territory proclaimed a Zelenchuksky-Urpsky Cossack Republic.

Events were also unfolding in the Kabardino-Balkar ASSR. On November 17, the first Congress of the Balkar people (a deported nation), was held in Nalchik, the ASSR’s capital, on the forming of a Republic of Balkaria, which the KGB feared would aggravate relations with the Kabardian population.¹²³ Balkarian grievances also stemmed from Soviet deportations, territorial delineations, and the redrawing of borders. The Balkars were never given full autonomy. Kabarda was designated as an autonomous oblast’ in 1922, while Balkaria, which was a separate okrug in the Mountain ASSR, was forced to combine with Kabarda. After deportation, Balkar lands were settled by people who needed more kolkhoz (collective farm) land from other parts of

¹²¹According to KGB documents. Ibid.

¹²² GARF, f. 10026, op. 4, d. 996, ll. 53-58 (Documents on the implementation of the Law of the RSFSR “On the rehabilitation of repressed peoples” in relation to the Karachay people January 17, 1991 – July 14, 1993). Self-identified Karachay made up 31.2% of the former Autonomous Oblast’, the Cherkes 9.7%, and Russians 42.4% according to the 1989 census. Aydin, “Geopolitics of Central Asia and the Caucasus,” 178.

¹²³ See Howard, ed. *Volatile Borderland*.

the republic. After territorial reinstatements, the borders were not fully restored; since then, the Balkars expressed feeling like a minority in “their own” territory.

With the USSR’s decline, faith, regional ties, shared histories (e.g., deportation), and ethnicity had an even stronger influence on group-making, or the “collective effervescence” in the North Caucasus. To protect their rights during a period of uncertainty and nationalization, new alliances started forming. The Confederation of the Peoples of the Caucasus (CPC), originally the Confederation of the Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus, was formed in 1989 to unite six national movements in the North Caucasus. The intent of the CPC was an allegiance to support North Caucasian nationalities in their struggles with larger nations.¹²⁴ The leaders of the newly established group, according to the KGB, called for the formation of armed groups in support of Chechnya.¹²⁵ Other countries and former Soviet republics had also become involved in the growing unrest, some of which encouraged pan-Islamic organization in the North Caucasus. Turkish groups reportedly agitated for “the creation of an independent state of the Caucasian peoples under the flag of Islam.” Similarly, some Azeris called on the “consolidation of the Islamic peoples of the Caucasus,” promising assistance with weapons, food, and oil for the cause, while urging Dudaev to send Chechen fighters to the zone of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict. Caucasian diasporas had also become invested in North Caucasian developments. Some living in Jordan, for instance, supported proclamations of Chechnya’s independence. The KGB warned that international interventions could escalate into terrorist attacks on Soviet citizens and institutions.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ Abkhaz groups initiated the creation of the CPC in their fight over sovereignty with Georgia. Krag and Funch, *The North Caucasus*, 30.

¹²⁵ GARF, f. 10026, op. 5, d. 778, ll. 5-25.

¹²⁶ GARF, f. 10026, op. 5, d. 778, ll. 5-25.

Meanwhile, delegates from Georgia were also supporting the idea of Chechnya leaving Russia, and they held talks with Ingush leaders on coordinating joint actions against Ossetia.¹²⁷ The Ossetians were split between autonomous territories in North and South Ossetia, with the former existing in the Russian North Caucasus, and the latter in Georgia. Many South Ossetians desired unification on the territory of Russia, a source of prolonged tensions.¹²⁸ By the late Soviet period, conflict over the fate of the Ossetian autonomous entity in Georgia grew. Clashes eventually escalated into war when South Ossetia demanded to join the USSR as a union republic. Ethnic cleansing of Ossetians from elsewhere in Georgia, and of Georgians in South Ossetia, transpired. All of this brought more “refugees” to neighboring regions in the Russian Caucasus. By April 15, 1991, 18,588 Ossetian “refugees” had arrived in Russian North Ossetia from Georgia.¹²⁹

The territorial dispute between Ingush and the Ossetian groups over the Prigorod District in North Ossetia escalated in tandem. At a rally in Nazran, the capital of North Ossetia, Dudaev read an appeal to the Ingush people with a promise to help them solve the territorial issue vis-à-vis North Ossetia.¹³⁰ According to a KGB report, members of the National Congress of the Chechen People believed that an armed conflict would accelerate the consolidation of the Muslim population of the Caucasus. Two Ossetian members of the militia had been found murdered, and there were reports of consequent assaults on the Ingush. The elderly, women, and

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Arsene Saparov, *From Conflict to Autonomy in the Caucasus: The Soviet Union and the Making of Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno Karabakh* (London: Routledge, 2015), 148-157.

¹²⁹ GARF f. 10121, op. 1, d. 32, l. 24 (Instructions of the Council of Ministers of the RSFSR on the problems of population migration and documents on their implementation. Volume 3. July 3, 1991 – December 29, 1991) According to some sources, 100,000 Ossetians were expelled from throughout Georgia (excluding South Ossetia) and about 23,000 Georgians living in South Ossetia were forced to leave. Saparov, *From Conflict to Autonomy in the Caucasus*, 148-157.

¹³⁰ GARF, f. 10026, op. 5, d. 778, ll. 5-25.

children of Ingush nationality were leaving the Prigorod District of North Ossetia in fear of the escalation of conflict.

As the Chechen secession incited ethnic mobilization throughout the North Caucasus and beyond, the consequent political and social changes deepened instability in the region for others. Dudaev's takeover created tensions not only with the republic's Russian residents, but also with other Russian speakers and the ethnically mixed (former) Soviet bureaucracy. In November 1991, confidential KGB memos decried the mass releases of prisoners in Chechnya, which made the "criminal situation," along with the presence of firearms, "significantly more complicated."¹³¹ The KGB had been blamed for the escalating destabilization, the memo proclaimed, which had resulted in the killing of a KGB officer. Ninety percent of the KGB in the territory had filed a report for dismissal, and many fled. The "Russian speaking population," according to the KGB, continued to leave the republic due to concerns about security. In the Ingush Republic, 10,000 or more Ingush also arrived from Central Asia to return to their primordial lands, which was now its own republic, and approximately 20,000 Russians residing there mainly in Cossack *stanitsas* (villages) were reportedly inclined towards flight.¹³²

Since 1990, the social climate sharply worsened. The newly independent Russian government remained unstable politically and economically. In the fall of 1992, the Prigorod conflict escalated into the first war on the territory of the Russian Federation, which lasted for one week, from October 30 to November 6, 1992, when Russian forces intervened to prevent border changes. During the constitutional crisis (1993), the Russian government also lost its control of the situation in Chechnya, which strengthened Dudaev's authoritarian hold.¹³³

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² According to a KGB report. GARF, f. 10026, op. 5, d. 778, ll. 5-25. Krag and Funch, *The North Caucasus*, 34.

¹³³ Ibid.

Enterprises closed, social tensions grew, as did criminal activity and the harassment of various nationalities, particularly Russians who lived in the territory. When interethnic tensions heightened and the criminal situation worsened, Russian speaking populations within the territory left en masse.

Mass forced migration further strained areas in the North Caucasus that were destabilized with the USSR's collapse, and that might already have received influxes of refugees from earlier conflicts. From 1989 to 1993, around 230,000 people fled the former territory of Chechnya-Ingushetia.¹³⁴ Prior to December 1994, 80 percent of forced migrants, who mainly fled to neighboring territories from former Chechnya-Ingushetia, were, reportedly, Russians.¹³⁵ This situation was only worsened with the First Chechen War, from December 1994 to August 1996, which affected several cities in the central part of Chechnya, including Grozny, where self-identified Russians had made up 53% of the population by 1989. By December of 1994, when the First Chechen War began, more than half of Russians living in Chechnya since 1989 left, including Cossacks whose families had been in the territory for over a hundred years.¹³⁶ Throughout the duration of the 1990s, around 800,000-900,000 people in total fled, and moved within, the borders of the Chechen Republic.¹³⁷

Forced migration from Dagestan, near zones of conflict, was also rapidly destabilizing the region. The Russian Federation feared that the migration of Russians and Cossacks from their historical places of residence in Dagestan would threaten the Caucasian border and result in a

¹³⁴ The Federal Migration Service officially registered about 208,000 forced migrants. Riazantsev, *Sovremennyi demograficheskii i migratsionnyi portret Severnogo Kavkaza*, 26-29.

¹³⁵ Seventy-three percent fled to Ingushetia, 15 percent to Dagestan, and six percent to North Ossetia and Stavropol. Ibid.

¹³⁶ Krag and Funch, *The North Caucasus*, 33.

¹³⁷ Riazantsev, *Sovremennyi demograficheskii i migratsionnyi portret Severnogo Kavkaza*, 26-27.

loss of control over part of the Caspian coast.¹³⁸ In 1999, when Chechen groups led incursions into the Dagestan border, the Second Chechen War broke out, and up to 17,000 more people became forced migrants. The disputed Novolakskii raion had been devastated in August and September of 1999 by the invasion of Chechen militants, who received support from many local Chechen-Akkins.¹³⁹ Other Dagestanis, in turn, assembled throughout the republic to defeat the militants and to exercise control over the Chechen-Akkin community.

Vlad, who fled Grozny in 1991 to Stavropol Krai with his two daughters and wife, simply described the unpredictable and calamitous situation in the North Caucasus as “pandemonium.”¹⁴⁰ Born and raised in Grozny, Vlad identified as Russian (though he had Cossack heritage). According to his recollections, interethnic relations took a dive for the worst after perestroika, which was when, according to him, Chechen groups from the rural areas began arriving into the capital. Though Vlad recalled how he had witnessed the destruction of the Ermolov statue “at least ten times” in his lifetime, there were still marked differences. From Vlad’s perspective, rising ethnic tensions were more a social issue than a conflict that grew out of territorial reclamation. Vlad suggested, like some Soviet authorities and experts worried about titular nationals in Central Asia, that rural Chechens continued to have a more “traditional” (or “backward”) mindset. According to him, many detested the *Khrushchevki* five-story apartment buildings, a feature of modern Soviet life. He pointed to religion, explaining that the reforms simply allowed animosities based on social difference to come to the surface.

¹³⁸ According to the Committee for Interethnic Affairs in January 1994. GARF, f. 10121, op.1, d.122, ll. 22-23 (Instructions of the Government of the Russian Federation on the problems of the Cossacks and documents on their implementation. Volume 3. October 18, 1993 – December 29, 1993).

¹³⁹ Ware and Kisriev, *Dagestan*, 150-151.

¹⁴⁰ Oral Interview with author. July 2019. Krasnodar, Russia. To provide anonymity as requested, I’ve included a pseudonym.

Vlad was aware that ethnic animosity had persisted throughout the republic since the return of Chechens and Ingush in the Khrushchev era. He claimed to understand the psychology behind such feelings. However, he asked, “if Stalin evicted them, why is everyone to blame?” In Vlad’s estimation when all the first secretaries were Russian, Grozny simply remained a solidly “Russian city.” Passionate about this, Vlad went into a historical recounting of the Cossack founding of the city. For Vlad, things began to drastically change when Zavgaev, a Chechen, became the First Secretary in 1989. Around this time, Vlad sensed that the politics changed, and non-Chechens were treated differently. This was when, according to Vlad, the teaching of Chechen was mandated in Russian speaking schools, a drastic alteration that had made his daughter come home in tears. Chechens began to “force out” Russians, Vlad described. A friend had been killed while walking home from work, while another’s car was robbed. Due to the increasingly dangerous situation, including the appearance of weapons on the streets, and fear for his daughters, he sold his apartment “for kopecks,” or pennies, and fled. The Chechen police, he alleged, requested bribes to allow his family to leave. They checked vehicles, making claims that possessions leaving the republic belonged to Chechens.

Despite the belief that relocation to a place where the majority shared a common ethnic heritage would provide acceptance, migrants continued to face obstacles. In a 1992 television appearance, Dudaev, speaking directly to potential Russian out-migrants on television, stated “...to those who are planning to leave for Russia. I’m not going to dissuade you. But think, who is waiting for you there? Who needs you there?”¹⁴¹ Almost all the Russian speakers Vlad knew in Grozny left. He noted how difficult the move was materially for many, and that those who

¹⁴¹ V.V. Katretskii. “Obustroistvo Vynuzhennykh pereselentsev iz Chechni v Rostovskoi Oblasti.” Valery A. Tishkov, ed., *Vynuzhennyye Migranty i Gosudarstvo* (Moscow: Institut Etnologii i Antropologii Rossiiskoi Akademii Nauk, 1998), 265

didn't have the means to relocate stayed behind. Forced migrants also had to overcome bureaucratic issues upon relocation. "No one called us here," Vlad said, "we just ran." Vlad, who left behind the good position he acquired after his university education, and a ten-year career, was used to the vibrant metropolitan life in Grozny. Yet he settled with his family in a small town outside of the city of Stavropol', where he had to cultivate the land to support his family. Vlad, however, was lucky enough to register as a forced migrant and receive an interest free loan to improve his livelihood.

Forced migrants also sometimes collectivized, which became an important source of social security for some fleeing conflict who had nowhere to turn. The "Soviet of Forced Migrants from the Chechen Republic in the Republic of Kabardino-Balkaria" was one such group in the North Caucasus. It consisted of more than 3,500 multinational migrants from separatist Chechnya, who entered their fifth year as displaced persons in the Republic of Kabardino-Balkaria in 1999.¹⁴² Like most forced migrants and refugees who were housed in sanatoriums, recreation centers, boarding homes, and hotels, they were resettled in what they claimed were poorly upheld and abandoned resorts.¹⁴³ The Soviet, in writing to the Prime Minister of the Russian Federation, described their situation as a perpetual limbo—of "double intimidation"—in which they were denied rights from both Chechen and Kabardino-Balkarian administrations. Their multinational "presidium" described that in opposing the separatist-nationalist Chechen government, they had fled to the neighboring republic, Kabardino-Balkaria.

¹⁴² Thirteen different nationalities, they specified, were elected to their "presidium." GARF, f. 10156, op. 1, d. 58, ll. 70-80 (Instructions of the Government of the Russian Federation on the problems of socio-economic and cultural development of the North Caucasus and documents on their implementation, Volume 5: August 3, 1999 – September 2, 1999).

¹⁴³ According to the Commission of the Council of Ministers of the RSFSR to assist refugees and internally displaced persons. GARF, f. 10121, op. 1, d. 30, l. 5-9 (Instructions of the Council of Ministers of the RSFSR on the problems of population migration and documents on their implementation. Volume 1: January 27, 1991 – May 6, 1991), GARF, f. 10156, op. 1, d. 58, ll. 70-80.

In Kabardino-Balkaria, this group of forced migrants claimed that they had fallen victim to discrimination and extortion, which involved illegal detentions from the police.¹⁴⁴ The Soviet noted that the Federal Migration Service, whose territorial bodies were housed in local administrations, provided funds beginning in 1996.¹⁴⁵ However, the funds came only periodically, and when they were delivered, the money was embezzled by local officials, who they alleged took from the international aid garnered for their support. The Soviet wrote that in practice, the administration of Kabardino-Balkaria, tried to “push” them out of the republic and denied registration (as forced migrants). In consequence, they lived without proper documentation, which handicapped their ability to create a new life. The Soviet of Forced Migrants from the Chechen Republic to Kabardino-Balkaria was additionally snubbed when turning to the Office of the President of the independent Chechen Republic-Ichkeria, which declared that they were now foreign “citizens of the Russian Federation.” After years spent with their lives in suspension between nationalizing nations and barricading regions, the Soviet of Forced Migrants wrote “We do not see any prospects for ourselves.”

¹⁴⁴ GARE, f. 10156, op. 1, d. 58, ll. 70-80.

¹⁴⁵ On June 6, 1992, the Russian Federal Migration Service (FMS) was formed. See chapter four.



Figure 3. Postwar Reunion of some Grozny Classmates, 1946. GARO f. R4462, op. 1, d. 20, l. 1

In the North Caucasus, the state facilitated ethnic cleansing that, following the outbreak of World War, had an enduring and detrimental “domino effect” on interethnic relations in the region. The USSR’s dissolution in the North Caucasus further bared and aggravated these national tensions—ultimately influencing armed conflict and mass forced displacement. The social landscape in former Chechnya-Ingushetia by the end of the 1990s was a far cry from the sentiments of Grozny classmates who graduated from School No. 2 in 1942, prior to when the deportations in the North Caucasus took place.¹⁴⁶ “We lost our native and beloved city of Grozny... where we were born,” Dora K. reminisced.¹⁴⁷ She recollected that “friendliness and kind relations” abounded between the multinational classmates. “Every year our class became like a single whole,” she wrote.

¹⁴⁶ GARO f. R4462, op. 1, d. 7, ll. 13-14 (Recollections of Vera Kamenskaia on the life of classmates in Grozny).

¹⁴⁷ GARO f. R4462, op. 1, d. 8, ll. 1-3. (Recollections of Dora Karavak on the life of classmates, 2002).

FOUR

THE MAKING OF RUSSIAN COMPATRIOTS: THE POST-SOVIET RUSSIAN NATIONAL REVIVAL, ETHNIC REPATRIATION, AND THE ADVENT OF PUBLIC ASSOCIATIONS IN THE EARLY 1990s

On August 31, 1993, the Russian Culture Association in Uzbekistan, an officially registered public association in newly independent Uzbekistan, made its second attempt to appeal to the Russian government.¹ By drawing on the Russian “refugee” problem and stressing common ethnic ties, the Association advanced the interests of Russians and Slavs in Uzbekistan and across Central Asia who were, until recently, citizens of the same state but were now separated by international borders. The early 1990s were a particularly fragile and uncertain period for the embryonic Russian nation-state. In December 1992, the Congress of People’s Deputies, the holdover parliament from the perestroika era, had disapproved of Boris Yeltsin’s official appointment of the Deputy Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar, the engineer of the unpopular “shock therapy,” a radical conversion to a market economy begun early in the year. During a moment of compromise between the dueling executive and legislative branches of power, Yeltsin replaced Gaidar with Viktor Chernomyrdin, a former Soviet apparatchik who favored a more restrained course toward market reforms, thus making him more amenable to the Congress, which confirmed him to the post. The tensions between the legislature and the executive powers, however, would soon culminate in Russia’s constitutional crisis. Ironically, Yeltsin, who came to power as a pro-democratic candidate, would officially dissolve the parliament, the members of which had been elected through perestroika’s democratization campaign, and violently assert executive control. It was precisely in this turbulent political climate, however—when Russia’s

¹ GARF, f. 10121, op. 1, d. 130, ll. 15-40 (Instructions of the Russian Federation's government on the problems of national relations in Russia and documents on their implementation).

nation-building course was still equivocal, and no compatriot or repatriation program existed—that the Association sought to negotiate a program of supports for Russian co-ethnics.

This chapter highlights a major moment just prior to and immediately after the Soviet collapse when the migrant crisis was compounded by the unresolved and daunting dilemma of a colossal extraterritorial Russian population. In this period, Russia was caught in a tense tug-of-war between parliamentary and executive powers. The state, facing increasing internal and external pressures, became troubled with the brewing “Russian question”—essentially what to do about the over 25 million ethnic Russians, and the around 30 million *rossiiane*, or civic Russians, living in other (former) republics.² Separated by newly international borders, extraterritorial *rossiiane* became the subjects of former republics that were carving out their own independent nation-building paths. Post-Soviet transformations made many communities newly separated by international borders from their historic homelands unsure of the potential to “return” to them (places some of them had never lived in), or their fate in general. In some major ways, the ethnic “unmixing” begun in the final years of the USSR’s existence (to the trauma of many, such as mixed families), continued to unravel the complicated web of Soviet multinationalism.³

As the former Soviet metropole, however, who *would* the Russian Federation embrace as its “compatriots”? Would a Russian and Slavic ethnic identity matter in Russia’s position toward the diasporas created by the Soviet collapse? Similarly, would petitioners from the post-Soviet space attempt to stress their ethnic rather than their Soviet connections in their appeals to Russia? Tackling the “Russian question” meant that the former Soviet metropole had to define its

² The 30 million number of people living in the former Soviet space who historically resided on the territory of Russia, which includes ethnic Russians and non-Russians, is from the following source: S.V. Riazantsev and A. A. Grebeniuk, *“Nashi” Za Granitsei: Russkie, Rossiiane, Russkogovoriashchie, sootchestvenniki: Rasselenie, integratsiia i vozvratnaia migratsiia v Rossiiu* (Moscow: ISPI RAN, 2014), 53.

³ See Rogers Brubaker, “Aftermaths of Empire and the Unmixing of Peoples.” Karen Barkey and Mark Von Hagen, eds., *After Empire: Multiethnic Societies and Nation-Building* (Boulder: Westview, 1997), 155-180.

compatriots in the former Soviet space. This decision had significant consequences. Yeltsin had advocated for the national-democratic movements in the former Soviet republics. Developing a Russian compatriot policy meant potentially interfering in the nationalization processes of former Soviet republics. Faced with confronting a contradictory “empire-saver” and nation-building course, Russia struggled to define Russian speaking “compatriots” and its political relationship to them.⁴

This chapter argues, firstly, that a growing ethno-cultural revival in Russia’s early 1990s became intertwined with the problem of mass migration to Russia and the position of its new diasporas in the former Soviet space (and more specifically, Russians, Russian speakers, and Slavs). Secondly, I contend that public associations, which became legal just prior to the USSR’s collapse in 1991, became important social forces both within Russia and in the former Soviet republics that negotiated for the support of co-ethnic Russian “compatriots” and ethnic repatriation. To win these concessions, they endeavored to tie Russia’s national revival to its co-ethnics in the former Soviet space—its historic zone of influence—and the fate of its repatriates. In a broader sense, this chapter shows how actors inside and outside of Russia shaped, and interplayed with, Russian ethno-cultural revival “from below.”

Tracing the meaning of “compatriot,” a notion of manipulative quality, helps to understanding how it evolved in the early 1990s. A Soviet era dictionary defines “compatriot” as a “person sharing a common fatherland with someone.”⁵ By this definition, “compatriot” can refer in a civic sense to people contemporaneously living in one state or in a particular ethnic territory. It can also apply, by historical logic, to those who once shared the same “fatherland,”

⁴ Oxana Shevel, *Migration, Refugee Policy, and State Building in Postcommunist Europe*. (New York: Cambridge University, 2011), 73-82.

⁵ S.P. Obnorskii, ed. *Slovar’ russkogo iazyka* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo inostrannykh i natsional’nykh slovarei, 1952), 691.

whether that was an imperial space, like the former Russian empire, and later, the Soviet Union, or a smaller ethnic territory within it. “Compatriot” can therefore denote people who share a common national imaginary or ethno-linguistic and cultural ties that can be traced to some (ambiguous or not) historical space. In the Soviet period, “compatriot,” was used by the state as an umbrella concept for all the nationalities who lived in the USSR’s geographical space, and to refer to the ethnic-cultural ties between members of specific Soviet nationalities living in different countries. “Compatriot” relationships, in both senses, were even mildly encouraged in the late Soviet period. A society for Cultural Ties with Compatriots Abroad named “Rodina (homeland)” was active from the 1960s through to the perestroika period (and remained in existence into the post-Soviet 1990s).⁶ The society also established separate branches for the USSR’s different nationalities to connect with “their” *sootchestvenniki*, or “compatriots.”⁷ In the summer of 1991, prior to the fateful August coup, the perestroika government was citing “compatriots” in this dual civic and ethnic fashion.⁸ In contemplating how “compatriots” could assist in the development of an emigrant labor program for Soviet citizens, for instance, it referred to “compatriots” as all the people of Soviet nationalities who lived outside of the USSR (about 20 million people), and to specific Soviet national groups outside its borders (e.g., Russians had 3 million “compatriots,” Uzbeks had 2 million, etc.).

⁶ See GARF f. R9651, op. 1 and op. 2 (On the Committee “Rodina”); GARF f. 10156, op. 1, d. 17, ll. 3-4 (Instructions of Russian Federation’s government to support compatriots abroad and international cooperation and documents on their implementation, volume 2). See also “Humane purposes: Soviet Committee for Cultural Ties with Compatriots Abroad Formed,” *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 28, vol. 15 (1963): 35-36.

⁷ See GARF f. R9651, op. 1, d. 59 (Report on the work of the editorial office of the newspaper “Voice of the Motherland” and the magazine “Rodina.”)

⁸ GARF 10121, op. 1, d. 14, ll. 52-61 (Instructions of the Council of Ministers of the RSFSR on the problems of small peoples living on the territory of the RSFSR). These matters were deemed urgent because 100,000 Soviet Germans emigrated from the USSR permanently since 1989. In seven months in 1990, 234,000 Soviet citizens emigrated; 132,000 to Israel, 17,000 to Greece, and 73,000 to the Federal Republic of Germany, while 300,000 “non-Muscovites” had arrived in Moscow in the Fall of 1990 to seek a visa to emigrate, which the government worried would destabilize the country. The Head of the International Relations Department of the Ministry of Labor of the RSFSR wrote, that this “discontent is easy to turn in the right direction,” in proposing the labor program.

In 1990-91 (just prior to the USSR's collapse), the term was also increasingly employed to refer to an ethnonational Russian imaginary. Russian "compatriot" returnees both from nationalizing republics and from other parts of the world were celebrated as part of a long-awaited ethno-cultural resurgence. In his September 1990 manifesto "How to Rebuild Russia (*Kak obustroit' Rossiю*)" in the widely circulated *Komsomolskaia Pravda*, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn wrote "must we now resettle those compatriots who are losing their places of residence? Yes, unavoidably so."⁹ Surely we must not wait until the uncontrollable flood of refugees from these areas reaches the millions," he asserted. Solzhenitsyn did not refer to the repatriation of Soviet citizens or Russians abroad (from outside the USSR), but to Russians leaving the Soviet peripheries due to nationalization—a process he supported, and even encouraged "godspeed." "Russians," Solzhenitsyn argued, were the "primary victims" of the Soviet experiment and the time had come to restore "the spiritual and physical salvation" of its people.¹⁰ He proclaimed the need for an ethnic "Russian Union" to include Ukraine and Belorussia, nationalities he argued were divided only by the "darkening of minds brought on by the communist years."

In January 1991, Boris Yeltsin (who at the time was the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR) began outlining an ethnic reunion of a similar nature. Russia's national revival, he proclaimed, would harness the potential of "compatriots" outside the USSR who had long been alienated from their co-ethnics. Yeltsin declared that Russia's new political course was aimed at "restoring the best of what we lost after October 1917," to revive the things that made "Russia,

⁹ Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *Rebuilding Russia: Reflections and Tentative Proposals* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1991), 3-34.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Russia.”¹¹ The speech suggested that Russia could now completely shed Soviet nationality policy against “Great Russian chauvinism” to finally embrace its ethno-cultural distinctions and reunite with emigres abroad. At the same time, Yeltsin boasted that compatriots whose “roots are in Russia”—in a territorial and non-ethnic sense—could repatriate and contribute to Russia’s restoration.

The scholarship on Russian “compatriots” has mainly come from political scientists and sociologists who have focused on contemporary state policies, political parties, and to a far lesser extent, the role of non-state actors identifying as Russian “compatriots.”¹² In fact, Igor Zevelev, a political scientist, wrote, “Russian diasporas are too weak, disorganized, and disoriented to influence Russian politics.”¹³ The “Russian question” was, indeed, the state’s terminology used to identify the problems surrounding extraterritorial Russians, the largest ethnic group living outside of “their” titular land in the former Soviet space when the USSR collapsed. The importance of public associations, especially in Russia’s formative early 1990s prior to the development of a compatriot or repatriation program, however, should not be disregarded. Without access to archival materials Zevelev has overlooked the influence that these organizations (and other petitioners) had on shaping or interacting with the “Russian question.” Moreover, this viewpoint discounts the impact of the migrant crisis as a critically interrelated part of the state’s response to these questions. The state, facing dual internal and external pressures, was aware, for instance, that a disturbing public opinion had formed in which Russians and Russian speakers were perceived as victims of the Soviet legacy (a sentiment

¹¹ Valery Kononov and Anatoly Stepovoi, “B. N. Yeltsin’s Appeal to his Compatriots,” *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 52, vol. 42 (January 30, 1991): 30.

¹² See Igor Zevelev, *Russia and its New Diasporas* (Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2001), Oxana Shevel, *Migration, Refugee Policy, and State Building in Postcommunist Europe* (New York: Cambridge University, 2011), and Riazantsev and Grebeniuk, “*Nashi*” *Za Granitse*.

¹³ Zevelev, *Russia and its New Diasporas*, 21.

Solzhenitsyn encouraged)—epitomized by the phenomenon of Russian “refugees” in the (former) Soviet space. This view of Russian influence in its historic zone of influence as weak paradoxically gave the organizations representing its diasporas in the former Soviet space more political weight in their negotiations with Russia.

Public associations, as I illustrate in this chapter, sought to shape the state’s response to the “Russian question” in a critical period prior to the development of a comprehensive state compatriot or repatriation program and when debates on Russia’s national course were taking place in society. In October 1990, the USSR passed a law “On public associations,” which came into effect on January 1, 1991, allowing for the establishment of voluntary formations representing “the free expression of the will of citizens united on the basis of common interests” across the country.¹⁴ Public associations began to form—both within Russia and across the Soviet space—organized behind the problem of repatriation. They appealed to the RSFSR, and later, the Russian Federation, to act in support of (mainly co-ethnic Russian and Slavic) repatriates. Despite socio-economic and political obstacles, the formative Russian state, therefore, was continually pressed to fashion a “compatriot” program relevant in the former Soviet space.

In the uncertain period of the early 1990s, newly emerging public associations aspired to become intermediaries for the ethnic repatriation of their constituents and for a broader Russian compatriot program. Nascent public associations dedicated to repatriation and an assertive Russian presence in the USSR’s former southern tier (where various regional conflicts

¹⁴ “Soiuz Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh Respublik Zakon ‘Ob obshchestvennykh ob’edineniakh.’ KonturNormativ. Accessed March 24, 2022 <https://normativ.kontur.ru/document?moduleId=1&documentId=1136>; “Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR Postanovlenie ot 9 oktiabria 1990g n. 1709-1 O vvedenii v deistvie Zakona SSSR ‘Ob obshchestvennykh ob’edineniakh.’ Biblioteka normativno-pravovykh aktov Soiuza Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh Respublik. Accessed March 24, 2022. http://www.libussr.ru/doc_ussr/ussr_17338.htm.

transpired) began to eschew “internationalist” rhetoric, which increasingly lost its legitimacy. Appeals from “internationalist” Soviet citizens were also less likely to win sympathy from the (radically) nationalizing Russian state. Scrapping informal and emotion-based petitions, they advocated state sponsorship of mass ethnic repatriation to Russia, the (former) Soviet metropole, through researched, organized, and sophisticated appeals. Such public associations drew on, in both name and content, ethnicized connections to Russia to argue for the right of “civilized” repatriation. The Russian Culture Association, for example, chose to underscore that it represented ethnic “Russians” (*russkie*) and “Slavs” to appeal to nationalizing Russian sentiments, or to shape them, in bargaining for state assistance. No longer Soviet citizens, the switch to national identities tied to nation-states was also, for some, a conflicted one, and associations sometimes referred to their contingents interchangeably as Russians, (supranational) Russian speakers oriented toward Russia, and Slavs. State-sponsored or facilitated repatriation programs negotiated by public associations first appeared in the early 1990s, and they were later replicated. This enabled many who identified with Russia who would not have the legal right of “return” (e.g., ethnic Russians living outside of its state borders for generations) or the means to do so, to relocate to Russia.

The processes of post-Soviet repatriation to Russia were negotiated and shaped through multiple actors. In the early 1990s, the “Russian question” was more than a developing state policy; it reflected the search for a new national imaginary—a pronounced new “Russianness.” Ultimately, the “Russian question” in the public exposed the purported belief that Russia and Russians were the unfair losers of Soviet nationality policy, and that post-Soviet Russia, with a federal structure gutted through reform, was continuing to suffer for it through the beleaguered state of its diasporas and mass forced relocation to Russia. By stressing the mutual interest of a

strong Russia capable of asserting itself in the post-Soviet space, public associations like the Russian Culture Association in Uzbekistan therefore played on these insecurities to win concessions for its contingents. In the early 1990s, as this chapter shows, the ideological foundations for a repatriation program were already developing. Initiatives for Russian “compatriots” grew in increasing popularity, and different actors attempted to tie the Russian revival to its co-ethnics located, or relocating from, elsewhere in the former Soviet space. When no compatriot or repatriation program existed, public associations began molding the blueprint for them. In the early 1990s, a period when citizenship, housing permits, and assisted relocation to Russia were difficult to achieve for many former Soviet citizens living outside of the Russian Federation, public associations succeeded in winning state support for mass resettlement programs. In the aftermath of the USSR’s collapse, historical processes that involved a multitude of players thus negotiated and mediated who counted as Russia’s compatriots and how they were imagined. Group consciousness, as E.P. Thompson famously applied to the working class, “owes as much to agency as to conditioning.”¹⁵

Nation-Building and “Non-Natives” in the Formerly Soviet Southern Tier

In the early 1990s, virtually every region of the former USSR underwent continued socio-political turbulence influenced by the nation-building of groups who had achieved titular and “native” status throughout formerly multinational Soviet territories. Important questions surrounding the restructuring of former Soviet republics into nation-states surfaced. In the early 1990s, the mechanisms for resolving the territorial, security, and nationality issues emergent with the breakup of the USSR slowly evolved. With the formation of international borders, questions of citizenship, borders, language, and the position of Russian and Russian speakers and other

¹⁵ E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), 9.

“non-natives” became vital to millions of former Soviet citizens. In this transformational period, tensions over these issues provoked continued flight to Russia. In turn, the “Russian question”—or the position of Russians and Russian speakers in the former Soviet republics—became a serious issue.

The sheer size of the Russian and Russian speaking “minority” population in the former Soviet space potentially subject to displacement was a matter of debate. In May 1992, Valerii Tishkov, Chairman of the State Committee for Nationality Affairs and a historian, argued that the term “minorities” did not accurately represent the demographic situation in many former Soviet states, in which the titular nation did not make up an overwhelming majority.¹⁶ In many cases, “minorities,” in the former Soviet states were in fact “splinter[ed]” from “large peoples,” or the major Soviet nationalities. Such groups, he contended, must qualify as full citizens of the republics of their residence, or the “process of irredentism is inevitable.” These groups, Tishkov feared, will not be able to “reconcile with the status of minorities.” He posited that “top-level agreement[s]” would not help, as “minorities,” cannot make up “30-50 percent of the population of states.” To avoid these dangerous tendencies, Tishkov proposed a common mechanism between members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) to monitor “civil equality,” which included the support of “compatriot” ties with possible sanctions for violations.¹⁷

The problem Tishkov described was already apparent in Moldova, however, where compact settlements of Russians and Russian speakers formed the breakaway Pridnestrovian Moldovan Republic. Separatist movements were also gaining traction in northern Kazakhstan.¹⁸

¹⁶ GARF f. 10121, op.1, d. 66, 5-7 (Instructions of the Government of the Russian Federation on the protection of the rights and interests of national minorities).

¹⁷ On December 21, 1991, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) became a voluntary association of former Soviet republics to promote inter-member cooperation and regional stability.

¹⁸ See the next chapter, “‘You are needed by the Motherland!’: The Russian Cossack Resurgence, Nation-Building, and Ethnonationalism in Russia.”

Hundreds of thousands of people in the former Soviet space became refugees. On September 2, 1990, Russian speakers in Moldova, many of whom lived compactly on the Dniester River border region with Ukraine reacted to nationalization in the republic by proclaiming “their own” Soviet socialist republic, the Pridnestrovian Moldovan SSR.¹⁹ Prior to the USSR’s annexation of Romanian territory during WWII, part of this breakaway SSR belonged to the Moldovan ASSR, an autonomous republic in the Ukrainian republic, where Ukrainians were the national majority. Russians and Ukrainians migrated throughout the newly established SSR in the hundreds of thousands after WWII as part of a campaign to implant “reliable” Soviet citizens in WWII-annexed territories.²⁰ A survey conducted by the Institute of Economic Studies in Kishinev, the capital of Moldova, indicated that a third of the Russians and Ukrainians living in Kishinev wanted to leave Moldova, with 90% citing interethnic tensions as their reason.²¹ Thirteen percent of the Moldovan population was made up of self-identified Russians, according to the 1989 census, while Russian speakers were 23.1% of its population.²² On July 30, 1991, Russian state organs reported a “surge of hostility to persons of non-indigenous nationality” and “serious concern” about the situation of Russians in Moldova.²³

¹⁹ The Moldovan ASSR was formed in 1924 as part of the Ukrainian SSR. Terry Martin argues this promotion of the Moldovan language and culture was done to “exert pressure” in Bessarabia, a former part of the Russian empire, which Romania later annexed, a move the Soviet Union never recognized. World War II granted the opportunity of the USSR to seize back these Bessarabia territories, and to form the Moldovan SSR. Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (New York: 2001), 274-275. See also Rebecca Hayes, *Moldova: A History* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2020), 142-143.

²⁰ See, in addition to Hayes, *Moldova*, Tarik Cyril Amar’s, *The Paradox of Ukrainian Lviv: A Borderland City between Stalinists, Nazis, and Nationalists* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2015).

²¹ Vladimir Solonar and Vladimir Bruter, “Russians in Moldova,” Vladimir Shlapentokh, et. al, eds. *The New Russian Diaspora: Russian Minorities in the Former Soviet Republics* (London: M.E. Sharpe, 1994), 72-90.

²² There were 562,000 self-identified Russians in Moldova according to the 1989 census. Zevelev, *Russia and its New Diasporas*, 96-97.

²³ According to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR Council of Nationalities Commission on Economic Relations of Republics and Autonomous Entities. GARF f. 10121, op. 1, d. 32, l. 24 (Instructions of the Council of Ministers of the RSFSR on the problems of population migration and documents on their implementation. Volume 3.)

On August 27, 1991, Moldova declared its independence and banned the Communist Party, after which interethnic tensions in Moldova further intensified, and eventually led to war.²⁴ A telegram from over a thousand women in the city of Dubossary in the newly proclaimed republic claimed that in November of 1990, after a “hard working day,” an “armed gang” from Moldova crossed over into Pridnestrovie and brutally killed residents with impunity.²⁵ They reported repeat attacks in 1991 and 1992 that also went unpunished. “They even fired at an ambulance with a woman in labor,” they declared, noting, “there is proof.” “We are simple workers and collective farmers who want to sow bread and raise children,” they beseeched. Turning to the perestroika holdover parliament, they begged for a commission of deputies to examine the “conditions” of the Yeltsin-led “democracy.” “Our city was hospitable, a resort, cheerful,” they bemoaned, and “now has become a target for shelling.”

The nascent Russian state was troubled with the potential of immense “return” migration to Russia. In September 1992, the Committee of Nationality Affairs contended that a “latent process” of the “squeezing out” of Russians was also underway in Central Asia, while the geopolitical crisis between Armenia and Azerbaijan created a concerning situation for the Russian diaspora in the Caucasus. It declared that an “alarm[ing] anti-Russian sentiment” emerged in Armenia, which was likely affected by the strained socio-political climate.²⁶ Armenians were reportedly concerned about Russian arms assistance to Azerbaijan, their geopolitical rival, and about the sale of arms to Turkey amid its growing influence in the region. Some Armenians reportedly feared that another Turkish genocide against the Armenian people

²⁴ Hayes, *Moldova*, 157-160.

²⁵ GARF f. 10026, op. 5, d. 800, ll. 14-15 (letters, appeals, telegrams of labor collectives, public organizations of the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic, the Republic of Moldova about the events in Pridnestrovie).

²⁶ GARF f. 10121, op.1, d. 71, ll. 42-44 (Instructions of the Government of the Russian Federation on the problems of population migration).

was “looming,” a sentiment that heightened anxieties and destabilized interethnic relations. The Committee also noted that 50-60,000 Russians left in a two-year duration due to the Azerbaijan Popular Front’s “ousting.” Forced migration, they assessed, was the result of “the difficult psychological awareness of the loss of communication with Russia” after the collapse of the USSR, the instability of the situation, the lack of human rights guarantees there, and the Baku pogroms of 1990 (where Armenians were mainly targeted). Fear and anxieties, as previously discussed, were a major driving force of migration. Though the Baku pogroms mainly targeted Armenians, they suggested the possibility of nationalist violence toward other people perceived of as “non-native,” or not the “*real* citizen.”²⁷

Russian state concern thus spiked over the direction of nation-building in the former Soviet space—even as represented by changing state symbols. Independence necessitated adopting the treatises and trappings of a nation-state, an opportunity some post-Soviet states had for the first time in their history.²⁸ In Estonia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania, Moldova, and Ukraine, constitutional provisions made explicit distinctions between “indigenous” communities and the rest of the populations.²⁹ The Kazakh constitution highlights, for instance, that the state has been created “on the ancient Kazakh land,” thus countering claims of Russians who considered themselves native. In July 1992, the Committee of Nationality Affairs stressed that even in Kazakhstan, where the population was split nearly evenly between Kazakhs and Russians, the constitution articulated support only of the Kazakh nation, and this exclusivity was

²⁷ See Janet Klein, “Making Minorities in the Eurasian Borders: A Comparative Perspective from the Russian and Eurasian Borderlands,” Krista Goff and Lewis H. Siegelbaum, eds., *Empire and Belonging in the Eurasian Borderlands* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2019), 17-18.

²⁸ The preambles of the of the post-Soviet constitutions in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Lithuania, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan stressed the “historical traditions of statehood of their titular peoples.” See Zevelev, *Russia and its New Diasporas*, 112-115.

²⁹ Ibid.

expressed “down to the symbolism in the state flag.”³⁰ Post-Soviet transformations of public space also transpired.³¹ In Tashkent, for example, the statue of Lenin in the main square was replaced with Tamerlane, a Turkic military leader in the Eurasian Steppe from the 14th century. The Committee of Nationality Affairs deplored that in Kazakhstan, as across Central Asia, the new governments did not solicit the opinions of the “non-native” populations in making major changes, such as renaming cities, provinces, and everyday signage.³² The number of Russian speaking publications, radio, and TV channels was decreasing throughout the region, it reported, while limited programs existed for the learning of state languages. It was concerned by reports that public associations or foundations had trouble obtaining registration and functioning in Central Asia, where freedom of speech and association remained under threat.³³ This all led, the Committee concluded, to an increase in the number of Russians and Russian speakers leaving Central Asia for Russia.

Though several former republics, including Kyrgyzstan and Moldova, eventually adopted transitional protocols or delays in enforcing certain provisions concerning the Russian language, the use of the Russian language for official and educational purposes was restricted in some measure across the former Soviet space, which influenced out-migration.³⁴ The Russian State Committee of Statistics and the Ministry of Internal Affairs survey found that migrants from the former Soviet republics who cited change of work as their primary motive for leaving the former Soviet space *also* named compulsory knowledge of the indigenous language (due to new

³⁰ GARF f. 10121, op. 1, d. 71, ll. 12-17.

³¹ See Nari Shelekpáyev, “Public Spaces and Nation-Building in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan,” Ira Jaroslav and Jiri Janac, *Materializing Identities in Socialist and Post-Socialist Cities* (Prague: Karolinum, 2017), 82-98. On some post-Soviet changes to Russian public space, see the next chapter, “‘You are needed by the Motherland!’: The Russian Cossack Resurgence, Nation-Building, and Ethnonationalism in Russia.”

³² GARF f. 10121, op. 1, d. 71, ll. 12-17.

³³ GARF f. 10121, op. 1, d. 81, ll. 12-17 (Analytical note of the Committee of the Russian Federation on Nationalities Affairs regarding the state of regional-national relations in the Russian Federation in 1992).

³⁴ Zevelev, *Russia and its New Diasporas*, 105-106.

language requirements and laws) as influencing their decision.³⁵ Adelina, a third generation Russian speaker in Uzbekistan with mixed Armenian and Tatar roots, for instance, felt inclined to leave when language issues pervaded interethnic relations and threatened her job.³⁶ She noted that the Russian speaking community in Tashkent where she lived had been connected mainly by language, not ethnicity in Soviet times. It was “fully united,” she observed, “yet Uzbeks were still inclined toward Uzbeks.” Adelina’s mixed Soviet heritage matched a comparably diverse choice in personal relationships: her first husband was Russian, her second, Uzbek-Tatar. Adelina worked as a writer and editor of a television program in Tashkent, which was broadcast in Russian. In 1991, however, Adelina felt pressured to leave her job, there were attempts to expel (*vytesniat*) her, as the Uzbek language was intended to supplant Russian on the show.

In combination with language policies and general insecurity, the “othering” that sometimes came with nationalization across the post-Soviet space increased the desire for flight. Not knowing Uzbek, Adelina, for instance, commonly faced micro-aggressions in everyday places.³⁷ Clerks in stores, she remembered, stopped responding to Russian, and would turn away from her. These tensions became greater when rural Uzbeks started to come to the capital in larger numbers, she explained, as their Russian was often not as fluent. Adelina’s second husband of Uzbek heritage, to whom she was married at the time, was a Russian speaking lawyer. He felt a stronger connection to the Uzbek culture, she noted, and so he was more open to adapting to the changes that pushed other Russian speakers to leave Tashkent. These differences eventually disrupted (and ended) their marriage.

³⁵ These included 34% of those surveyed from Tajikistan, 33% from Lithuania 33%, 31% from Estonia 31%, 25% from Kyrgyzstan, 23% from Uzbekistan, and 22% from Georgia 22%. According to the questionnaire, 43% of all migrants who arrived in Russia from the republics of the former USSR did not speak the titular language at all, and 17% knew it poorly. GARF f. 10121, op.1, d. 71, l. 10-17.

³⁶ Interview with author. December 18, 2018.

³⁷ Interview with author. August 2017.

It was a “language revolution,” Aleksandra Viktorovna Dokuchaeva expressed, though many Russians had lived in other (former) Soviet republics for generations. Aleksandra Viktorovna, the current head of the Department of Diasporas and Migration for the CIS based in Moscow, spent 23 years in Kazakhstan.³⁸ She arrived in Kazakhstan at the age of 22 after university to pursue a career in physics at the Academy of Sciences in Alma-Ata. Aleksandra took an interest in local politics there and eventually became a deputy in the Supreme Soviet of the Kazakhstan SSR. At the everyday level, she stated, nationalization was primarily conveyed by changes in language policy. In Kazakhstan, a 1989 language law granted official status to the Kazak language while Russian became the language of interethnic communication. Even in Kazakhstan, where much of the titular population spoke Russian as their primary language, nationalization processes were “softer,” she declared—but it was still clear that this would eventually “fall away” and that life would get harder. In 1993, Aleksandra Viktorovna joined a multinational public association in Kazakhstan (it integrated other “non-native” communities like Tatars and Russian-Germans) to advocate explicitly for Russian as an equal state language. Plenty of governments have multiple state languages, she emotionally argued, so why should Russians become “people of a second sort” in the former republics? Decreased language rights, for Aleksandra, was the key aspect of nationalization that seeped into other problems, like discrimination, interethnic tensions, and increased cultural divides. In national demonstrations in Kazakhstan, Aleksandra Viktorovna recollected, Kazakhs nationalists spread the slogan “Russian-suitcase-train station-Russia (*ruskii-chemodan-vokzal-Rossii*)” to pressure Russians to leave. Unlike Russian-Germans who emigrated to Germany in large numbers, there was no

³⁸ Interview with author. March 12, 2019.

program for Russian repatriation, she explained.³⁹ People simply “voted with their feet,” Aleksandra Viktorovna expounded, and left. As did she, in 1995, when she was pressured to leave due to her support of Russian as an equal state language.

Some extraterritorial Russians with competency in the local language still repatriated to Russia.⁴⁰ Born in Moscow oblast’, Yury Kaplun moved to Tashkent in 1949 as a six-year-old child. He had relocated there when his mom, who was the director of a military hospital during the war and was later offered a job in Tashkent. Yury went to Russian schools in Tashkent with a multinational “conglomerate” of students, and he developed a verbal command of the Uzbek language, a subject taught in school, which he furthered in his university studies. Therefore, he explained, he never felt pressured to leave. Language was a critical matter for most “non-native” speakers, however. According to the 1989 census, only 4.3% of “non-native” residents of Uzbekistan claimed fluency in Uzbek.⁴¹ Many Soviet urban spaces, but particularly Soviet capitals where extraterritorial and nontitular populations were often demographically dominant, were freely navigated without knowledge of the titular tongue. Yury went on to become a rector of a Tashkent VUZ, a state institute for higher education. He noted with pride that he had been elected to the post with wide margins though most of the faculty were Uzbeks.

Still, some sort of “discomfort” did arise, Yury admitted, noting the appearance of nationalist slogans.⁴² The Soviet Union’s collapse was cataclysmic, he recollected, a life “shock” that pushed people to make a choice about their future. VUZ Instructors who taught in Russian

³⁹ German law and their Federal Expellees Act established in 1953 enabled ethnic Germans to repatriate. However, these numbers grew so large (over 600,000) over the 1990s that Germany restricted the program. See: Olga Zeveleva, “Political aspects of repatriation: Germany, Russia, Kazakhstan. A comparative analysis.” *Nationalities Papers* 42, no. 5 (2014): 808-827.

⁴⁰ Interview with author. April 30, 2019.

⁴¹ Zevelev, *Russia and Its New Diasporas*, 105-107.

⁴² Interview with author. April 30, 2019.

began to leave, he explained, essentially describing pressure to make similar choices.⁴³ His wife, an ethnic Russian woman born in Tashkent, had been hesitant to leave earlier when he had been offered a job in Russia in 1989, so they remained. Yet he was still “drawn” to Russia, his homeland, he clarified. He had many friends and family in Russia, where he went to graduate school, and these connections played a role in the opportunities available to him. In 1992 he used these social networks to land a job in Russia, though he eventually obtained an even more prestigious job in Uzbekistan’s Ministry of Higher Education in his last five years there. He was never pressured to leave, he stressed. Yury even described one instance when he had been asked to switch to Russian while giving a speech in Uzbek at a Tashkent VUZ for the Ministry. Most in attendance still did not understand the local language.

Some ethnic Russians, however, adapted to nationalization to stay in their homes after the USSR’s collapse. In this regard, a person’s sense of “rootedness” in the former republics could play a role.⁴⁴ Tamara, for instance, was born in Galliaaral, a rural town in the Dzhizakskoi oblast’ of Uzbekistan.⁴⁵ Her maternal grandfather moved there to work on the railroad in Tsarist times, and on her paternal side, her grandfather resettled in Uzbekistan for agricultural work on an MTS (machine tractor station) in the 1940s. The railroad ran through the town, she said, describing an active, multinational place. When the 1990s came, she recalled, many she knew wanted to leave, but after relocating, some experienced nostalgia for what they left behind. “It’s very difficult when one nation becomes the priority,” she said, explaining the reasoning for those who abandoned the town. These weren’t just Russians; less “traditional” and “European” mixed

⁴³ Students technically had the right to university instruction in their native tongue, though Russian was the main language in Soviet VUZy, state institutes for higher education. See Mervyn Matthews, *Education in the Soviet Union: Policies and Institutions since Stalin* (London: George Allen, 1982).

⁴⁴ See Brubaker, “Aftermaths of Empire and the Unmixing of People,” 189-218.

⁴⁵ Pseudonym used. Interview with author. March 3, 2018.

families also left, she remembered. Even some people born in Uzbekistan, she confessed, felt like a “stranger among one’s own (*chuzhoi sredi svoikh*).” Only one or two Russian families on her street were left. Why did Tamara cope? “Uzbekistan is my homeland,” she concluded, “I was born and raised here. I have never lived anywhere else. I love these people.” She learned the titular tongue to stay in Uzbekistan as a teacher of the Russian language. “Not many [teachers of Russian] are left,” she noted, and so those who remained were treated with more “care (*berezhno*).”

Extraterritorial populations also “returned” to historic homelands other than the (former) Soviet metropole, some after living out careers, lifetimes, or several generations in another Soviet territory. Upon “return,” they also discovered processes of nationalization. Nina P., a Ukrainian career migrant to Tashkent, left Uzbekistan in 1989 as did many of her coworkers who hailed from elsewhere in the USSR, because of, what she claimed, were feelings of being othered.⁴⁶ Nina P. and her family relocated while the USSR was still intact, and she described an easy process of transferring jobs as the enterprise she worked in had an affiliate in Ukraine. Many interviewees and letters also reported swapping apartments between republics, and therefore a *propiska* (housing registration), to move prior to the USSR’s collapse. In Ukraine, she stated, it was “peaceful,” there was no “interethnic strife.” Her daughter who had attended Russian schools in Tashkent and whose primary language had become the Soviet *lingua franca*, however, had to adjust to the Ukrainian tongue (which she did not know well) when it became the language of instruction at her new school. In Ukraine, language policies became a matter of

⁴⁶ Interview with the author. August 31, 2017.

debate at the local level, with some local governments choosing to elevate the status of the Ukrainian language, and others doing the opposite.⁴⁷

The independent post-Soviet states also had to work through citizenship policies, some of which were convoluted or discriminatory to people proclaimed as “non-native.” Latvia and Estonia introduced blatantly discriminatory policies.⁴⁸ While the southern republics were generally less Russified by the Soviet Union’s collapse due to out-migration and the more rapid growth of the titular population in the USSR’s final decades, the opposite occurred in the Baltic and (non-Russian) Slavic republics, where the Russian population continued to expand.⁴⁹ Latvia and Estonia experienced rapid declines in their titular populations amid a rising Russian population, which made up a massive 33.8% and 30.2%, of the republics by 1989, respectively. Latvia and Estonia became the only former republics in which citizenship was not automatically granted to all legal residents when the Soviet Union dissolved. The Estonian constitution, moreover, introduced an unusual provision that curbed “civil and political rights of noncitizens and stateless persons.” Into the late 1990s, approximately 28% of the Estonian population was categorized as “stateless,” which was almost entirely composed of its Russian population, 40% of whom had been born there. Similarly, in Latvia, by the late 1990s, 27% of the population was stateless, 86% of whom were Eastern Slavs.⁵⁰ Fear of becoming stateless also spread among some who resided in separatist territories. One such group from Pridnestrovie appealed to

⁴⁷ According to Zevelev, there were “active internal struggles” in Ukraine over language policy issues in the immediate post-Soviet period. Zevelev, *Russia and its New Diasporas*, 107. On early Soviet tensions and problems regarding language policy in Ukraine, and the way this played out in education, see Matthew Pauly, *Breaking the Tongue: Language, Education, and Power in Soviet Ukraine 1923-1934* (Toronto: Toronto University, 2014).

⁴⁸ See Zevelev, *Russia and its New Diasporas*, 104-105; 112-115.

⁴⁹ Latvia and Estonia also had large numbers of “non-native” non-Russians by 1989, who mainly consisted of self-identified Ukrainians and Belorussians. (14.5% and 8.6%) Barbara A. Anderson and Brian D. Silver, “Demographic Sources of the Changing Ethnic Composition of the Soviet Union,” *Population and Development Review* 15, no. 4 (1989), 628-635.

⁵⁰ See Zevelev, *Russia and its New Diasporas*, 104-105; 112-115. Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan also made it easier for a member of the titular nationality to acquire citizenship by “admission.”

Russia, the Soviet metropole. On September 21, 1991, a trolleybus management team from Tiraspol, the capital of the separatist Pridnestrovie blamed Moldovan President Domnul Mirga Snegur for attempting to “tear away” the land where “Russians, Ukrainians, Moldovans, Gagauz, Bulgarians and other peoples” have “lived and fraternized” for centuries.⁵¹ The collective proclaimed their primordial rights to the territory “abundantly watered with the sweat and blood” of their ancestors, but also refuted the legitimacy of Moldovan nationalization by nodding anachronistically to Soviet internationalism. These lands, they declared, were developed through the efforts “of the entire Soviet people.” “We do not want to be stateless,” they beseeched.

Soviet “refugees” and those who desired Russian citizenship but had permanent residence in another former republic in turn faced complicated citizenship policies in the former Soviet metropole.⁵² In addition to one’s place of birth, the “Law on Citizenship,” passed in the Russian Federation on February 6, 1992, established that all who were already permanently resident in Russia on the date the law came into force became citizens of the Russian Federation.⁵³ The legal basis for this process was murky as permanent residency was proven on an ad hoc basis through the *propiska*, which technically lost force since January 1, 1992.⁵⁴ Citizenship was also automatically granted to those who had at least one parent who was a citizen of the USSR who permanently resided in the Russian Federation. People with a spouse or direct family member with Russian citizenship were additionally able to acquire citizenship through a process of application. Soviet citizens who were residents of another former republic *prior* to that date were

⁵¹ GARF f. 10026, op. 5, d. 800, l. 1 (Letters, appeals, telegrams of labor collectives, public organizations of the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic, the Republic of Moldova about the events in Pridnestrovie).

⁵² GARF f. 10121, op.1, d. 71, ll. 95-100.

⁵³ “Zakon Rossiiskoi Federatsii: O grazhdanstve Rossiiskoi Federatsii.” Ofitsial’nyi internet-portal pravovoi informatsii. Accessed February 16, 2022. <http://pravo.gov.ru/proxy/ips/?docbody=&nd=102013292>.

⁵⁴ The *propiska* lost force through decision N 26 of the USSR Committee of Constitutional Supervision dated October 11, 1991, though regional administrations continued to require it. See Alexander G. Osipov, *Russian Experience of Ethnic Discrimination: Meskhetians in Krasnodar Region* (Moscow: Memorial Human Rights Center, 2000), 94-100.

able to apply for Russian citizenship if they were not already citizens of another republic.⁵⁵ The latter stipulation effectively required return to the place of origin for the proper documentation, an impossible feat for some. Soviet “refugees” also had to prove refusal of other citizenship (from a former republic) and had to fulfill a two-and-half-year residence requirement and to file within three-years, though this was later extended.

Clearly, the circumstances for permanent residents of another republic who desired Russian citizenship were challenging, as the Law on Citizenship defined the right to citizenship based on territoriality. This made it easier for those who were born in Russia, or had parents born there, like many career migrants, to “return” to post-Soviet Russia. Aleksandra Viktorovna, who was born in Russia, for instance, said that she never had to struggle with the question of Russian citizenship, so the move, and the decision, was easy.⁵⁶ Adelina, introduced earlier, on the other hand, could not claim Russian citizenship according to this law as she was born in Tashkent and had no direct familial connections to the Russian Federation’s territory. It was only when her daughter emigrated by marriage that she could leave Uzbekistan with her for good (though not to Russia). These laws established the basic parameters of citizenship, but the fact of the matter was that movement across Soviet space, complicated personal histories, and other factors presented innumerable challenges for many who desired Russian citizenship. In April of 1992, for instance, Derenik, an ethnic Armenian who resided in Moscow without permanent residency for four years as a self-proclaimed “forced migrant,” appealed for Russian citizenship and for a Moscow *prospika* to Boris Yeltsin and to the Committee of Nationality Affairs.⁵⁷ An impressive career Muscovite, he had been an elected People’s Deputy of the USSR from Moscow and the chairman

⁵⁵ In this case, applicants had to apply within three years, though this was later extended. Hillary Pilkington, *Migration, Displacement and Identity in Post-Soviet Russia* (London: 1998), 36-40

⁵⁶ Interview with author. March 12, 2019.

⁵⁷ GARF f. 10121, op.1, d. 71, ll. 18-40.

of a subcommittee on public health in the Supreme Soviet of the USSR—statutes that he hoped would help his case for obtaining Russian citizenship and a Moscow permanent residency. The complexities of life and work had brought him back to Erevan, however, which was where he lived before moving to Moscow for his graduate training as a psychiatrist.

His return to Erevan for “voluntary work” sanctioned by the Supreme Soviet Committee for the Protection of People’s Health, turned against him, Derenik argued, as he no longer had permanent residency in Russia and therefore could not claim Russian citizenship. This made him lose “health, homeland, and peace of mind!” he declared, and his wife’s health had declined to the point of her becoming bedridden. Returning to Armenia, where he had not been since 1990 and where he and his family had encountered a “stressful situation,” he claimed, was impossible. He beseeched, “If I am denied Russian citizenship, the meaning of my entire previous life and activity, as well as the meaning of staying on the territory of the CIS as a whole, is lost for me.” Derenik attached various letters of support that attested to his highly qualified expertise. Despite his repeated appeals, he received back only clarification of the respective laws. Remarkably, when he petitioned yet again, this time for a job in Russian state structures, he was “invited for a conversation” at the Committee of Nationality Affairs. This was a lucky outcome limited to someone of his extraordinary professional experience. Fortunately for other former Soviet citizens seeking Russian citizenship, an amendment passed on June 17, 1993, removing the exasperating requirement for providing proof of denunciation of prior citizenship, and finally, on October 24, 1994, a presidential decree ensured that a *propiska* was not necessary to receive Russian citizenship for those legitimately resident in Russia when the law came into force.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Shevel, *Migration, Refugee Policy, and State Building in Postcommunist Europe*, 85. The October 24, 1994, decree established that individuals without “confirmation of being admitted to citizenship” and living in Russia on legitimate grounds could certify citizenship through paperwork confirming their “individual will” for citizenship. See Osipov, *Russian Experience of Ethnic Discrimination*, 94-100

The Slighted Nation: The “Russian Question” and Domestic Outcries in the Early 1990s

In the early 1990s, Russia was daunted by the prospect of uncontrollable in-migration, which it was ill-equipped to handle as state structures regulating asylum seekers did not exist in the USSR and movement had been strictly monitored. Until the Soviet Union’s collapse at the end of December 1991, “refugees” from across the Soviet space were still technically internally displaced, but after the USSR’s dissolution, they became international refugees and migrants. It was not until February 1993 that the Russian Federation would finally legally differentiate between “forced migrants” and “refugees.” Forced migrants would become those who could claim Russian citizenship, according to its “Law on Citizenship.” Many who moved within the (former) Soviet space due to coercion, fear, and various anxieties—and identified themselves as “refugees” or “forced migrants”—were never able to obtain official status as such. Some may also have been able to take unfair advantage of these state labels—and benefits. Prior to the legal differentiation as previously shown, “refugee” was commonly used (by state organs and by petitioners) to connote the plight of (former) Soviet citizens, though “forced migrant” was used interchangeably. Goskomtrud (the State Committee of Labor), in charge of the mounting “refugee” problem during perestroika, became eager to control snowballing population flows to Russia. As earlier chapters have shown, it was concerned that in-migration would exponentially increase from throughout the former Soviet space, aggravating housing issues, and so it denied relocation requests to Russia. Goskomtrud also pressured people to return to their places of origin or to turn to “their” titular spaces.

On the cusp of the USSR’s dissolution, “refugee” movements to Russia were the heaviest from the southern tier, which was afflicted by geopolitical crises over sub-republican autonomous territories (Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan), myriad conflicts, and interrelatedly,

general economic malaise.⁵⁹ The region, moreover, had an established trend of its Russian population leaving.⁶⁰ By the 1980s, Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Moldova underwent net out-migration.⁶¹ As previous chapters have shown, many different extraterritorial and nontitular communities (and mixed families) reported exclusionary and sometimes violent emergent national movements. Some who sought refuge within the RSFSR as perestroika-era “refugees,” like many Armenians from Azerbaijan and Meskhetian Turks from Uzbekistan, did not historically reside on the territory of the Russian Federation. By April 15, 1991, 156,613 Soviet citizens of different nationalities were resettled in the RSFSR as “refugees,” most as a result of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the Fergana Valley Massacre in Uzbekistan.⁶² Among them, as noted in chapter two, were 43,983 Armenians and 48,805 Meskhetian Turks. The RSFSR Supreme Soviet continued to report “serious concern” about the “rapid increase” in the flow of “refugees” from other parts of the country into the spring of 1991.⁶³ During this time, a geopolitical conflict in Georgia over the fate of autonomous territories (as in Azerbaijan) brought about 20,000 Ossetian “refugees” who were technically still internally displaced from South Ossetia, an autonomous region in Georgia to Russia.⁶⁴ Regional authorities worried about relocating the displaced as many lived in temporary accommodations like dormitories and even

⁵⁹ The number of registered refugees and forced migrants from Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Azerbaijan, and Georgia were significantly higher in the immediate post-Soviet period than from the rest of the former Soviet republics. Registered refugees and forced migrants were higher from Moldova than from the Baltic and Slavic republics, Armenia, and Turkmenistan. Armenia, Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan, all former republics in the Caucasus and Central Asia, experienced the largest share of their Russian populations leaving between 1990-1994. Pilkington, *Migration, Displacement*, 8-9.

⁶⁰ The absolute number of Russians began to decrease in Georgia in the 1960s, in Azerbaijan in the 1970s, and from the rest of the southern republics, including Moldova (which had a sizeable Russian population) in the 1980s.

Zevelev, *Russia and its New Diasporas*, 117

⁶¹ Pilkington, *Migration, Displacement*, 118.

⁶² GARF f. 10121, op. 1, d. 32, l. 24

⁶³ GARF f. 10121, op. 1, d. 31, ll. 50-51 (Instructions of the Council of Ministers of the RSFSR on the problems of population migration and documents on their implementation. Volume 2.).

⁶⁴ “Refugee” numbers in this period also included 6,226 Azerbaijanis, likely from ethnic cleansing that transpired in Armenia. GARF f. 10121, op. 1, d. 32, l. 24.

school buildings that needed to be used for classes.⁶⁵ The conflict also created a debilitating situation for pensioners and the disabled in South Ossetia who were no longer able to receive their benefits as these matters had been regulated by Georgia.⁶⁶

Though state structures were developing to handle migration crises, in this critical state-building period, no Russian “compatriot” or repatriation program existed. Essentially, no state program designed for extraterritorial *rossiiane* facilitated, sponsored, or assisted with “return” migrations. This meant that those who desired to repatriate prior to the collapse of the USSR, including Russians, had to establish housing registration (a *propiska*) in the RSFSR (such as by exchange of apartments) or wait on the RSFSR to pass laws that might address the rights of asylum seekers from conflict zones. Gradually, state structures designed to meet migration and “refugee” needs began to form. On November 22, 1990, an RSFSR migration service was finally established within Goskomtrud to coordinate migration with affiliates in other republics. The dissolution of the Soviet system, however, upset these plans and ultimately translated to the state’s need to make predictions on migration—unthinkable prior to the late perestroika period, when movement in Russia was tightly regulated. In its conceptual framework from 1991, the migrant service concluded that more than 10 million people could end up in Russia as forced migrants due to unstable interethnic relations, which would require more than 500 billion rubles in financial support.⁶⁷ The newly developed migration service did not intend to develop a repatriation program to Russia, however. Instead, it sought to develop “normal, fair,

⁶⁵ GARF f. 10121, op. 1., d. 32, l. 14.

⁶⁶ According to the Executive Committee of South Ossetia’s Council of People’s Deputies. GARF 10121, op. 1, d. 25, l. 24 (Instructions of the Council of Ministers of the RSFSR on the problems of the Ossetian people).

⁶⁷ GARF f. 10121, op. 1, d. 31, ll. 26-35.

humanitarian, and legal conditions” for displaced persons in the country.⁶⁸ On June 6, 1992, the Russian Federal Migration Service (FMS) finally replaced it by presidential decree.

While Russia struggled to absorb the displaced, citizens in quickly nationalizing republics continued to seek relocation to the former Soviet metropole. State organs struggled to house existing “refugees,” and thus resettled them in rural areas, especially in areas outside of European Russia, where housing issues were less acute.⁶⁹ In increasing numbers, extraterritorial Russians, the largest ethnic group living outside of “their” historic homeland during the demise of the Soviet Union, also began to plan “returns” in the early 1990s. They were met with growing discrepancies in the Soviet system. On September 6, 1991, the newly formed RSFSR State Committee of Nationality Affairs, which did not oversee migration services, reported receiving persistent requests for relocation assistance from the “Russian speaking population living outside the RSFSR.”⁷⁰ Changes in systems of administration at the Union, republic, and local level amid the perestroika reforms and the USSR’s disintegration added to the confusion.⁷¹

⁶⁸ GARF f. 10121, op. 1, d. 31, ll. 7-15. On July 19, 1990, the RSFSR Council of Ministers passed a law providing additional measures of support for “refugees” arriving in the RSFSR, which secured a republican program of “refugee” aid. A State Commission for Assistance to Refugees and Forced Migrants was created and a Russian State Refugee Assistance Fund was set up.

⁶⁹ As part of the ongoing “refugee” housing crisis in Moscow, a decree from May 15, 1990, even provided funds to move “refugees” temporarily residing in medical and health facilities away from the Moscow oblast’. GARF f. 10121, op.1, d. 32, l. 95. The RSFSR Council of Ministers developed a program for resettling the displaced in rural areas throughout Russia that excluded the population dense Moscow oblast’ and other popular destinations, like the majority Russian areas in the North Caucasus. Some of the major destinations for the settlement of “refugees” became Central Asian border areas, like Orenburg oblast’ and Novosibirsk oblast’ after housing became restricted in the Russia south and center. GARF f. 10121, op. 1, d. 71., ll. 83-85.

⁷⁰ The committee was created by decree in March 1990. It apparently housed departments focused on nationality affairs in different republics. “Zakon ob obrazovanii Soiuzno-respublikanskogo gosudarstvennogo komiteta SSSR po natsional’nym voprosam.” Biblioteka normativno-pravovykh aktov Soiuza Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh Respublik. Accessed February 10, 2022. http://www.libussr.ru/doc_ussr/usr_16355.html; GARF f. 10121, op. 1, d. 32, ll. 81-82. The newly established Committee oversaw interethnic issues in the republic and assisted with resettling newly arrived citizens in Russia.

⁷¹ See, for example, “Ukaz Prezidenta RSFSR ot 28.11.1991 g. No 242 “O reorganizatsii tsentral’nykh organov gosudarstvennogo upravleniia RSFSR.” Prezident Rossii. Accessed February 10, 2022. <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/479>.

Russians had been a more privileged and formidable extraterritorial community, but they were also affected by titular nationalism or hostility, both directly, as members of mixed families, and indirectly, through threats and fears that spread diffusely. From 1989-1992, self-identified ethnic Russians made up 80% of the overall migrants (not “refugees”) into the Russian federation, the majority of whom arrived from the USSR’s southern tier.⁷² At the end of 1991, the Russian State Committee of Statistics and the Ministry of Internal Affairs conducted a sample survey of 18,100 people 16 and older who migrated to the Russian Federation from the former Soviet republics, more than half of whom were ethnic Russians (10,100 people).⁷³ Interethnic conflicts outstripped all other reasons for the respondents’ departure from most of the former Soviet republics. Almost two thirds (65%) of the migrants who cited aggravated interethnic relations for their reason to move to the Russian Federation were identified as Russians. Some also sought to leave because of general uncertainty and a sense of unease at the pace of change of nationalization, which included language issues.

The state was anxious to address the rising notions of ethnic Russians as the slighted nations and ideas of ethnic Russian statehood, which grew in popularity. The perennial “Russian factor,” or the “Russian question,” the State Committee of Nationality Affairs highlighted, extended to the Soviet era when Russians were excluded from the opportunity to have ethnic-based national units, which continued to create issues with the fall of the USSR.⁷⁴ Moreover, the Russian Federation, the Committee pointed out, like the Soviet Union, continued to house autonomous ethnic territories, while Russians were again deprived of such entities. These

⁷² Andrei V. Korobkov, “Post-Soviet Migration: New Trends at the Beginning of the Twenty-First Century,” in Cynthia J. Buckley, Blair A. Ruble and Erin Trough Hofmann, eds., *Migration, Homeland, and Belonging in Eurasia* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 2008), 69-79. In 1990, about 95,000 Russians migrated from Kazakhstan, over 55,000 from Uzbekistan, almost 50,000 from Azerbaijan, and over 35,000 from Tajikistan. These numbers reflect migrants, not registered refugees. GARF f. 10121, op. 1, d. 32, l. 27.

⁷³ GARF f. 10121, op.1, d. 71, l. 10-17.

⁷⁴ GARF f. 10121, op. 1, d. 81, ll. 12-17.

growing sentiments, it warned, extended to the Federation's ethnic territories in which the titular nation officially had autonomy, but where, in fact, the Russian population was in the majority. These sorts of contradictions, it implied, aggravated frustrations.⁷⁵ As the previous chapter showed, accelerated nationalization and territorial reclamation (sometimes fueled by a legacy of state repression) within Russian autonomous territories also contributed to mass flight. The Russian State Committee of Statistics and the Ministry of Internal Affairs survey conducted at the end of 1991 showed that only 2.5 percent of the respondents who migrated *within* Russia cited aggravated interethnic tensions as their primary reason for moving, but those who did were primarily Russians (78%) from autonomous ethnic territories.⁷⁶ In addition to the North Caucasus, in June 1991, the RSFSR Council of Ministers reported that there was a "mass outflow of Russians" from the Tuva Republic due to an "increased recent demarcation" between persons of indigenous nationality and Russian speakers. The latter involved "non-isolated cases" of ethnic hostility and crimes," including murders, arson, and pogroms against people perceived of as Russian.⁷⁷

Granted the size of the extraterritorial Russian population, the trend of "return" migration was alarming to the RSFSR, which, of course, sought to contain haphazard migration and "refugee" flows, particularly as the devolving state—and Russian permanent residents—were strapped with economic hardships. Most "refugees" who had already arrived from former Soviet

⁷⁵ It considered measures that would address this question by finally granting Russians ethnically based autonomy within Russia. The allocation of large majority-Russian administrative territories or the consolidation of various smaller ones had become an increasingly widespread concept. GARF f. 10121, op. 1, d. 81, ll. 12-17.

⁷⁶ GARF f. 10121, op.1, d. 71, l. 10-17.

⁷⁷ Fifty-four percent came from Chechnya-Ingushetia, 10% from Dagestan, and 7% in Tuva. It proclaimed that hostility to "non-native people" and an "anti-Russian sentiment" in Tuva were fomented by the national democratic movement in the Republic, the "People's Front." These hostilities were also evident in the actions of some Tuvan leaders, the report claimed, who separated schools, cultural institutions, and kindergartens on national grounds. GARF f. 10121, op.1 d. 28, ll. 78-83 (Instructions of the Council of Ministers of the RSFSR on the problems of repressed peoples. Volume 1).

republics were families with children, pensioners, and the disabled, requiring extra state funding and attention.⁷⁸ Though the law on “On the free national development of Soviet citizens living outside their national entities, or not having them” passed on April 26, 1990, nationalization processes obviously persisted, eclipsing central directives.⁷⁹ In an attempt to assuage the “refugee” crisis in the spring of 1991, the Russian Supreme Soviet attempted to present itself as the custodian of all Soviet citizens living outside of or without “their own” national territories at odds with nationalization processes in the Soviet Union.⁸⁰ It demanded concrete measures be taken, which included the working out of an inter-republican agreement on “refugees” and compensation for them provided by respective abandoned republics.

In an open plea sent to different republics, the RSFSR Supreme Soviet declared, “national extremism is reflected today in insulting the national dignity of people who do not live on their national-state territory or do not have one... refugees arrive from your republic to Russia, having lost their homes, property, and means of livelihood there, and among them are both Russians and peoples of other nationalities.”⁸¹ According to the USSR’s latest statistics, 73.1 million people lived outside of “their” national territories in the Soviet Union.⁸² Pronouncing that multinationalism had “long become a reality,” it proclaimed, “all these people are citizens of the same Fatherland, united in the past by traditions of friendship, by the common historical destinies of the country—the USSR.”⁸³ Several months earlier, in fact, Soviet leaders

⁷⁸ GARF f.10121, op.1, d. 31, ll. 4-15.

⁷⁹ See “O svobodnom natsional’nom razvitií grazhdan SSSR, prozhivaiushchikh za predelami svoikh natsional’no-gosudarstvennykh obrazovanií ili ne imeiushchikh iz na territorii SSSR.” Biblioteka normativno-pravovykh aktov Soiuza Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh Respublik. Accessed February 21, 2023. https://www.libussr.ru/doc_ussr/usr_16492.htm

⁸⁰ GARF f. 10121, op. 1, d. 31, ll. 50-51.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² GARF f. R9654, op. 6, d. 221, ll. 2-11 (Materials received by the Chairman of the Soviet of Nationalities, R.N. Nishanov, on issues of interethnic relations: conflicts, problems, refugees).

⁸³ GARF f. 10121, op. 1, d. 31, ll. 50-51.

had suggested strapping republics with more responsibility for flight from them through legislation to be codified through both a new Union treaty (which Gorbachev had just proposed to salvage the dissolving Soviet Union) or a law on “On the protection of the rights of citizens of the USSR who were forced to leave their places of permanent residence.”⁸⁴ Ultimately, both were never passed.

The struggle to stem unpredictable migration to Russia (and the plight of its co-ethnics in the former Soviet space) despite such assertions and attempts, also began to reflect poorly in the public. Public initiatives showed increased apprehension surrounding the status of Russians and Russian speakers in other republics and the fate of repatriates. Russians began to organize to support their co-ethnics who desired to leave nationalizing republics or who had already fled them. State leaders feared that promulgating aid would only encourage more people to leave, and that it could, therefore, further destabilize the country. They were concerned that public associations organized to support migrants would thus aggravate “social and national tensions in the republics.”⁸⁵ The fate of “refugees,” Aleksandr Misharin, a Soviet playwright, decried to Gorbachev on November 26, 1990, raised “deep and strong pain” in the “most diverse strata” of society. He proposed the creation of a Civil Assistance Committee for Refugees in Russia, and the organization of labor for “refugees” in various cities across Russia (though mainly in the depopulating Russian Far East). Misharin suggesting that, despite its concerns, the state needed to act, warning that there was “deep confidence in the widest circles of the Russian public that neither the parliament nor the government is going to take any serious measures on this problem.” Gorbachev affirmed Misharin’s proposal, asking leaders of the USSR’s Council of Ministers and the Soviet of Nationalities, including Rafik Nishanov, who had been transferred to

⁸⁴ GARF f. R9654, op. 6, d. 221, ll. 2-11.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

the post after the disastrous Fergana Valley Massacre, to “work out” the specifics for its implementation. Hesitant to draw more people to Russia, however, they responded that the “formation of public organizations on this issue” had to proceed “very carefully.”

In early December 1990, an initiative group organized by professionals “and public representatives” of migration issues in the USSR proposed an extensive program to assist with the repatriation of Russian speaking citizens to Russia.⁸⁶ The group drafted a charter for a public association entitled “Native Spaces” with a planned inaugural conference set for January 7, 1991.⁸⁷ The problems facing citizens forced to leave their place of residence because of interethnic conflict was a significant issue in contemporary Russia, it argued. “Native Spaces” hoped to advocate on behalf of the “most vulnerable.” These people, the group stated, were primarily “Russian speaking citizens” who lived outside their national-state entities or did not have them. They petitioned for government funding for their proposed “intermediary services” to assist with the mass “resettlement, accommodation, and social adaptation of migrants.” The group, criticizing the government’s past response, hoped that the proposed association would (finally) ensure a “systematic approach to migration processes” and prevent forced migration from turning into a “phenomenon like a natural disaster” in Russia.

Instead, as the August coup began, the Council of Ministers drew attention to Russia’s “compatriots” *outside* the USSR, who, unlike the co-ethnics in Soviet space, represented the opportunity for exciting new international connections. When the Soviet “refugee” crisis was in full swing, the Council of Ministers of the RSFSR, and other republican organs, including the

⁸⁶ GARF f. 10121, op.1, d. 4, ll. 32-36 (Instructions of the Council of Ministers of the RSFSR on the rehabilitation of repressed peoples and documents on their implementation). Not all material in this file relate to the rehabilitation of repressed peoples. The collection (*opis*) is for the Committee of Nationalities, and the files (*dela*) in the collection are also classified by date from 1990-1994. Therefore, the subject of the file and material do not always align.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

Committee of Nationality Affairs, planned a massive Congress of Compatriots as an almost two-week affair to represent Russians from 40 different countries.⁸⁸ The Congress, held about six months after Yeltsin's proclamation toward "compatriots," was heralded as celebration of Russia's rebirth, one that "compatriots" would help fashion. Ultimately, the Congress was committed to resurrecting a new "great" Russia precisely when the facts on the ground, including an unravelling Soviet "refugee" crisis, belied this image. The event was organized as a public affair that spread across the country complete with its own postage stamp dedicated to the event. Its officially broadcasted aims were "the spiritual, cultural and socio-economic revival of Russia," and the "restoration of the rights of peoples." The Congress' discussion topics included bold, patriotic themes, like the "Russian Army and the Fatherland," and "Russia and the Slavic World." Anti-Soviet dissidents, like Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (who had recently published the pamphlet entitled "Rebuilding Russia" that advocated for Russian irredentism) were welcomed back to Russia.

The reality of the USSR's collapse forced the state to finally contend with (re)defining Russian "compatriots," which it began to do at the Second Congress of Compatriots held on September 7, 1992.⁸⁹ Toward the Soviet collapse, the state began to apply the term to those fleeing to Russia from former Soviet space. The migration service developed by the RSFSR, for instance, already referred to "forced migrant compatriots" in its conceptional framework in 1991.⁹⁰ The Second Congress of Compatriots also suggested that the concept of Russian "compatriots" should extend to both imperial and Soviet diasporas oriented toward Russia. A

⁸⁸ GARF f. 10121, op. 1, d. 33, ll. 1-7 (Instructions of the Council of Ministers of the RSFSR on the Congress of Compatriots). See also G. Alimov and G. Charodeyev, "Congress to Gather Compatriots from all over the World," *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 33, vol. 43 (September 18, 1991): 32

⁸⁹ "Russia is Again Receiving Compatriots from Abroad," Zbigniew Brzezinski and Page Sullivan, eds. *Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States: Documents, Data, and Analysis* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1997), 99-100.

⁹⁰ GARF f. 10121, op. 1, d. 31, l. 28.

group of participating experts defined “compatriots” as “people who were subjects of the Russian empire,” and, for the first time, “citizens of the USSR in the past (and their direct descendants),” who belong to one of Russia’s ethnic groups, and those who consider themselves “spiritually, culturally, and ethnically linked to Russia.” According to *Izvestiia*, the experts pronounced that Russia was “obliged to provide protection for its compatriots,” that the law should have a “special provision on protecting the rights and interests of people of Russian origin,” and that it was essential to provide “aid and assistance” to them.”⁹¹ These proclamations were controversial, as “compatriots” were citizens of other countries. The constitutional crisis and the dissolution of the parliament in September 1993 would, nevertheless, delay any further state action on a state “compatriot” program.

The slow attention to such issues, and their inherent problems, deepened dissatisfaction with the status quo in Russia. The conflict between the legislative and executive branches of power and Yeltsin’s assault on the Soviet command system left lower-level hierarchical systems intact (the regional and local level bureaucracies) but a skeletal central-level control system.⁹² The weak capability of central organs was sensed by the populace, particularly as it was a strong federal structure that was needed to handle the new international order in the post-Soviet space, one that left around 25 million ethnic Russians outside of “their” historic homeland. The powerful image of Russians as continued victims in the former Soviet space, in fact, was weaponized by some militant groups as a force for ethno-nationalism, which is the focus of the next chapter. In July of 1992, just months after the official demise of the USSR, the State Committee of the Russian Federation of Nationality Affairs underscored that the Russian

⁹¹ “Russia is Again Receiving Compatriots from Abroad,” Brzezinski and Sullivan, eds. *Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States*, 99-100.

⁹² See Lynn D. Nelson and Irina Y. Kuzes, *Radical Reform in Yeltsin’s Russia: Political, Economic, and Social Dimensions* (London: M.E. Sharpe, 1995), 65-71.

Federation's lack of attention and concrete assistance to its compatriots abroad was already utilized by "political parties and associations of national-radicalistic orientation."⁹³ The State Committee of the Russian Federation of Nationality Affairs in some sense justified these movements by admitting that a "Russo-phobic" mentality indeed contributed to the "moral and psychological trauma" of Russians in the former Soviet republics.⁹⁴ The Committee stressed the need to address the issue not only as humanitarian problem, but due to its direct influence on domestic radicalism, as a key national security one for the nascent state. Domestic Russian activists, including nationalists, had pushed the state to think in more concrete terms regarding its response to "compatriots" in the former Soviet space. Some of their efforts also solidified and expanded. By 1995, the Congress of Russian Communities, which was founded as a public association in Russia to promote the interests of Russians in the former Soviet space, grew into its own political party and lobby.⁹⁵

Public Associations in the (Post) Soviet South and Ethnic Repatriation to Russia

As previously shown, in the late perestroika period, Soviet citizens living outside or without "their own" ethnic territories, appealed to central organs for transfers and interventions through appeals that were, in numerous cases, grounded in internationalist practices. These requests, including those of Russians, were often refused. The correspondence of Russian federal organs with organizations like the Russian Culture Association in Uzbekistan introduced at the beginning of the chapter shows a representative shift in how extraterritorial communities seeking alignment with Russia negotiated with the (former) Soviet metropole. Since the USSR's collapse, myriad formal organizations like this one were established across the former Soviet

⁹³ GARF, f. 10121, op. 1, d. 81, ll. 12-20.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ See Pilkington, *Migration, Displacement*, 54-55.

Union. By the early 1990s, the Russian Federation was fielding sophisticated inquiries from various public associations representing its new “diasporic peoples” in former Soviet space that sought to win Russian sponsorship.⁹⁶ Registration meant that each public association had to receive “prior approval,” which, in some cases, meant a review of its charter. To adopt a charter, public associations needed to convene, create an organizational infrastructure (e.g., elected officers) and, in some cases, design appropriate symbolism (e.g., letterheads) for their organization. If an association did not follow the established procedures in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, it was liable for criminal or administrative and civil liability.⁹⁷ These restrictions, however, seemed to work to the advantage of some registered public associations. They were able to present a more professional and polished image in their appeals for sponsorship to the Russian state.

These were not the pervasive and informal collective appeals of the late 1980s. Public associations spearheaded professional, well-crafted proposals. They held conferences and congresses, and some, such as the Association of Russian Culture in Uzbekistan, proposed Russian state interventions, including state-sponsored ethnic repatriation. Public associations were the offspring of the more informal collectives that flourished during the perestroika reforms; glasnost' increased the number of non-state groups, and associations continued to be some of the earliest reflections of a budding civil society brought about through the perestroika processes of democratization. Due to their novelty, public associations, even in Russia,

⁹⁶ See the next chapter for a comparison of 1990s public associations representing repressed peoples. Ethnonational Cossack organizations received more support from the state than those like the Confederation for Repressed Peoples, which represented various non-Russian formerly deported peoples. In the 1990s, the Russian Federation was the only country of the former USSR that did not require public associations to register. On civil society in the post-Soviet space, see: Anders Uhlin, *Post-Soviet Civil Society: Democratization in Russia and the Baltic States*, (New York: Routledge, 2006), M. Holt Ruffin and Daniel Waugh, eds. *Civil Society in Central Asia* (Seattle: University of Washington, 1999).

⁹⁷ Scott Horton and Alla Kazakina, “The Legal Regulation of NGOs: Central Asia at a Crossroads,” Ruffin and Waugh, eds. *Civil Society in Central Asia*, 34-56.

sometimes formed “broad non-negotiable demands” that hampered their efficacy to secure material support and membership.⁹⁸ Those that were successful in organizing large constituencies or the support of experts and government officials were difficult for the nascent Russian Federation to ignore. In the crucial early 1990s, a period of political and legal uncertainty, they added pressure on the Russian state to consider its position on the “Russian question” and, hence, the direction of its nation-building course.

The role of public associations in potentially aiding migration and Russian interests became increasingly important after the breakup of the Soviet Union. In proposals that ranged in level of development, diaspora public associations appealed to the Russian state for sponsored ethnic repatriation and for socioeconomic support and security. The Russian government, concerned with increased migration from the former Soviet space and the position of the Russia diaspora, seriously considered these proposals, which offered a controlled, sustainable form of resettlement. The potential for the intensification of in-migration due to further destabilization in former Soviet space was a major factor that influenced Russian state organs in weighing these requests. Since the late perestroika period, the state was overwhelmed with a “refugee” crisis, it turned away transfer requests, and had no comprehensive “compatriot” or repatriation program. Rather than gamble on the potential of continued haphazard migration that risked aggravating local populations, and concerning the general populace, the Russian Federation acted on some major proposals sent by public associations who represented Russia’s co-ethnics. In result, they ushered in, and presented the blueprint for, state-organized ethnic repatriation to Russia.

⁹⁸ Uhlin, *Post-Soviet Civil Society*, 48-49.

Ўзбекистон Республикаси		СВИДЕТЕЛЬСТВО	
о регистрации устава общественного объединения			
Бирлашманинг номи	Ўзбекистон Республикаси	Номи	1992
Бирлашманинг тур	Ҳис-ҳиссий ассоциация	№	100
Бирлашманинг тур	Ҳис-ҳиссий ассоциация	Вид объединения	республиканское
Бирлашманинг раҳбар органи	Конференция, Бошқарув	Руководящий орган объединения	Конференция, Правление
Тошкент ш. Ленин шох кўчаси, 4-а уй		г.Ташкент, проспект Ленина, дом 4-а	
Фактнинг асосий ҳаққиди	Ўзбекистон Республикасида яшайдиган рус ва славян халқлари вакиллари	Основная цель деятельности	сохранение и развитие культуры представителей русской и славянских народов, проживающих в Республике Узбекистан, гармонизация межнациональных отношений, изучение истории зарождения и развития русской культуры, пропаганда её достижений, установление культурных связей.
Узбекистон Республикаси	А.Вазир	Узбекистон Республикаси	М.Б.Маликов

Figure 4. The registration certificate, in both Russian and Uzbek, for the “National Association ‘Russian Culture’ in Uzbekistan.” GARF, f. 10121, op. 1, d. 130, l. 19

In the early 1990s, public associations and individual Russian co-ethnics in the formerly Soviet southern tier interacted with the surfacing “Russian question,” and the notion that Russia’s national identity should embrace rather than shrink from an ethnic Russian or pan-Slavic identity denied under the Soviet regime. Why did some instrumental diaspora public associations evoke Russian culture and pan-Slavic identities? One interpretation is that post-Soviet transformations unearthed, disclosed, or influenced sentiments long inhibited by the Soviet regime. The plight and newly difficult position of many Russians and Russian speakers across the former Soviet space in the immediate post-Soviet period epitomized the evolving belief that they had been victims of Soviet policy against “Great Russian chauvinism.” This belief encouraged Russian ethnonationalism, or an unapologetic embrace of Russian ethnicity, culture, Orthodoxy, and the pan-Slavic identity extending throughout its historic zone of

influence. In essence, these labels implied that Russians in Russia should, therefore, feel a “natural” connection to their co-ethnics in former Soviet space. In this way, public associations representing Russia’s loosely-defined “compatriots” asserted themselves into the burgeoning process of Russian nation-building and the (re)construction of post-Soviet Russian culture to negotiate for their contingencies.

In the nationalizing Russian state, Orthodoxy, and aspects of the Russian imperial legacy, such as Cossack border guardianship (explored in the next chapter), were also gradually reintegrated culturally, which advanced such perspectives. Some scholars have argued that increased Russian ethnic self-awareness that surfaced throughout the 1990s was, in fact, shaped by Orthodox discourse.⁹⁹ The Russian Orthodox Church emerged as a strong social authority with widespread popularity—a symbol of the Russian nation. It was seen as both a “repository of ancient Russian traditions and historical continuity” as well as a spiritual and cultural stabilizer for citizens undergoing socio-political instability.¹⁰⁰ Aleksandra Viktorovna, for instance, recalled that the Orthodox church played an important role in creating community among Russians in Kazakhstan when they began to feel “uncomfortable (*diskomfort*).”¹⁰¹ It gave them the opportunity to be among people “cut from the same cloth (*odnim mirom mazany*),” she

⁹⁹ See Svetlana Ryzhova, “Tolerance and Extremism: Russian Ethnicity in the Orthodox Discourse of the 1990s,” Juliet Johnson, et. al., eds., *Religion and Identity in Modern Russia: The Revival of Orthodoxy and Islam* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2005), 65-90.

¹⁰⁰ In September 1997, the liberal law on religion from 1990, which drew on Western notions of freedom of religion, was amended through a controversial new law “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations.” A boon for the Moscow Patriarchate, its preamble highlighted Orthodoxy’s special contribution to Russian history and statehood (though it mentioned that other forms of Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Judaism also had historic roots in Russia). Reflecting the views circulated by the Russian Orthodox Church and the media in the 1990s, it restricted proselytizing and required a process of registration for religious associations in which evidence of existence in Russia for more than 15 years had to be proven. The law intended to weed out new foreign religious movements that proliferated in Russia. Failing to provide evidence of this heritage meant a loss of status as an official religious organization in Russia and certain privileges. On state policies toward religious organizations, including the Russian Orthodox Church, see: Irina du Quenoy, “Russia: The Stability Implications of State Policies Toward Religion and the Russian Orthodox Church,” Katya Migacheva and Bryan Frederick, eds., *Religion, Conflict, and Stability in the Former Soviet Union* (Santa Monica: RAND), 159-180.

¹⁰¹ Interview with author. March 12, 2019.

attested. In church, you were “among your own,” she said. “I’m fully an atheist,” Aleksandra confessed, “and I was raised totally atheist, but in these years in Kazakhstan I understood that the church became an institution that unites and protects our national characteristics and qualities.” Even Gennadiy Andreevich Zyuganov, the leader of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, expressed support for, and close affiliation with, the Russian Orthodox Church.¹⁰² Zyuganov stated that “a politician who does not understand the colossal and largely unique role played by the Orthodox faith in the establishment and development of our state and culture does not understand Russia itself and cannot lead the country out of crisis.” At the basis of Zyuganov’s conception of the Russian national idea lay two overarching values: Russian spirituality, which he claimed was “unthinkable without the Orthodox world view” and “Russian power and statehood.” These sentiments, even within the Communist Party of the 1990s, echoed growing public opinion that envisioned the Russian imaginary, in any incarnation, as a cultural force with global reach and relevancy.

Socio-political trends in Russia were also redefining identity in ethno-cultural terms as part of the post-Soviet national transformation. More extremist movements emerged aiming to bridge Slavic peoples under one ethno-cultural state. On December 19, 1991, the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR vocalized its concern that the Belovezha accords (signed between the leaders of the three Slavic republics to effectively end the Soviet Union) was used by some political figures and the mass media as a “Slavic Union” allegedly directed against Central Asian or Muslim republics and states.¹⁰³ In the early-mid 1990s, Russian, Ukrainian, and Belorussian political factions on both the far-left and far-right championed a confederal concept known as the “Slavic

¹⁰² This statement is from an October 5, 1995 interview with *Pravda Rossii*. “Zyuganov on Religion, Russian Idea,” Brzezinski and Sullivan, eds. *Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States*, 166-170.

¹⁰³ “Zaiavlenie Verkhovnogo Soveta RSFSR ot 12 dekabria 1991 g. no 2016-1,” *Raspad SSSR: Dokumenty i fakty (1986-1992gg) Tom. 1 normativnye akty, Ofitsial’nye soobshcheniia* (Moscow: Wolters Kluwer, 2009), 1062-1063.

Union,” which advocated for Slavophile traditions and the integration of Slavic peoples for their mutual economic, cultural, and intellectual benefit.¹⁰⁴ Nikolai Lysenko’s National Republic Party of Russia, a political offshoot of the perestroika-era nationalist group Pamiat’ (Memory), for instance, promoted a Russian state that combined Ukraine, Belarus, and northern Kazakhstan for the “revival of ‘purified’ Russian spiritual values.”¹⁰⁵ It can be argued that some diaspora Russian “compatriot” organizations displayed some form of this ethno-cultural rather than national identity in their attempts to bargain for Russian assistance. Some surfacing public associations sometimes claimed to represent supranational (though pan-ethnic) Russian speaking “Slavs,” whom they argued the Russian state should sponsor for mutual advantage. Though the Russian state’s Law on Citizenship was closely tied to territory, many evidently struggled to distill their post-Soviet identity into the bounds of one nationality and nation-state.

Since the late perestroika period, as we have seen, anxieties arose within the state and at the everyday level amid post-Soviet nationalization, ethnic tensions, and ongoing out-migration. Public associations, therefore, also focused on establishing a state-supported route of exit for those who no longer envisioned a future in nationalizing former Soviet republics, and they sought support for the diasporic peoples who wished to remain. In the early 1990s, the Center of Russian Culture in Moldova emerged as an influential public association that negotiated the resettlement of Russian speakers when interethnic conflict there was intensifying. On February 16, 1991, the Center announced its establishment in Moldova’s capital city of Kishinev (outside of separatist Pridnestrovie) amid developing tensions in the republic.¹⁰⁶ Writing to Yeltsin and to

¹⁰⁴ On 1990s Slavophilism and the concept of a Slavic Union, see Brzezinski and Sullivan, eds. “Alternative Confederal Concepts: The Slavic Union,” Brzezinski and Sullivan, eds., *Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States*, 318-328.

¹⁰⁵ The Party would militarize, in fact, and send militias into Moldova and Georgia, where conflict between Russian-oriented territories and nationalizing post-Soviet countries developed. Marlene Laruelle, *Russian Nationalism: Imaginaries, Doctrines, and Political Battlefields* (London: Routledge, 2019), 156-159.

¹⁰⁶ GARF f. 10121, op.1, d. 14, ll. 16-20.

the Chairman of the Council of Ministers, Ivan Silaev, it proclaimed that the Center's mission was to unite and provide supports for groups "connected by their native Russian language and centuries-old Russian culture."¹⁰⁷ One of its most far-reaching aims, however, was to negotiate certain conditions for resettlement in some of the most desirable areas in European Russia for its constituents. It fervently demanded that the Russian government "oblige local authorities" on the "European part of the RSFSR"—which was mainly off limits to many refugees, especially for collective settlement—to allocate home plots to "organized groups" of Russian resettlers "without obstruction," both in urban and rural locations. This involved, the Center requested, furnishing resettlers with a temporary residence permit (*propiska*) for the period of construction "with a guarantee of permanent residence after resettlement."

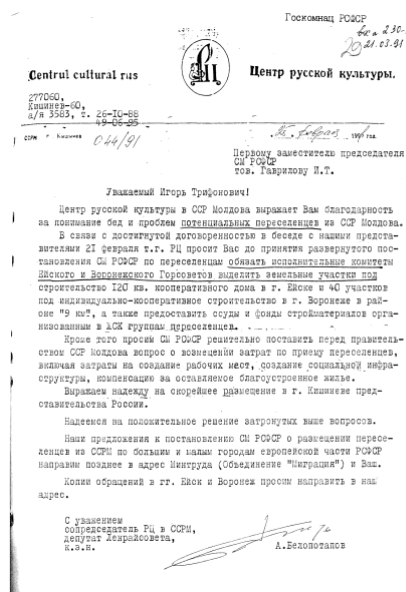


Figure 5. A letter, on the organizational letterhead (in both Russian and Moldovan), from the Center of Russian Culture to the First Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers, February 25, 1991. GARF 10121, op.1, d. 30, l. 29

¹⁰⁷ GARF f. 10121, op.1, d. 32, ll. 85-88, GARF f. 10121, op.1, d. 30, l. 29 (Instructions of the Council of Ministers of the RSFSR on the problems of population migration and documents on their implementation. Volume 1.).

The Center played on the growing notion that Russians had become victims in the former Soviet Union to argue that Russians and Russian speakers deserved a “civilized departure”—in other words, sponsored or assisted state resettlement—to their historic homeland in their time of need.¹⁰⁸ The Center evoked the image of patriotic Russian “compatriots” unjustly victimized in Moldova who were owed rights, care, and respect by their historic homeland rather than a pitiful banishment to remote regions. Refusing this proposal, the Center declared, meant to abide by current Russian (local and federal) practices for refugees and migrants, which it asserted amounted to the slogan: “Revive the Russian village on the bones of Russian resettlers.”¹⁰⁹ The latter assertion suggested that the Russian authorities attempted to take advantage and even traumatize resettlers (many of whom were unequipped for rural life) through federal and local practices that relocated them to labor-deficient locales away from European Russia. The “receiving” local authorities, the Center added, should not “dictate” the “choice of places of residence” for resettlers. Rather, the Center, contended, local authorities should aid resettlers instead of creating obstacles for them. “At the stage of resettlement or assimilation,” the proposal argued, resettlers need moral support and a “company of ‘fellows-in-misfortune’” (*okruzhenie “sobrat’iami po neshchast’iu”*).¹¹⁰ To win support, the Center stressed the potential risk of a more haphazard Russian out-migration from Moldova due to the current tensions. The “gradual squeezing” of Russian speaking specialists, it estimated, could grow to as high as 47,600 families leaving (from the 1,180 families who had already arrived in Russia from Moldova by May 1, 1991).¹¹¹ It attached a graph (table 1) featuring two different prognostications for ethnic Russian

¹⁰⁸ GARF f. 10121, op.1, d. 14, ll. 16-20.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ GARF f. 10121, op. 1, d. 32, ll. 5-11.

¹¹¹ Ibid. Likely because of the developing conflict, the Center had been able to work with the State Committee for Nationality Affairs to draft this latest appeal.

migration to Russian cities, as estimated by one of its board members, a Candidate of Economics. Forecast two, the most extreme prediction for outmigration the Center established, considered the consequences of these developments (the “squeezing” out of Russians) spreading to rural areas and agricultural production.

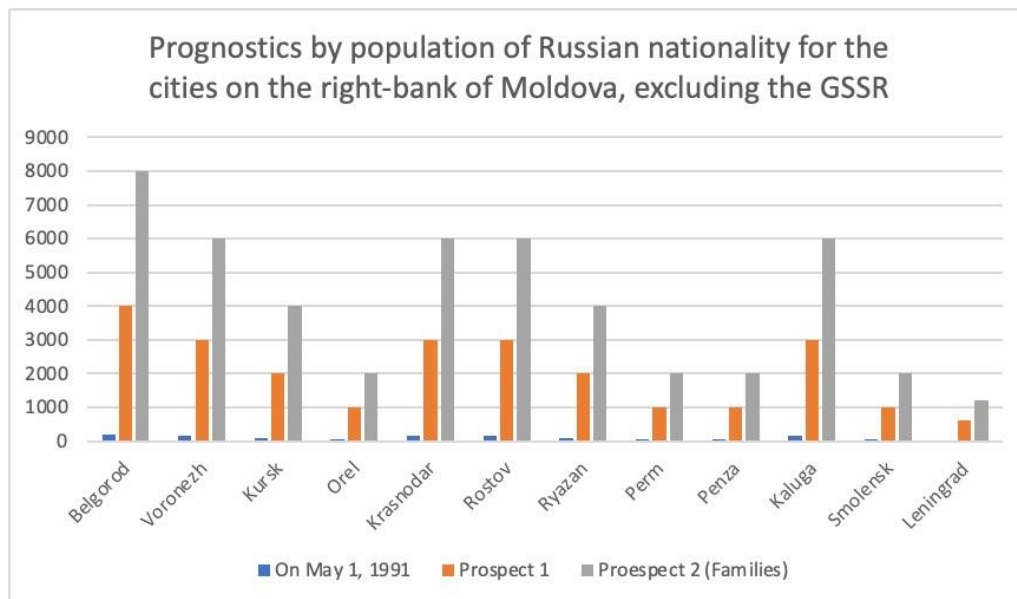


Figure 6. Predictions made by the Center of Russian Culture in Moldova on in-migration of ethnic Russian families to Russian cities, which exclude the Georgian republic (it is not clear why Georgia was mentioned). Replicated by the author. GARF f. 10121, op. 1., d. 32, l. 9

The Center ultimately received its stamp-of-approval for compact resettlement in the European parts of Russia—an opportunity denied to most. Yeltsin and Silaev agreed to almost all the terms presented by the Center in a resolution signed directly in response to its proposal.¹¹² Yeltsin and Silaev ordered the Council of People’s Deputies “of all levels in the territory of the RSFSR” to act in fulfillment of the Center of Russian Culture in Moldova’s appeal. The latter included providing collective land plots, long term interest free loans, and residence permits. Yeltsin and Silaev celebrated the Center’s plan for state-facilitated repatriation as a move to

¹¹² GARF f. 10121, op. 1, d. 14, ll. 20-21.

benefit Russia's revival. They declared that a "large group of citizens of Russian origin has formed" who seek to move to a permanent place of residence in the Russian Federation to "give their strength, professional values, and experience for the benefit of the revival and development of Russia."

The Slavic Foundation in Kyrgyzstan was another important public association that emerged to successfully negotiate for collective ethnic repatriation. "Today discrimination on the basis of nationality is being introduced into the ranks of state policy in our republic," their letter, which was somehow handed to Yeltsin during his visit to Kyrgyzstan in 1991, stated.¹¹³ The Foundation, writing just prior to the August coup that solidified Yeltsin's path toward Russian independence, expressed concern over recent developments in Kyrgyzstan, such as the Supreme Soviet of Kyrgyzstan's declaration that the "land in the Kyrgyzstan Republic is the property of the Kyrgyz people." The Foundation claimed that its petition was organized following a conference that convened Slavs of different nationalities in the republic, just prior to the August coup that derailed the USSR for good. The Foundation, however, also united in common cause with "nine different nationalities" in the republic via a Union of Civil Accord, an allegiance that reflected the cross-ethnic mobilizing efforts vis-à-vis titular nationalism present in the perestroika era (as discussed in earlier chapters). The Slavic Foundation in Kyrgyzstan claimed to represent everyday people, like workers of a vegetable state farm (*sovkhoz*), who evidently played an active role in the public association's foundation. "More than a million Slavs," the letter declared, are now "strangers" in Kyrgyzstan.¹¹⁴ "We believe that it is possible to build a

¹¹³ GARF f. 10121, op. 1, d. 14, ll. 67-68.

¹¹⁴ According to the 1989 census, the self-identified titular population of Kyrgyzstan made up only 51.9% of the total population, Russians 21.4%, and other populations 26.7%. Barbara A. Anderson and Brian D. Silver, "Demographic Sources of the Changing Ethnic Composition of the Soviet Union," *Population and Development Review* 15, no. 4 (Dec. 1989): 609-656.

normal life in the republic only if all nations are equal,” the letter beseeched, expressing hope in a new Union treaty.¹¹⁵

Soon after its rudimentary 1991 appeal proposed with the Union of Civil Accord when the Soviet Union was still tentatively intact, the Slavic Foundation in Kyrgyzstan converted itself into an international public association that initiated a major resettlement plan with Russia.¹¹⁶ Six months after the USSR collapsed, the Russian Committee of Nationality Affairs supported a mass resettlement initiative and funding request coordinated jointly by the Board of the Slavic Foundation in Kyrgyzstan and the administration of the Altai Republic, a Russian republic where the Russian population (not the indigenous Altai people) was in the majority, located on Siberia’s border with Central Asia.¹¹⁷ To be conducted between 1992-1995, the proposal intended to resettle “Russian speaking” migrants from Kyrgyzstan to the “sparsely inhabited regions of the Altai Republic,” where they would establish 304 large farms and agricultural processing enterprises to sustain their livelihood in “close cooperation with the local population.” The resettlement program would give Russian speakers (it was unclear whether this included

¹¹⁵ The letter was addressed not only to Yeltsin. It was also entailed for the President of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan, Askar Akaev, and to the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the Ukrainian SSR, Leonid Kravchuk. The latter inclusion indicated that the organizations likely represented Ukrainians as well, who made up 2.5% of the Kyrgyzstan population according to the 1989 census. There were 108,027 self-identified Ukrainians in Kyrgyzstan in 1989. *Itogi vsesoiuznoi perepisi naseleniia 1989 goda: Tom 1* (Alma-Ata: Republic Information Publishing Center, 1991), 9.

¹¹⁶ By this point, “Slavic Foundation in Kyrgyzstan” and “International Slavic Foundation” were used interchangeably by the Foundation. Its name change indicated that it broadened its activities beyond the territory of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan. According to Kyrgyzstan’s law “On public associations” from February 1, 1991, public associations had to register as an international public association if their activities involved foreign countries. The law specified that the privileges of a registered (international) public association were limited to the “consolidation of peace, the development of international cooperation, and other types of humanitarian activities,” and that associations pursuing political goals were not eligible to receive financial and other material assistance from foreign states, foreign organizations, and foreign citizens. “Zakon Respubliki Kyrgyzstan: Ob obshchestvennykh ob”edineniakh.” Ministerstvo Iustitsii Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki. Accessed March 22, 2022. <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/860/10?cl=ru-ru#5>.

¹¹⁷ Self-identified Russians comprised over 60% of the republic in 1989. “Iz istorii perepisei naseleniia Gornogo Altaia.” Upravlenie Federal’noi Sluzhby gosudarstvennoi statistiki po Altaiskomu Kraiu i Respublike Altai. Accessed February 15, 2022. <https://akstat.gks.ru/storage/mediabank/Из%20истории%20переписей%20населения%20Горного%20Алтая.htm>. GARF f. 10121, op.1, d. 71, ll. 6-9.

other nationalities or Slavs in addition to ethnic Russians) the opportunity to leave Kyrgyzstan through an ethnic repatriation program of their own making with Russian state support.

More surprisingly, the Foundation was able to achieve this in Kyrgyzstan, where there was, in comparison to Moldova, little exigency. The Foundation's proposal even implied that the intention to relocate Russian speakers was more of a precautionary impulse as it cited the increasing trend of outmigration of Russian speakers from Kyrgyzstan as its main rationale. Kyrgyzstan, in fact, attempted to stem the intensified trend of emigration of the non-Kyrgyz population.¹¹⁸ Between 1991-1995, Kyrgyzstan lost 225,000 people to Russia, 197,000 of whom were identified as Russian, which made it the former republic with the second largest number of Russian out-migrants behind Kazakhstan.¹¹⁹ Between 1992 and 1994, its president, Askar Akaev, even publicly stated that he supported a treaty with Russia on dual citizenship, though he eventually had to abandon the idea due to parliamentary opposition.¹²⁰

The Russian Committee of Nationality Affairs decided in favor of the repatriation program organized by the Slavic Foundation of Kyrgyzstan without serious threats to the Russian population there.¹²¹ Developed in conjuncture with the Altai Republic, the proposal simply presented a solid resettlement plan that addressed anticipated problems for the Russian state during a period when migration processes from Central Asia to Russia were intensifying. Facilitated by the Slavic Foundation, the resettlement project in Kyrgyzstan involved bringing thousands of Russian speakers to the Altai Republic in a sustainable manner. The Foundation's proposal envisioned a "compact residence of resettlers engaged in entrepreneurial, economic and industrial activities," and a self-sustenance plan through agricultural production. Overall, the

¹¹⁸ Zevelev, *Russia and its New Diasporas*, 118; 150.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 118.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 136-137.

¹²¹ GARF f. 10121, op.1, d. 71, ll. 6-9.

repatriation project would involve 1,404 laborers and a general population of 5,616 people. It entailed only the essentials, which included: 1,404 newly constructed homes, one school, two kindergartens, four medical stations, water and heating networks, a woodworking plant, a brick factory, and a mortar and concrete base. By entering into agreement with the Slavic Foundation in Kyrgyzstan, Russia would ensure mass ethnic repatriation that was, at least, regimented, productive, and that it had pre-approval by local and regional authorities. Furthermore, it could uphold a favorable image for Russia as a state capable of producing results for its “compatriots.” Within several months, as previously discussed, the Committee of Nationality Affairs would vocalize its concern over the growing hold of the “Russian question” in the public and the need to act on Russian diasporas. From the Russian perspective, the resettlement plan also involved sparsely inhabited areas that would not infringe on the local population—a concern for Russian regional and federal organs. Better still, it would develop these lands, and logistical operations with the Altai Republic were already resolved.

Critically, the Slavic Foundation negotiations with the state thus offered a chance for impoverished groups, as well as those with questionable legal rights to Russian citizenship, the chance to move to Russia. Financial means played a considerable role in the ability to repatriate to post-Soviet Russia. Many letter writers from the USSR’s former southern tier stressed how the meager size of their pensions and savings prevented their (desired) repatriation. By the late 1990s, some of these letters continued to evoke Russian patriotism to ask for larger pensions for their security, money to relocate, and even for apartments in Russia. In representing the interests of Russians in former Soviet republics, the Congress of Russian Communities (which by the end of the 1990s had formed a division in Armenia) also received such petitions and, in providing an

intermediary service, asked for Russian state organs to support its co-ethnic petitioners in the former Soviet republic.¹²²

Raisa, a Russian citizen, for instance, complained that she only received 7 US dollars per month for her pension in Armenia.¹²³ She asked for a pension comparable to those Russian citizens in Russia received. “Resolving this problem will be a concrete help for your compatriots,” Raisa G. beseeched, addressing Boris Yeltsin. “There’s not that many of us here,” she stated, “but, at least we will all know that a great Russia is behind us.” An eighty-year-old WWII veteran living in Erevan declared that Russia was his homeland (*Rodina*); he asked for the provision of an apartment in Moscow as his pension was only 15 US dollars per month.¹²⁴ He had volunteered to defend Moscow against the Nazis and was wounded doing so, he entreated, but now could not even afford an apartment there. Similarly, Viktoria K. from Tbilisi proclaimed that she was of those who “lost their homeland overnight and were forced to live as foreigners in independent Georgia.”¹²⁵ Her savings also “literally disintegrated (*bukval’no zgareli*)” overnight due to the reforms. She proclaimed that she was ready to partake in the Russian revival, writing, “Dear Boris Nikolaevich, give me back the money I earned so that I can return to Russia to participate in the building of a bright future.” She begged, desperately and somewhat naively, “If our homeland doesn't have money (I understand it's hard to collect taxes from fledgling factories) then at least give me a one-room apartment in Russia.” Throughout the 1990s, only 350,000 out of 11 million (registered and unregistered) migrants (3%) were fortunate enough to receive some housing support from the state.¹²⁶

¹²² GARF f. 10158, op. 7, d. 44, 7-9 (Appeals of foreign citizens on pension provision, social benefits, and compensation payments for 1999 from Azerbaijan and Armenia).

¹²³ Pseudonym is used. GARF f. 10158, op. 7, d. 22, ll. 3-5 (Appeals of foreign citizens on pension provision, social benefits, and compensation payments for 1998, Armenia).

¹²⁴ GARF f. 10158, op. 7, d. 22, ll. 18-19.

¹²⁵ GARF f. 10158, op. 7, d. 24 ll. 7-8.

¹²⁶ Korobkov, “Post-Soviet Migration,” 89.

In Kyrgyzstan, like Kazakhstan, many Russians also lived compactly outside of diverse urban centers, so the Slavic Foundation's initiative would likely allow rural Russian speaking villagers from Kyrgyzstan (like members of the vegetable farm collective) to relocate collectively with their communities. As previously discussed, late perestroika policy toward "refugees" entailed limiting or denying collective resettlement, especially in some of the most desired and population dense regions of central and southern European Russia.¹²⁷ In fact, the state actively sought to house refugees outside of European Russia, which presented dual benefits for the state: preventing friction with local populations in highly populated regions and obtaining new labor forces in labor deficient areas. The Federal Migration Service, which was developed in June 1992 continued this policy, considering compact settlement as "potentially provoking" rather than resolving problems of socio-cultural integration. Sometimes, regional authorities took measures into their own hands to remove compact settlers. For instance, local authorities in the Kursk District of Stavropol' Krai resorted to transporting Meskhetian Turks by train from Mineral'nye Vody to Azerbaijan, likely deemed the republic that had the closest affiliation to the Turkic-speaking peoples.¹²⁸ In desiring to settle compactly, they had formed a "tent city" of settlers, despite a moratorium on *propiskas*. The same actions were taken against Kurd arrivals.

Like the Slavic Foundation of Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Culture Association in Uzbekistan, formed on May 8, 1992, after the break-up of the Soviet Union, argued for the need for repatriation programs without a pressing threat of interethnic conflict in Uzbekistan. Islam Karimov who came to power as the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan

¹²⁷ See Pilkington, *Migration, Displacement*, 69.

¹²⁸ Sergei Riazantsev, *Sovremennyi demograficheskii i migratsionnyi portret Severnogo Kavkaza* (Stavropol: ISPI RAN, 2003), 130-131.

immediately after the Fergana Valley Massacre when his predecessor Rafik Nishanov was removed, used the interethnic issue there to quell democratization and economic liberalization. After securing the Uzbek presidency and substituting the People's Democratic Party for the Communist Party, Karimov sought to enforce "discipline and order" by suppressing the Islamic opposition.¹²⁹ Karimov also attempted to stave off continued out-migration from the country, which was detrimentally affecting Central Asian countries that lost many specialists. Karimov outlawed parties with Islamist messaging, including the group *Birlik*, and instituted a new constitution, which banned political parties based on "nationalistic or religious principles." For these reasons, Karimov became especially popular among non-Uzbeks, who formed 30% of the population and who were threatened by the prospect of interethnic conflict provoked by nationalist, pan-Turkic or Islamic rhetoric. In neighboring Tajikistan, tensions between the government, represented by the former General Secretary of the Communist Party, Rahmon Nabyev, and the Islamist opposition escalated into war when the opposition seized power from the Tajik Supreme Soviet. As a result, tens of thousands of refugees sought asylum in Uzbekistan and other neighboring countries. Despite Uzbekistan's attempts to quell radical movements, the Association's President, V. Emel'ianov, claimed, that there were "objective realities" that would isolate the Russian population economically and culturally irrespective of the politicians' current declarations of prioritizing the "human rights of any nationality."¹³⁰ Despite these enforcements against ethno-nationalism in Uzbekistan in the early 1990s, the Association argued, the fear of

¹²⁹ Karimov installed a travesty of a multi-party system and maintained brutal control over Islamic practice. Under Karimov's regime, even the wearing of religious clothing could result in jail-time. Dilip Hiro, *Inside Central Asia: A Political and Cultural History of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkey, and Iran* (New York: Overlook Duckworth, 2009), 148-178.

¹³⁰ GARF, f. 10121, op. 1, d. 130, ll. 15-40.

becoming refugees made their “desire to leave for Russia” understandable due to the “unfolding situation in Central Asia.”¹³¹

Though the Association’s title suggested its activities centered on promoting Russian culture, it in fact envisioned more far-reaching goals. The Association claimed to represent a sizeable number of Russians and Slavs who were potential “returnees” to Russia during a period in which Russia’s sociopolitical climate was turbulent. The Russian Culture Association in Uzbekistan drew on the reportedly tenuous position of Russians or Russian speakers in the former Soviet space, which was increasingly seen as a serious problem for Russia’s emergent identity and image as a nation-state. The Association did not propose to directly facilitate mass resettlement, but rather to provide auxiliary tools and resources necessary for Russians in Uzbekistan to make their move successful, and it also called on significant investments in Russian and Slav dominated spheres in the republic.¹³² The Association, it argued, could stem unmitigated migration flows among the demographic group most likely to migrate to Russia, and simultaneously, ensure that Russian and Slavic migrants reentered their historic homeland not as “poor” refugees, who detracted from Russia’s image as a burgeoning nation-state, but as capable, proactive citizens ready to partake in building the country.

In contrast to the internationalist petitions to the state in the perestroika period, the Association posited that a Russian revival was contingent on the unapologetic embrace of Russian co-ethnics, and even more broadly, Slavs, in the former Soviet republics. The Association established itself as a potential stabilizing force in Russia’s post-Soviet development

¹³¹ Karimov would later pursue a policy of “Uzbekization” to win over the support of Uzbeks, that enforced an Uzbek language test for government officials and the use of Uzbek in higher education, which made many (including native minorities such as Tajiks) lose their jobs. These measures had to be enforced by 2005. Hiro, *Inside Central Asia*, 148-178.

¹³² GARF, f. 10121, op. 1, d. 130, ll. 15-40.

by its proposed role in facilitating migrant preparedness and socioeconomic supports for the more than 1.5 million Russians living in Uzbekistan (according to the 1989 census). With the Russian government's support, Emel'ianov wrote, the Association would ensure that prospective migrants "successfully and painlessly" make their "return" to their historic homeland— "not as refugees, but as full-blooded citizens (*polnokorvnymi grazhdanami*)" of Russia.¹³³ The Association's stress on Russians and Slavs in Uzbekistan as Russia's "full-blooded citizens" was a direct proclamation that the nationalizing Russian state should take responsibility for "their own"— co-ethnics who did not deserve to become the new victims of nationalization in Central Asia.

The Association presented a convincing argument that positioned the support of Russians and Slavs in Uzbekistan and Central Asia as instrumental to key Russian national interests. It proposed a mass Russian-sponsored development program encompassing educational, economic, and cultural spheres, which would prevent Russians in the region from leaving *en masse*. In addition, it would establish itself as an intermediary grooming those who were determined to leave, regardless, into employable future citizens of Russia. It therefore implied that by supporting Russians and Slavs, the Association could also prevent refugee flows from Central Asia by buttressing the region's weak economy and by providing Russians and Slavs with the educational and cultural institutions they need to make life there more sustainable. Through its anticipated program, the Association would help the Russian state sustain its leverage in newly post-Soviet Central Asia, the Association argued, which would also strengthen Russia politically. This included the creation of new social infrastructure, such as the establishment of a Russian National University, and training courses for young people hoping to relocate to Russia. These

¹³³ Ibid.

programs involved training in agricultural specializations for those who desired to move to Russia —presumably for the rural locales they were more likely to receive registration in according to contemporary practices.

The Association of Russian Culture in Uzbekistan attempted to construct Russians and Slavs in Central Asia as “compatriots” capable of cultivating a Russian resurgence. Registered in Uzbekistan (see image 1) as a public association, the Association of Russian Culture listed its main objectives as first and foremost the “preservation and development” of Russian and Slavic culture in Uzbekistan and the “propagandizing of its achievements.”¹³⁴ It used the latter to justify its request for five million rubles for the creation of a Russian printing base, a Russian Theater, and Russian sports clubs. The Association also forwarded many measures to improve the economic potential of the republic, which it argued would “stabilize” the region and “preser[ve] the interests of Russians,” not only in Uzbekistan, but also in other Central Asian republics. Even prior to the collapse, Central Asia had large rural populations and sizable unemployment, yet upon the USSR’s dissolution the region also struggled with the withdrawal of Soviet funds and state subsidization. It proposed the creation of jobs and different investments that were of “economic and social importance for the Russian and Slavic peoples and for Russia.”

The Association’s proposal, in fact inspired the Department of CIS Countries in Russia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs to begin to envision what a government program on “compatriots” should look like. It posited that a government program of support for the Russian speaking population in the former Soviet republics should, indeed, be oriented around “socially significant areas.” Under federal funds established for the “national revival of the peoples of the Russian Federation,” it agreed to support the Association’s educational initiatives. A Russian compatriot

¹³⁴ GARF f.10121, op. 1, d. 130, l. 19.

program in support of Russian and Slavic co-ethnics was thus developing, one that could guarantee new generations of Russian and Russian speaking communities favorably disposed toward Russia, and if need be, equip them to adjust to life in their historic homeland.

The Russian Compatriot Program: The “Russian Question” Resolved?

In the fall of 1993, the Constitutional crisis finally culminated in Yeltsin’s consolidation of power and a new constitution that granted the executive branch greater authority.¹³⁵ The Russian Federation was consequently also ready to move forward with a program of support for its “compatriots” in the former Soviet space, which it did—in greater ethno-cultural rather than civic terms. In the early 1990s, public associations, both within Russia and in the former Soviet space, had attempted to tie the fate and strength of Russia to the position of its “compatriots.” Their success in shaping the state response to the “Russian question” behind the scenes was evident in Russia’s compatriot program, which was unveiled in 1994, though it did not become state law until 1999. Slow to implement due to socio-economic problems, it proclaimed Russian conservatorship over Soviet-created “compatriots,” which in the 1990s began to reflect more of an ethno-cultural concept. The 1994 program, though mainly symbolic, accommodated most of the concerns raised by Russian and Slavic public associations, while the state continued to repatriate co-ethnics through different initiatives that granted them certain privileges. Though initially cautious, the 1994 program showed that Russia was ultimately ideologically ready for, and in some major respects had already shifted to, interventionism on behalf of its nationally ambiguous “compatriots” in the former Soviet space.

¹³⁵ See Nelson and Kuzes, *Radical Reform in Yeltsin’s Russia*, 65-71.

Public associations gave the Russian state blueprints for developing a “managed” policy for migration in former Soviet space when no compatriot program existed.¹³⁶ The Center of Russian Culture in Moldova and the International Slavic Foundation of Kyrgyzstan for instance, succeeded in receiving approval for compact settlement when migrants were restricted from doing so by federal and local practices. By the mid-to-late 1990s, there was some evidence that the Federal Migration Service was now willing to change its position on compact settlement. A clause in the amended Law on Forced Migrants included the need to “cooperate positively with migrant associations seeking to construct compact settlements.”¹³⁷ The FMS also admitted to helping finance construction for 107 compact settlements. In June 1994, the Russian Federation also mirrored and scaled up the state-funded repatriation program advanced by the International Slavic Foundation in Kyrgyzstan. It announced a state-run resettlement program envisioning voluntary settlement of up to 11 million people to sparsely populated areas of Russia in Central Russia, Southern Siberia, and the Russian Far East for people from the former Soviet republics, out-migrants from the Far North, and returning military personnel.¹³⁸ The Russian government would invest in industry and infrastructure in these regions, the provision of farming land, and building materials for the construction of housing to aid the development of small business.

It was only after the Constitutional crisis that the Russian Federation began to form an official compatriot policy, which it did, from 1994 on, through an increasing number of legislative and executive resolutions, decrees, and state programs.¹³⁹ In August 1994, the Russian Federation endorsed a state policy of “special relations” with its “compatriots” in former Soviet

¹³⁶ On the “myth” of managed migration in the Soviet period, see Cynthia Buckley, “The Myth of Managed Migration: Migration Control and Market in the Soviet Period,” *Slavic Review* 54, no. 4 (1995): 896–916.

¹³⁷ Pilkington, *Migration, Displacement*, 69.

¹³⁸ Pilkington, *Migration, Displacement*, 59; fn 16.

¹³⁹ Shevel, *Migration, Refugee Policy, and State Building in Postcommunist Europe*, 86.

space through issuing the “Main Directions of State Policy Towards Compatriots Abroad.” The latter document used terms like *rossiiane* (the civic notion of Russians) and the vague “vykhodtsy iz Rossii,” literally “those who left Russia,” which can be translated as “descendants,” “natives,” or “emigrants” from Russia. In a decree from August 31, 1994, the government established the main directions for a compatriot program.¹⁴⁰ Taking a stance on the “Russian question,” the Decree stated that “the new Russia” has opened for “compatriots—victims of historical upheavals and repression.”¹⁴¹ “If they wish,” the decree continued, they could “restore Russian citizenship and return to their historic homeland.” The Decree thus articulated the sentiments that Russian “compatriots” could return” as “citizens”—not as disgraced “victims”—a sentiment public associations and others advocating for Russians and Slavs in the former Soviet space advanced.

The Decree outlined a “compatriot” program envisioned by public associations in the early 1990s, and it presented a plan to provide Russian and Slavic public associations outside of Russia with concrete supports.¹⁴² Though careful to avoid defining “compatriots” as ethnic Russians or Slavs, the intended supports clearly envisioned them as such. The Decree committed supports to supranational (though ethicized) Russian speaking Slavic public associations, like the ones discussed in this chapter, which were oriented toward Russian language and culture. In fact, it specified support of “Russian and Slavic centers abroad” for the purposes of the “preservation and development of Russian culture.” Separately, the Decree declared the Russian Federation’s intent to work with “Russian and Slavic associations and other public organizations in

¹⁴⁰ The Decree “On measures to support compatriots abroad” from 1994 was first amended in February 1999.

¹⁴¹ “Osnovnye napravleniia gosudarstvennoi politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii v otnoshenii sootchestvennikov, prozhivaiushchikh za rubezhom (utv. Postanovleniem Pravitel’sтва RF ot 31 avgusta 1994 g. 1064).” Garant. Accessed April 4, 2022. https://base.garant.ru/1548722/#block_1000.

¹⁴² Ibid.

neighboring countries” and to “use the opportunities at their disposal in matters of support for compatriots.” The Decree also established intent to build regional associations in Russia to develop relationships with Russian “compatriots” throughout the country, which included important border cities.¹⁴³ Remarkably, the aims of the compatriot program included economic measures that involved supporting enterprises where “mainly compatriots work,” a major goal of the Association of Russian Culture in Uzbekistan.

The Decree acknowledged the unique historical moment in which many remained, perhaps involuntarily, outside of their historic homelands. The “difficulties and hardships experienced by our compatriots who find themselves abroad,” the Decree furthermore established, “cannot be indifferent to Russia.”¹⁴⁴ It declared that the Russian Federation intended to “prevent infringement of the rights of its compatriots abroad by all means recognized by international law.” It expressed “gratitude” to the governments for providing *rossiiane* “shelter,” which implied their impermanent status in other states when nation-states (and inter-state agreements) were still forming and when many were still determining their futures. The Decree, however, suggested that in the event of conflict, as in Moldova, it would intervene on behalf of its “compatriots.” It stated that the Russian state should be prepared for “conflict situations in any regions of the former USSR that threaten the life and well-being of our compatriots.”

Though the compatriot program reflected more of the state’s disposition toward its “compatriots” rather than its actual practice during Russia’s “lean” 1990s, it resembled “right of return” laws that existed in other states, like Germany, for co-ethnics.¹⁴⁵ The state also continued

¹⁴³ These included centers in Moscow and Saint Petersburg, as well as in Russia’s border cities: Rostov, Krasnodar, Stavropol’ in the Russian North Caucasus; Orenburg, Novosibirsk, and Chelyabinsk on Russia’s Central Asian border, and Pskov, Smolensk, and Kursk on Russia’s western border with Estonia, Belarus, and Ukraine.

¹⁴⁴ “Osnovnye napravleniia gosudarstvennoi politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii.”

¹⁴⁵ On Germany’s Federal Expellees Act, see: Zeveleva, “Political aspects of repatriation,” 808-827.

to support repatriation projects, which had been validated by its 1994 Decree. The loosely established compatriot program, however, continued to suffer setbacks and financial struggles. In 1998, Russia underwent a financial crisis, and it was not until 1999 that a stronger conceptual foundation for the policy (further developed in 1996) was adopted.¹⁴⁶ In the meantime, however, the Russian Federation did continue to acknowledge custody over “its own.” Some people who identified as ethnic Russians had lineages that extended back over a century outside of the Russian Federation’s territory, and therefore, they could not claim Russian citizenship or lacked the means to “return” to their historic homeland.

Though initially hesitant to encourage “return” migrations, the multinational Russian Federation increasingly supported the repatriation of people who identified as ethnic Russians—including communities separated from its territory for many generations. While other refugees and migrants, like Meskhetian Turks, who had a legal basis for citizenship and housing registration were denied it in Russia, ethnic Russians removed for generations from the Russian Federation were repatriated with the privilege of compact settlement.¹⁴⁷ Liubov’ Nikolaevna, for instance, identified as an ethnic Russian though she was of the 13th generation to live in Georgia as part of a religious community.¹⁴⁸ She repatriated to Russia in the late 1990s along with 130 families when a Russian state resolution allowed Dukhobors, Russian religious sectarians who were resettled in the Caucasus region in the nineteenth century (and were thrown into the role of colonizers) to repatriate to Russia.¹⁴⁹ “We lived compactly in Georgia,” Liubov’ Nikolaevna,

¹⁴⁶ On the political journey of the program into law, see Zevelev, *Russia and its New Diasporas*, 131-149.

¹⁴⁷ See Osipov, *Russian Experience of Ethnic Discrimination*.

¹⁴⁸ Interview with author. July 13, 2019.

¹⁴⁹ The resettlement process, which ensured that the non-Orthodox believers no longer proselytized among Orthodox Russians, began in the 1830s and lasted until the end of the century. As a form of punishment, they were banned to the South Caucasus, which was not yet pacified by Russia, to serve as experimental colonizers. See Nicholas B. Breyfogle, *Heretics and Colonizers: Forging Russia’s Empire in the South Caucasus* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2005). The Russian Federation resolution was entitled “N 1462 On measures for governmental support of

who later represented Dukhobor resettlers in the Society for Dukhobors from Georgia in Moscow, explained. Everything in their village community of Gorelovka in southern Georgia was run by Dukhobors, Liubov' Nikolaevna detailed, so they did not lose jobs or experience the difficulties she heard Russians and Russian speakers underwent in Tbilisi and other cities in Georgia. "Dukhobors know how to do everything," Liubov' Nikolaevna boasted, "from woodwork and stonework, to hunting." They built an agricultural company (*agrofirma*) in the village with 3,500 cows, chickens, houses, and their own dairy shops that produced butter, sour cream, and cottage cheese (*tvorog*). Though Dukhobors in Gorelovka did not face interethnic tensions other than the occasional complaint or inquiry about their livelihood, the 1990s brought on serious economic struggles. Their village completely lost electricity, Liubov' Nikolaevna said, in underscoring the economic concerns that made Dukhobors leave Georgia behind. Russia continued to be the "great homeland (*Rodina*)," she emphasized, "everything here works."

The resolution made it easier to get settled in Russia, Liubov' Nikolaevna recalled. They relocated compactly where they determined they could construct housing quickly, choosing land in Bryansk oblast' (which borders Ukraine and Belarus) near forests for lumber, and they established farms. The Russian government imposed no restrictions, according to Liubov' Nikolaevna, and the migration service treated them kindly. Some Dukhobor resettlers traveled to Moscow or St. Petersburg for seasonal labor for three or four months at a time to earn money (*na zarabotki*). She recalled that locals tried to assist them, and no one protested their relocation with statements like, "who are you?" or "why are you given this and that?" Some left in mixed families. Her aunt, for instance, was married to a Georgian, and they left for Russia with their children in tow. When Dukhobors began to repatriate, the few who lacked the ability to move,

agricultural Dukhobor community of emigrants from Georgia to the Russian Federation" from December 9, 1998. Osipov, *Russian Experience of Ethnic Discrimination*, 102.

including the disabled, or simply did not want to leave their historic area of settlement where their ancestors were buried, stayed behind. Few Russian schools are now left, Liubov' Nikolaevna noted, implying that most of the Dukhobor community in Gorelovka had taken advantage of the ability to repatriate.

Public associations emphasized their Russian or Slavic heritage not only to press for the legal right of Russians and Russian speaking Slavs to repatriate from former Soviet republics compactly or otherwise, but also for state sponsorship to ensure that their “return” was appropriate to what they believed their privileged status as co-ethnics should be. Between 1992-2003, 1,637,600 people became registered forced migrants and refugees in Russia, 1,392,400 came from the former Soviet republics, and over 200,000 from autonomous Russian regions.¹⁵⁰ In the 1990s migratory problems had become so widespread that a guidebook entitled *Kto i Kak Pomozhet Pereselentsam, Who will Help Resettlers and How*, was continually published in the Russian Federation.¹⁵¹ The manual was intended to serve as a household directory of resources and legal rights for the hundreds of thousands of individuals who “under pressure from nationalists” had ended up as “vagabonds” on the territory of the former Soviet Union.” In May 1999, a federal law “On the State policy of the Russian Federation in relation to compatriots abroad” was finally signed. By late 1999, Russian state organs were also working out agreements with the governments of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan to define specific forms and methods of support for “diasporas,” which included support of their “associations and organizations.”¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ Korobkov, “Post-Soviet Migration,” 69-79.

¹⁵¹ *Kto i kak Pomozhet Pereselentsam: noveishie dokumenty raz'iasneniia* (Bibliotekha “Rossiiskoi Gazety”: 1996). This release was a 17th issue.

¹⁵² Similar “cooperation agreements” had already been reached with Moldova (in 1993), with Turkmenistan (1995), Ukraine (1997) and Belarus (1999). GARF f. 10156, op.1, d. 84, ll. 115-116 (Instructions of the Russian Federation’s government on relations with compatriots abroad and documents on their implementation, Volume 1). Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s diaspora organizations representing titular natives of former Soviet republics



Figure 7. *Kto i Kak Pomozhet Pereselentsam. Who will Help Resettlers and How: The Latest Explanatory Documents*, 17th issue, 1996

In the early 1990s, diaspora public associations evoked ethno-cultural identities to win state sponsorship in a moment when these debates emerged in society and politics. The Yeltsin Administration, initially a radical reformist and pro-Western regime, gradually implemented policies that favored, fashioned, and institutionalized organizations that fostered an ethno-cultural revival. In the early 1990s, to some extent, this was influenced by public associations that sought to win support for Russians and Slavs. This was done most vehemently so by militarized Cossack organizations, which I argue in the next chapter, became a major force to be reckoned with. By the 2000s, however, rather than representing ethno-cultural ties, the term “compatriot” began to represent more inclusive patriotic notions appropriate to anyone in the former Soviet Union who sought to contribute to Russia’s growing economy. The understanding of “compatriot” in Russian policy grew so vague, that in 2010 amendments to the Compatriot

were also created in Moscow. See Ia. I. Zdorovets, *Diaspory: Predstavitel'stva natsional'nostei v Moskve i ikh deiatel'nost'* (Moscow: TSPI, 2003).

Law began to incorporate anyone who “freely chose” to identify as such.¹⁵³ It also began to reflect new realities. Temporary labor and undocumented migration grew, and ethnic Russian repatriation declined.¹⁵⁴ By the mid-to-late 2000s, forced migrants and refugees made up a miniscule percent of total migration to Russia, and migrants from the former Soviet republics began to consist more of non-Russians.

In turn, Russified former Soviet citizens—irrespective of their nationality or citizenship status—were integrated into Russia’s post-Soviet revival. In 2003, Yury Kaplun, introduced earlier, co-founded the Moscow House of Compatriots, a center to support Russian speaking diasporas that was sponsored by the Mayor of Moscow Yuri Luzhkov. He hoped to create a bridge between Russia and Russian speaking communities located elsewhere—like in Uzbekistan, where he was raised. Who is a “compatriot” to you? I asked. He explained that it was someone “who regards Russia with love, who has personally experienced Russian language and history (*cherez sebia propustil*) and understands Russia.” He described, essentially, a Russified Soviet person. In 2006, when a state resettlement program for compatriots was finally launched, the Federal Migration Service expanded the notion of “compatriots” (those eligible to obtain the right of residency in Russia) to incorporate “former Soviet citizens competent in Russian and possessing professional skills.”¹⁵⁵ By this time, forced migrants and refugees only made up .1% of the total migration to Russia.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ Shevel, *Migration, Refugee Policy, and State Building in Postcommunist Europe*, 86-92.

¹⁵⁴ Timothy Heleniak, “An Overview of Migration in the Post-Soviet Space,” in *Migration, Homeland, and Belonging in Eurasia*, 34. Self-identified ethnic Russians made up 64% of the overall migrants into the Russian federation from 1993-2000; 59% from 2001-2004, and 53% in 2005. Korobkov, “Post-Soviet Migration,” 69-79.

¹⁵⁵ Shevel, *Migration, Refugee Policy, and State Building in Postcommunist Europe*, 86-92.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 102.

FIVE

“YOU ARE NEEDED BY THE MOTHERLAND!”: THE RUSSIAN COSSACK RESURGENCE, NATION-BUILDING, AND ETHNONATIONALISM IN RUSSIA

“Oh, Russian people, where are you dashing (*kuda nesetes' vy*)? Into the depths of the abyss or into the heights of greatness?” asked the first couple of lines of the poem “Epilogue or Rebirth?” featured in *Zona Otsepleniia* (the Cordoned Zone), an anti-Soviet newspaper based in Rostov Oblast', a majority Russian region in Russia.¹ The newspaper was established in either 1990 or 1991, after Mikhail Gorbachev passed a law on press freedom.² Its last few lines implored, “at least beyond the limit of my life, may Russia rise again in glory, after the heavy fumes of its bitter pyre (*trisna*).”³ This poem, with its forlorn rhetoric, registered the growing uncertainty rippling through Russian society in the USSR's final years. Such fears about a Russian demise, would, in fact, propel a Cossack ethnonational revival bent on selectively protecting the Russian homeland. The Soviet Union's disintegration provoked widespread insecurity, but it also gave the Cossack movement public expression. For many self-identified Cossacks, the migrant crisis on Russia's southern border, the historic stronghold of Cossack culture and an important site of its revival, was a particular disgrace for Russia. Up to 1992, as previously mentioned, the Russian North Caucasus borderland (particularly Krasnodar and Stavropol' Krai and North Ossetia) received three quarters of all “refugees” from the (former) Soviet republics.⁴ Cossack organizations argued that they could buttress Russian borders, defend

¹ “Epilog ili vozrozhdenie?” *Zona Otsepleniia*. January 1991. It is not clear how long this newspaper was released. In 1989, the Rostov Oblast' population consisted of about 89.5% self-identified Russians and was less than 1% self-identified Ukrainian. “Statisticheskii sbornik: Natsional'nyi sostav naselenia Rostovskoi oblasti po dannym VPN-2002.” Rostovstat. Rostov-na-Dony, 2005. Rostov.gks.ru. Accessed February 21, 2023.

² Jeff Sahadeo, *Voices from the Soviet Edge: Southern Migrants in Leningrad and Moscow* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2019), 188.

³ “Epilog ili vozrozhdenie?” January 1991.

⁴ Hilary Pilkington, *Migration, Displacement and Identity in Post-Soviet Russia* (London: 1998), 90.

Russian and Slavic peoples fleeing what they claimed were rightfully “Russian” lands, and restore ethnonational values to bring Russia glory.

As discussed in the last chapter, the notion of Russia as a “great state” throughout its former imperial and Soviet periods was central to many within the Russian Federation and for those oriented toward it in the 1990s. Some public associations played on this idea to win support from the state. Cossack groups, by contrast, believed that they could end the perceived humiliation Russia faced by taking things “into their own hands” and directly pushing the nascent Russian state to act. The phenomenon of Russians and Cossacks fleeing nationalizing former republics, territories that many considered “native,” became a major factor influencing a veritable Cossack call-to arms. In 1993, *Za Rus’!* (For Rus’!) “A National Liberation Movement Newspaper,” founded in Rostov Oblast’ and Krasnodar Krai, popularly referred to as the Kuban, for instance, called on Cossacks with the subline: “Russian! Wherever you have been, remember: you are needed by the motherland!”⁵

These beliefs contributed to social tensions in the North Caucasus, a zone of mass immigration, particularly as economic insecurity and regional parochialism increased. While the borderland struggled to absorb “refugees” from Transcaucasia and elsewhere, regional conflicts also added to the displacement in the region (see chapter three), which became especially problematic in Krasnodar and Stavropol’ krai and the Rostov Oblast’, majority Russian territories in the North Caucasus.⁶ Cossack groups and organizations railed against accelerated

⁵ *Za Rus’!* No. 3 (1993). Krasnodar Krai, which was formed in 1937, largely corresponds to the territory of the former imperial Kuban Oblast’, and the Kuban is popularly applied to the Krai to this day. On the formation of Soviet Krasnodar Krai, see “O razdelenii Azovo-Chernomorskogo kraia na Krasnodarskii Krai i Rostovskuiu Oblast’.” Konsul’tantPlus. Accessed February 21, 2023.

<http://www.consultant.ru/cons/cgi/online.cgi?req=doc;base=ESU;n=24450#TvrqWWTzceB0iA7A>

The North Caucasian Krai was later split between the Azov-Chernomorskii Krai.

⁶ By 1994, housing issues and social tensions in the North Caucasus began to deter some forced migrants and refugees, who shifted their destinations east. Pilkington, *Migration, Displacement, and Identity in Post-Soviet Russia*, 90. On social tensions and coerced migration in the North Caucasus from the late Soviet period to the

nationalization in the (former) Soviet space, yet many ironically reacted by policing non-Slavic migrants and espousing ethnonationalist values. Cossacks, moreover, had been a repressed community in Soviet times like many who sought refuge in Russia with the USSR's demise (e.g., Meskhetian Turks and Kurds), which made the actions of those representing the Cossack revival even more paradoxical.

In the early 1990s, as the previous chapter underscored, the perception that Russians and Slavs were the “victims” of Soviet nationality policy became an increasingly popular notion, a sentiment also distinctly apparent in the Cossack resurgence. The Cossacks, as frontier border guard communities, however, had diverse social and ethnic origins, and their relationship with the imperial Russian state had been a complicated one, with heritages of rebellion and forced settlement as well as privilege.⁷ This unique Cossack culture was also fashioned at the outskirts of empire in close contact with native populations. The Cossack revival that began with the USSR's dissolution, on the other hand, was representative of an emergent form of Russian nationalism grounded in selective protection of Russians and Slavs and the promotion of a “great” Russian state. In Krasnodar Krai, for instance, while Cossacks fought for territorial demands and to protect Russian, Slavic, or Cossack “refugees,” Cossack groups and organizations categorized other (non-Slavic) migrants as a social evil who presented a threat to the local Slavic population.⁸

USSR's demise, see chapter three. Of course, the Chechen wars and other regional conflicts in the North Caucasus, as discussed in chapter three, added to the displacement in the region.

⁷ See, for example, Thomas M. Barrett, *At the Edge of Empire: The Terek Cossacks and the North Caucasus Frontier, 1700-1860* (Boulder: Westview, 1999), and Michael Khodarkovsky, *Bitter Choices: Loyalty and Betrayal in the Russian Conquest of the North Caucasus* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2011).

⁸ *Kubanskii Novosti*, Krasnodar Krai's semi-official newspaper (before 1994 it was linked to the Krai Soviet), also published statements by Cossack leaders championing the protection of the “Krai's ethnic purity” and concerns with “Caucasian colonization.” A.G Osipov, *The Violation of the Rights of Forced Migrants and Ethnic Discrimination in Krasnodar Territory* (Moscow: Memorial Human Rights Center, 1996), 58-63.

As I argue in this chapter, Russian Cossack organizations negotiated, and attempted to shape, major questions relevant to Russia's post-Communist transformation, like borders, migration, and diasporas. More importantly, however, they molded Russia's national imaginary in critical ways. The significance of the Cossack revival to Russian nation-building, particularly migration, has been discounted by scholars focusing on the subject who have mainly come from outside the historical field and have, therefore, not incorporated archival sources.⁹ Some, for instance, have noted how ethnonationalist parties and groups were increasingly marginalized in the 1990s and struggled to derive electoral support in politics.¹⁰ They faced resistance, as Igor Zevelev contended, from those who leaned toward a Soviet identity, were in mixed families, were non-Russian, or were otherwise intellectually opposed to ethnonationalism. Extremist

⁹ As previously mentioned, scholarship on migration affiliated with the Soviet collapse has mainly excluded works based on archival research. Though the Cossack revival has received increased attention, the literature on the Cossack resurgence also largely comes from outside the historical field and does not integrate archival material. It, therefore, overlooks some of the important interconnections the Cossack revival had to Russian nation-building, especially as it relates to migration. Ian Appleby argues that Kuban Cossacks, even though they never had official recognition as a Soviet nationality, were still able to progress toward nationhood. However, the article relies on secondary sources and a theoretical approach and does not integrate the Cossack role during the migrant crisis, or their role in Russia's wider ethno-nationalist movement. See Ian Appleby, "Uninvited guests in the communal apartment: nation-formation processes among unrecognized Soviet nationalities" *Nationalities Papers* 38, vol. 6 (2010): 847-864. In 2020, Olexander Hyrb published a study of contemporary Ukrainian and Russian nationalism through the lens of the post-Soviet Cossack revival, which goes into the Putin era. However, the monograph only relies on fieldwork consisting of interviews in the Odesa region, which is limited to the appendices of the book. It does not incorporate a discussion of Cossacks and the Russian migrant problem. In addition to interviews, it relies mainly on newspapers. See Olexander Hyrb, *Understanding Contemporary Ukrainian and Russian Nationalism: The Post-Soviet Cossack Revival and Ukraine's National Security* (Stuttgart: ibidem-Verlag, 2020). Scholarship on Russian diasporas only briefly mentions Cossacks. In Igor Zevelev's *Russia and Its New Diasporas* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace), 2001, Cossacks are mentioned cursorily in connection to ethnonationalism. Literature on migration to and within Russia also has a contemporary focus and does not include a broader discussion of the Cossack revival movement and its connection to Russian nation-building and Russian diasporas. In Hilary Pilkington's *Migration, Displacement, and Identity in Post-Soviet Russia* (London: Routledge, 1998), for instance, Cossacks are briefly mentioned in connection to interethnic strife related to Krasnodar's refugee crisis. The latter is only referenced as an example of "exclusionary policies with regard to refugees and forced migrants." See also Sergei Riazantsev, *Sovremennyi demograficheskii i migratsionnyi portret Severnogo Kavkaza* (Stavropol: ISPI RAN, 2003). Matthew Light, *Fragile Migration Rights: Freedom of movement in post-Soviet Russia* (London: Routledge, 2016) discusses the Cossack policing role in the North Caucasus but does not include a broader discussion of the Cossack movement itself. Alexander G. Osipov, *Russian Experience of Ethnic Discrimination: Meskhetians in Krasnodar Region* (Moscow: Memorial Human Rights Center, 2000), a humanitarian study from the (now dissolved) Memorial Human Rights Center, provides an important examination of Cossack treatment of non-Slavic minorities in post-Soviet Russia.

¹⁰ Zevelev, *Russia and its New Diasporas*, 69-81.

ethnonationalist groups were also eventually outlawed after 1993, he notes, and their newspapers were banned. This chapter underscores how major Cossack organizations with ethnonationalist views were, nevertheless, embedded into federal and regional structures (a process that began in 1993) and influenced them widely. Though parties that supported “de-ethnicized nation building” represented the majority political voice from 1991 to 1999, as Zevelev claims, Cossack organizations espousing ethnonationalist values held significant influence over key nationalization processes at the federal, regional, and local levels. They also molded, on the ground, the boundaries of inclusion into Russia’s developing imagined community.¹¹ The epicenter of the Russian Cossack resurgence was in the North Caucasus, but it became a formidable social force throughout the Russian Federation. Its influence also spread outside of the nascent country’s borders.

The integration of Cossack groups into regional and federal structures incited interethnic anxieties not only in Russia, but also in newly independent countries. Cossacks groups and organizations intervened in geopolitical conflicts outside of Russia’s borders and fashioned others through their own provocations. This inflamed tensions in former Soviet republics, like Kazakhstan, which comprised territories that some revivalist Cossack groups claimed as “native” (and therefore artificially separated from the “motherland”), and in Moldova, where Cossack groups interceded on behalf of separatists loyal to Moscow. As we have seen, Cossack communities were also mobilized by the unraveling situation in the North Caucasus autonomous territories, where many had lived for generations, and began to flee in the late 1980s. The fact that Russians, Slavs, and Cossacks had been driven or otherwise separated from “their” lands contributed to the sense that these communities, and Russia more generally, were headed toward

¹¹ On political parties and the Russian diaspora, see Zevelev, *Russia and its New Diasporas*, 80.

colossal ignominy. Cossacks groups thus positioned themselves in the fight for Russian “greatness” that many believed could only be reconstituted through Russian ethnonationalism.

In the early 1990s, Cossacks received special rehabilitation honors from the Russian state as a distinctly repressed group. The RSFSR April 1991 law “On the Rehabilitation of Repressed Nations,” however, had guaranteed an array of measures for all nations subjected to state repression under the Soviet regime. The law ensured the right of return to historic homelands and the reclamation of them, which aggravated interethnic tensions. Citing further risk to interethnic relations and the newly international character of rehabilitation following the USSR’s collapse, the Russian Federation stalled in implementing these measures, even as it, contradictorily, continued to institutionalize and militarize the Cossacks. This provoked considerable tensions both domestically and in the nationalizing former Soviet republics.

Unlike other repressed peoples, the Cossacks, as imperial border communities, had been a symbol of the Tsarist *ancien regime* (despite their tenuous relationship with the imperial state). In imperial Russia, Cossacks received certain privileges. In exchange for military service, they were granted local autonomy, land, and other benefits.¹² This frontier life thus simultaneously provided both autonomy and dependence on the state. Viewed stereotypically as “lackeys” of the imperial regime endowed with estate privileges, the Cossacks became targets of a Bolshevik decossackization campaign during the Civil War (pursued in 1919).¹³ The Bolsheviks abolished estate privileges and implemented a policy of “indiscriminate terror against all Cossacks” characterized categorically as “unreliable” counterrevolutionaries (despite the fact that many fought for the Red Army as well as for the White Army). The Soviet campaign of

¹² See Barrett, *At the Edge of Empire*.

¹³ See Peter Holquist, “‘Conduct merciless mass terror’: decossackization on the Don, 1919,” *Cahiers du monde Russe* 38 (1-2): 127-162.

dekulakization, which stripped away holdings from *kulaks*, or prosperous peasants, further restricted the Cossack way of life, sometimes through state violence, as did the collectivization of agriculture. In 1936, the Soviet government, facing growing international tensions, removed restrictions on Cossack service in the Red Army.¹⁴ Though these state persecutions tapered, Cossack identity and culture were continually stifled until the perestroika reforms permitted a Cossack resurgence.¹⁵

The Russian Cossack resurgence, which first comprised loosely associated groups, began to feature nation-wide organizations and quasi-official militias that interposed themselves into the heart of debates on Russia's nation-building course. In the 1990s, these major Cossack organizations, mobilized by the USSR's decline, argued for stronger borders, control over the migrant crisis, and even irredentism to claim territories they maintained rightfully belonged to Russia. The Cossack movement, which mushroomed across the country, attempted to regenerate a Cossack culture of guarding Russian borderlands (repressed throughout the Soviet period), which the Yeltsin regime soon supported to secure the unstable (and newly international) North Caucasian border. The North Caucasus border region reemerged as an important center for Cossacks in the 1990s, but their revival spread throughout Russia and in former Soviet republics with extensive histories of Cossack settlement.

¹⁴ See Lewis Siegelbaum, "Rehabilitation of Cossack Divisions." Seventeen Moments in Soviet History: An on-line archive of primary sources. Accessed March 6, 2023. <https://soviethistory.msu.edu/1936-2/rehabilitation-of-cossack-divisions/>

¹⁵ There were some exceptions, for instance, the Kuban' Cossack choir became well-respected in the 1970s, emerging as a reservoir of Cossack identity in the North Caucasus. Ian Appleby, "Uninvited guests in the communal apartment: nation-formation processes among unrecognized Soviet nationalities" *Nationalities Papers* 38, vol. 6 (2010): 847-864.



Figure 8. *Za Rus!* [For Rus!]: A National Liberation Movement Newspaper, jointly founded in Rostov Oblast' and Krasnodar Krai in 1993. The tagline on the top reads, "The Lord is calling! I won't be afraid of Satan, right?" The banner on the bottom reads: "Russian! wherever you have been, remember: you are needed by the Motherland!" The newspaper was likely named after Kievan Rus, the first east Slavic state, to evoke a desire to embrace unapologetic Slavic traditions and values. On Rus' and its links to the Russian national idea, see Faith Hillis, *Children of Rus': Right Bank Ukraine and the Invention of a Russian Nation* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2013)

Importantly, non-Slavic historically repressed communities also petitioned the Russian Federation for the state supports provided to Cossack organizations. According to state reports from 1991, there were 273,000 people categorized as "repressed" who had not returned to their historic homelands—17% of the total identified as "repressed" in the former USSR.¹⁶ After the collapse of the USSR, the situation for repressed nations became more complicated as they were dispersed throughout the territory of the former Union, separated by borders of independent states. The Confederation of Repressed Nations which represented 10 other (non-Slavic) repressed nations across the former Soviet space organized to promote their rehabilitation. The historic homelands of most nations subjected to state repression were, in fact, located in Russia. Russia also became the place of refuge for thousands of Meskhetian Turks whose historic

¹⁶ GARF f. 10121, op. 1, d. 29, l. 22 (Instructions of the Council of Ministers of the RSFSR on the problems of repressed peoples and documents on their implementation. Volume 2.).

homeland was in Georgia, but who migrated, and were evacuated, to Russia after the Fergana Valley Massacre of June 1989.¹⁷ The Russian Federation contradictorily provided the Cossacks with considerable backing while failing to provide the Confederation of Repressed Nations with parallel support. Cossacks were eventually allowed to militarize, to fortify borders in different corners of the Russian Federation, and to serve as patrol units in the North Caucasus (which they continue to do to this day). Ironically, these roles gave them policing rights over migrants, some of whom, like Meskhetian Turks, also identified as repressed peoples. While diverse repressed nations pushed for increased national and cultural rights, it was the Cossacks who eventually received unprecedented backing from the nationalizing state.

Did the Cossack institutions and loosely affiliated groups that emerged in the early 1990s equate to a genuine Cossack “revival”? The Cossack culture and identity were hampered for decades under Soviet rule, so to what extent did these different groups have genuine ties to Cossack heritage and tradition? I contend that the Cossack revival movement’s authenticity in this regard was irrelevant to the importance and influence it had on Russian nation-building. In this era of political uncertainty, economic decline, and social friction, people rallied behind the Cossack national idea—something long impeded by the Soviet regime. Many began to embrace, enforce, and identify with the values long associated with Cossacks: Slavic institutions, like Orthodoxy, a “great” Russian state across its historic zone of influence, and strong, militarized borders. For the fledgling Russian Federation, the growing popularity of the Cossack movement and the vehemency of its groups (and their militancy) made it a force to reckon with—and one that it could use to its advantage.

¹⁷ Though deportations of Volga Germans and nationalities from the North Caucasus living on the territory of Russia were the largest deported groups by June of 1943, other nationalities were also deported from Georgia, Moldova, and Crimea (which became a part of Ukraine in 1954), the Baltic countries, and from around the Black Sea Coast. See Nikolai Bougai, *The Deportation of Peoples in the Soviet Union* (New York: Nova Science, 1996), 157.

The Soviet Collapse and the Cossack Resurgence

The Cossack experience of state persecution was different in comparison to that of nations subjected to deportation and internment in “special settlements” until 1957. Cossack autonomy, militancy, and attachment to land holdings—their estate privileges—made the Bolsheviks wary of Cossacks by early 1919. These suspicions were amplified by the fact that many supported the Whites (the counterrevolutionary forces) during the Civil War, even though Cossacks fighting on the side of the Red Army had opened the southern front (major Cossack regions of Russia) to Soviet incursions. Regardless, party officials ordered a policy of “mass terror” against wealthy Cossacks, those who participated “directly or indirectly in the struggle against Soviet power,” and the Cossack elite, while “middle Cossackry” was vaguely ordered to be restrained to prevent anti-Soviet provocations.¹⁸ Some Cossacks rebelled, which in at least one known case led to a bloody uprising. Tens of thousands of Cossacks, mainly from the North Caucasus Cossack Hosts (the Don, Kuban, and Terek Cossacks), escaped into exile after fighting against the Red Army.¹⁹ As a decolonization measure, between 1920 and 1922, the mass expulsion of Slavic settlers and Cossacks took place in the North Caucasus, Kazakhstan, and what later became the Kyrgyz SSR. Cossack bands and *stanitsas* (villages) within the country continued to revolt into the 1920s.

In continued worry that the Cossacks could transform into a “Russian Vendee,” the USSR Central Committee sought a solution to the Cossack problem.²⁰ In 1924, to assuage “Cossack anger at the Soviet nationalities policy,” the Politburo moved to create Russian

¹⁸ Holquist claims that it is difficult to find credible numbers for the victims of decossackization, but they numbered in the thousands, perhaps over 10,000 people. Holquist, Peter. ““Conduct merciless mass terror,”” 134-138.

¹⁹ The Don, Kuban and Terek are rivers in the North Caucasus. Shane O’Rourke, *The Cossacks* (Manchester: Manchester University, 2007), 259-270.

²⁰ Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (New York: 2001), 60-64.

national soviets for Cossack communities in North Ossetia and Chechnya. This sparked a movement for Cossack autonomy in Kazakhstan (and what would become the Kyrgyz SSR), which, in turn, generated considerable popular and elite resistance. Bowing to pressure from central authorities, however, these territories installed Russian national soviets by the end of the 1920s (for territorially dispersed Russians and Cossacks), though such territories were phased out by the late 1930s.

Collectivization and dekulakization campaigns from the late 1920s to the early 1930s, however, once again wrought havoc on Cossack communities. The Cossacks were especially susceptible to arrest and deportation under the dekulakization campaign against the (seemingly) more privileged peasantry. During collectivization, many Cossacks were generally forced to give up their land, grain, and livestock to work on collective farms while sometimes enduring devastating famine. Resistance to collectivization was widespread across the USSR. Local resistance was “extremely strong” in the Cossack regions of the North Caucasus, but it became violent in some “eastern” national regions the Bolsheviks deemed more “backward.”²¹ The regime, however, linked the failure of grain requisitions in Ukraine and the North Caucasus to Ukrainian nationalism. In providing an interpretation of the grain requisitions crisis in the North Caucasus, for instance, Soviet officials referred to “kulak sabotage” but also to the “pernicious influence of Ukrainian nationalists” conducting counterrevolutionary work from neighboring Ukraine, “especially in the Kuban,” where many spoke the Ukrainian language. According to the 1926 census, Ukrainians were the dominant ethnic group in the Kuban, Don, and Chernomorskii (which included Black Sea towns, like Sochi) okrugs of what was then the North Caucasian

²¹ Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, 291-307.

Krai.²² Officials in the North Caucasus (which like, Ukraine, contains rich grain-producing black earth soil), argued that Ukrainization “obstructed” collectivization efforts.²³

Violence escalated as part of collectivization campaigns throughout grain-producing regions, but the Ukraine and North Caucasus became the main targets of state terror. The peasantry in the North Caucasus, but especially the Kuban Cossacks, became the primary victims of state violence in the borderland. Proponents of Ukrainization in the North Caucasus were branded as nationalists who favored the “forced Ukrainization of the Russian population,” and were blamed for ruining the grain requisition campaign. Between 1932 and 1933, 100,000 people were deported from the Kuban alone, including entire villages of Kuban Cossacks.²⁴ In November 1932, over two hundred thousand people were arrested as counterrevolutionaries.²⁵ These repressions signified the state’s broader transition to ethnic cleansing of purported fifth column nations that predominated from 1933 to 1953.²⁶ Cossack military services, however, were eventually solicited out of necessity for the Great Patriotic War. State oppression of them faded thereafter, but Cossack culture remained tightly controlled. Cossacks were unable to organize, hold conferences, or establish academic journals. They were relegated to subethnic status and were not included in Soviet or the Russian Federation’s census representation until 2002.²⁷

²² M. Iu. Makarenko, “Sostav i struktura naseleniia Severnogo Kavkaza po materialam perepisi 1926 goda,” *Istoricheskaia demografiia* 27, no. 1 (2021): 15-20.

²³ There had been a Ukrainian campaign to incorporate neighboring RSFSR territory. See Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, 291-307.

²⁴ Shane O’Rourke, *The Cossacks* (Manchester: Manchester University, 2007), 274.

²⁵ Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, 300.

²⁶ Terry Martin, “The Origins of Soviet Ethnic Cleansing,” *The Journal of Modern History* 70, No. 4. (1998), 847.

²⁷ The 2002 census for the first time reflected these changes. The 2002 census showed that: 140,028 people classified themselves as “Cossack,” 62.5% of whom were in Rostov Oblast’, 12.5% in Krasnodar Krai and 14.7% in Volgograd. “Perepis’ naseleniia otrazit etnicheskii sostav Kransnodarskogo kraia.” *Kavkazkii Uzel*. October 24, 2010. Accessed February 13, 2023. <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/175954/>.

It was perestroika and glasnost', the push for democratization and the party leadership's repudiation of Soviet repressions, that enabled Cossack revivalism, and so it surfaced concomitantly with these larger social processes. Cossack groups emerged first as informal clubs (typically facilitated by members of the intelligentsia) that were formed throughout the former Cossack territories.²⁸ It was only under perestroika and glasnost that nascent Cossack groups situated in the former historic Cossack territories by the Don, Kuban, and Terek rivers began to openly form, and the revivalist Cossack movement began.²⁹ By 1990, Cossack societies, and their affiliated Cossack newspapers that soon followed suit, demanded recognition of state injustices toward Cossacks and their rehabilitation. These developments in the Cossack movement, however, soon eclipsed national groups concerned with their own respective advancement, which contributed to interethnic frustrations. The uncertain social and political climate during the late 1980s and early 1990s only exacerbated these tensions.

Cossack revivalism unearthed debates about the imperial past that triggered tensions between national groups. Prior to perestroika and glasnost, the presentation of imperial Russian history—and thus the Cossacks' role in colonization—remained filtered through the party's socialist lens. After years of suppression, certain actors pushed a narrative that relied upon a positive reevaluation of the Cossack presence in the Caucasus. In the perestroika and glasnost' era when historical issues and ideological debates were aired to an extent unprecedented in the Soviet Union, Cossack rehabilitation also became a sensitive issue.

The open resurgence of imperial memory and identity at this time provoked heated debates about the past in Krasnodar (the Kuban), a region conquered for Russia through the Cossack presence and a major site of Soviet-era Cossack repressions. In the Soviet period, the

²⁸ O'Rourke, *The Cossacks*, 281-283.

²⁹ Osipov, *The Violation of the Rights of Forced Migrants*, 64-66.

Krai enveloped a subordinate autonomous oblast' intended for native Circassians (Adygea), some of whom began to take issue with the representations of Russian colonialism that emerged in the region as a result of the increasingly lax climate of the perestroika reforms. In the summer of 1988, a collective of twenty workers from the Adygei oblast' complained that the First Secretary of the Krasnodar Krai Regional Party Committee (Kraikom), Ivan Polozkov, belittled Adygei concerns about the Krai's recent controversial activities.³⁰ The Regional Party, the Adygei group argued, had begun to favorably represent Russian imperialism, a concern they legitimately raised, but, they claimed, they had been labelled as nationalists for doing so.

The Krai's planned 150th anniversary celebration of the cities of Sochi and Tuapse, they alleged in a grievance sent to Mikhail Gorbachev, shamelessly endorsed Russian imperialism. The Adygei group had voiced opposition to the chosen date of the celebration, which corresponded to the landing of the Tsarist colonial troops on Circassia's Black Sea territory, and thus the ruthless (Russian and Cossack) conquest over the Circassian nation.³¹ The tragedy of the Adygei people's history, the group contended, was directly connected to the Tsarist colonial policy in the North Caucasus, which was an exploitation purportedly shared in the Soviet era *with* Russians as a common "memory of the people [*narod*]."³² The collective of Adygei workers (which included students, intellectuals, and artists) therefore contended that Polozkov manipulated perestroika for purposes antithetical to the party by organizing these "anniversaries" on the controversial date. In fact, they were convinced that the Regional Party Organization for the Patriotic and International Education of Workers had been behind the very idea of organizing the celebration on the contentious date. They asserted that "internationalist education" in

³⁰ RGANI, f. 100, op. 5, d. 439, ll. 1-19 (Letters from citizens of various nationalities demanding recognition of their nation, language, culture 1966-1988).

³¹ See Walter Richmond, *The Circassian Genocide* (Rutgers University, 2013).

³² RGANI, f. 100, op. 5, d. 439, ll. 1-19.

Krasnodar had been used to “undermine the friendship of the peoples,” a purpose contrary to the party’s mission. In their appeal to Gorbachev, they thus flipped Polozkov’s accusations on their head by seemingly faulting the Krasnodar Regional Party Committee of ethnonationalism. The collective wrote that they considered the Kraikom’s stance as “anti-perestroika and tendentious.”

Under Gorbachev, people identifying as Cossacks began to openly take pride in their historical role as borderland colonizers. Perestroika increasingly enabled civic engagement, which allowed groups to publicly address and organize around formerly suppressed issues, yet these processes also created contention over the representation of the reopened past. The Adygei intellectuals, for instance, addressed other recent provocations. They argued that Circassian/Adygei histories had been manipulated in the regional media. The collective proclaimed that while Adygei history had been belittled, the Russian/Cossack, Byzantine, Greek, Italian, and Turkish factors in the region’s history had been “unduly exalted.”³³ This was a sore issue for the Adygei, who had come to identify as among the country’s “small peoples,” and who made up a minority in their “own” autonomous territory in comparison to Russians. In another letter, two other Adygei intellectuals lamented that the autonomous territory’s “native people were doomed to attrition [*na razmyvanie*] and forced assimilation.”³⁴ They wrote that the interests of “small nations” were “openly trampled upon or hushed up.” In February 1988, Krasnodar TV showed a roundtable discussion on local history with the participation of the head of Kuban State University’s Department of Pre-Revolutionary History, Valerii Ratushniak. The discussion, the group of Adygei intellectuals and students lamented, portrayed the appearance of

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ RGANI, f. 100, op. 5, d. 488, l. 67-87 (Appeals to the Plenum of the Central Committee of the CPSU on the national question, letters from citizens of various nationalities demanding recognition of their nation, language, culture. February 1989 – July 1990).

the Cossacks as the first “sprouts of civilization” in the territory.³⁵ The “most outrageous fact of violation of the principles of Communist morality and ideas of internationalism,” they argued, were the existence of Caucasian War monuments commemorating Tsarist generals (like Aleksei Ermolov) who, “with fire and sword” asserted Tsarist colonial dominion over the Circassians.³⁶

These Adygei groups were thus able to take advantage of the perestroika and glasnost reforms to address a range of alleged offenses, some new and some already existing, that sparked their frustrations. In attempting to expose the purported hypocrisy of the anniversary celebrations, the group of Adygei students and intellectuals also sent a letter in the spring of 1988 to the editorship of the newspaper *Soviet Kuban*. The letter condemned those who “take advantage of the current revolutionary perestroika, glasnost and democracy,” suggesting that their goal, instead, was to genuinely adhere to these party positions.³⁷ The lengthy letter detailed how the “movement of the Adygei people and other mountain nations was a just struggle against tsardom and serfdom,” which the “Russian people themselves fought against.” This view of the imperial past, however, was not necessarily historically applicable to Cossacks in the Kuban, as many had served in the White Army against the Bolsheviks and now sought to revive a way life tied to the imperial era that had been repressed in the Soviet period. The open letter, the Adygei group hoped, would foster genuine “internationalist feelings and the strengthening of friendship between peoples.”

Contestation rose over the future direction of the region when it became increasingly uncertain in the last months of the USSR’s existence. In a petition to Boris Yeltsin in November

³⁵ RGANI, f. 100, op. 5, d. 439, ll. 1-19.

³⁶ There were specific references to several different monuments in Krasnodar Krai, including, among others, a statue for Admiral Lazarev in the Lazarevskoe village, and a monument for General Vasilii Geiman, in the village of Geimanovskaia. These were also villages named after imperial Russian military leaders.

³⁷ RGANI, f. 100, op. 5, d. 439, ll. 1-19.

1991, the newly formed Council of the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Adygea and Krasnodar Krai contended that the Muslim clergy was doing everything possible to prevent confrontation on religious and national grounds.³⁸ The restoration of the Shapsug National District for the Circassian people (that existed on the Black Sea coast from 1924-1945), they argued, would “strengthen the friendship and cooperation of people of different faiths and nationalities” in the region. The restoration of the Shapsug District was reportedly supported by various (emergent) organizations, including the World Circassian Association, the Confederation of the Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus, the Adygei-Khase National Movement, as well as by some circles in Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Israel.³⁹ The matter turned into a contentious debate at the Krasnodar Regional Council of People’s Deputies, where the Organizing Committee for the Reconstruction of the Shapsug National District declared its readiness to call on the “Shapsug people to acts of civil disobedience.” Though the Committee of Nationality Affairs believed that the reinstatement of the national district was a justified concern, there were no legal grounds for it, as, unlike the Cossacks, they were not considered a “repressed nation” (under the Soviet government) according to the April 1991 law.⁴⁰

The Soviet legacy also played a major role in disputes over territory amidst the USSR’s dissolution, and these debates penetrated the Cossack movement as well. Contestations over Russia’s nation-building direction, which climaxed in the fall of 1993 during the Constitutional crisis when Boris Yeltsin dissolved the perestroika holdover parliament, also extended to other

³⁸ GARF f. 10121, op. 1, d. 29, ll. 93-94.

³⁹ Ibid., 98-106.

⁴⁰ Circassian groups also already had “their own” ethno-national territories: Adygea and Kabardino-Balkaria, so the 1990 USSR law “On the free national development of Soviet citizens living outside their national entities, or not having them” was not applicable to them. See “O svobodnom natsional’nom razvitií grazhdan SSSR, prozhivaiushchikh za predelami svoikh natsional’no-gosudarstvennykh obrazovanií ili ne imeiushchikh iz na territorii SSSR.” Biblioteka normativno-pravovykh aktov Soiuza Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh Respublik. Accessed February 21, 2023. https://www.libussr.ru/doc_ussr/usr_16492.htm

disputes. Debates over the level of influence the (former) Soviet system should have, in fact, created a schism within the Cossack movement. In a meeting of the Great Circle of the Union of Cossacks from November 8-10, 1991, held on the eve of the Soviet Union's disintegration, many speeches allegedly evoked the need for the "internationalization of the Cossacks" in an attempt to censure "chauvinistic sentiments" and "incorrect epithets addressed toward other nationalities."⁴¹ In short, some Cossacks spoke out against rising ethnonationalism within the organization by promoting an increasingly defunct Soviet internationalism. A rift in the Cossack movement with the Soviet collapse ultimately produced two separate nationwide Cossack organizations: the Union of Cossacks of Russia, which announced the day it formed (June 29) in 1990 as the "Day of the Cossack Revival," and the Union of Cossack Troops of Russia.⁴²

What was at the essence of this split? The Union of Cossacks, considered "red," supported the perestroika holdover parliament, while the Union of Cossack Troops was dubbed "pro-presidential" and "white." The Union of Cossack Troops interpreted Cossack self-government as an institution of atamans [Cossack leaders] appointed by the President, while the Union of Cossacks desired soviets (councils) as a more representative form of authority.⁴³ The Union of Cossack Troops was also characterized by a greater militarism and a desire to "serve in the protection of order," while the Union of Cossacks, remained "skeptical" about this and preferred to focus instead on guarding monasteries and temples (*khramy*).⁴⁴

In Krasnodar Krai, a similar schism unfolded. The militarizing Kuban Cossack Army (KKV) supported the "white" Union of Cossack Troops, for example, while a separate Cossack

⁴¹ GARF f. 10026, op. 4, d. 996, ll. 5-14 (Documents on the implementation of the Law of the RSFSR "On the rehabilitation of repressed peoples" January 17, 1991 – July 14, 1993).

⁴² GARF f. 10026, op. 4, d. 996, l. 36.

⁴³ Ibid., ll. 22-25

⁴⁴ According to a Cossack specialist reporting to the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation. Ibid., 57.

organization there, the Kuban Cossack Rada, supported the system of soviets (councils) in Cossack self-government.⁴⁵ On July 11, 1992, the KKV announced in a declaration that sculptures of the “leaders of the communist regime” needed to be dismantled as “idols of a misanthropic doctrine (*idolov chelovekonenavistnicheskogo ucheniia*).”⁴⁶ Krasnodar, the KKV proclaimed, should be renamed Ekaterinodar, the city’s name before the Soviet period, which means “Catherine’s Gift,” in commemoration of imperial Russian conquests in the Caucasus under Catherine the Great. In fact, the rift between the factions grew to the extent that the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation became concerned over the possibility of civil war in the south of Russia.⁴⁷ By 1993, however, the formerly “red” Union of Cossacks petitioned the state to allow Cossacks to serve in the “construction of a new Russian army,” or Cossack armed forces, which it by then considered vital to the overall Cossack revival.⁴⁸

The law of April 1991 “On the rehabilitation of repressed nations” contributed to the momentum behind the Cossack resurgence as it had included Cossacks in its definition of “repressed nations.” After the USSR’s disintegration, two separate legal acts gave further recognition to the Cossacks. On June 15, 1992, the presidential decree “On the rehabilitation of repressed peoples in relation to the Cossacks” was passed, and on July 16, 1992, the Supreme Council of the Russian Federation passed a resolution “On the Rehabilitation of the Cossacks.” These laws declared all actions taken against the Cossacks since 1918 illegal and formally accepted the “revived” cultural traditions of the Cossacks, which allowed for the establishment

⁴⁵ GARF f. 10026, op. 4, d. 996, ll. 22-25

⁴⁶ Ibid., l. 31.

⁴⁷ GARF f. 10026, op. 4, d. 996, l. 28.

⁴⁸ GARF f. 10121, op. 1, d. 120, l.13 (Instructions of the Government of the Russian Federation on the problems of the Cossacks and documents on their implementation. Volume 1. 1993).

of self-governance in their places of compact residence. By the fall of 1992, the Committee of Nationality Affairs warned that the activities of local Cossack organizations had sharply intensified.⁴⁹ The first (tepid) phase of the Cossack revival prior to the rehabilitation acts was gone, it declared. It claimed that these state measures played a “special role” in the “radicalization” of the Cossacks—even a “lumpenization of the Cossack movement”—that began to incorporate “persons of an obviously criminal nature.” A major reason for the turn to radicalism, the Committee noted, was the “serious deterioration of the overall socio-political, economic, and migration situation in the south of Russia.”

Indeed, the majority-Russian North Caucasian territories faced a worrisome migration problem amidst economic instability, which became particularly acute in Krasnodar Krai. As early as November 1990, a plea from the Executive Committee of Krasnodar’s Krai’s Council of People’s Deputies (Kraikom) to the USSR Council of Ministers argued that the approximately 30,000 refugees from five different waves, including Russian speakers, Armenians, and Meskhetian Turks, had “infringed on the interests of the permanent population.”⁵⁰ Following episodes of ethnic violence in Uzbekistan, 15-16,000 Meskhetian Turks resettled in Krasnodar Krai.⁵¹ While a rural labor surplus persisted, a factor that influenced interethnic agitation across the southern tier, the Kraikom projected the market transition would only further complicate the situation, resulting in 5,000 locals losing their employment.⁵² Most of the internally displaced “refugees” sought housing in the resort zone, likely Black Sea towns that were popular vacation

⁴⁹ GARF f. 10026, op. 4, d. 996, ll. 22-25.

⁵⁰ GARF, f. 10121, op. 1, d. 30, ll. 49-51 (Instructions of the Council of Ministers of the RSFSR on the problems of population migration and documents on their implementation. Volume 1.).

⁵¹ See V.A. Tishkov and S. V. Cheshko, eds., *Severnyi Kavkaz: Etnopoliticheskie i Etnokul’turnye Protsessy v XX v.* (Moscow: Rossiiskaia Akademiia Nauk Institut Etnologii i Antropologii im. N.N. Miklukho-Maklaia, 1996), 159. Osipov, *The Violation of the Rights of Forced Migrants*.

⁵² GARF, f. 10121, op. 1, d. 30, ll. 49-51. On the economic causes behind perestroika’s interethnic conflicts, see: Pal Kolsto, “Nationalism, Ethnic Conflict, and Job Competition: Non-Russian Collective Action in the USSR Under Perestroika,” *Nations and Nationalism*, vol. 14, no. 1 (2008): 151-169. See also chapter one.

spots, where housing registration was already restricted.⁵³ By 1991, comprehensive legislation was making its way through the USSR Council of Ministers that would have granted “emergency powers” to local administrations with substantial in-migration.⁵⁴ In fact, the latter was exactly what Krasnodar’s Party Kraikom requested.

Letters arrived almost daily to the Council of People's Deputies, local authorities, and the media from agitated citizens, Krasnodar’s Kraikom attested, demanding “immediate departure of refugees” to areas outside the region.⁵⁵ Due to acute shortages, a rationing system for sugar, soap and detergents was implemented, while the sale of food was severely limited. The refugees, the Kraikom complained, resold the goods for profit. The Kraikom listed a slew of complications, among which was the shortage of 3,983 beds for the refugees, and the over-straining of school-systems, requiring 80% of the schools to run in two to three shifts. In March 1990, the USSR Ministry of Internal Affairs had also reported that the “native” population of Krasnodar Krai made “non-isolated appeals” to party and Soviet bodies for the “immediate expulsion [*vyselenie*] of Meskhetian Turks and migrants of other Caucasian nationalities.”⁵⁶

Local authorities began to take liberties in regulating migration, which weakened migrants’ rights. These liberties included demanding housing registration, a system that was annulled by decree in late 1991 by the USSR and the Russian Federation’s constitution in 1993.⁵⁷ By April 13, 1993, Krasnodar Krai’s administration claimed the situation had grown especially

⁵³ In 1987, legislation restricted housing registration in population dense areas of Crimea Oblast’ and Krasnodar Krai. Valery A. Tishkov, ed. *Vynuzhdennye Migranty i Gosudarstvo*. (Moscow: Institut Etnologii i Antropologii Rossiiskoi Akademii Nauk, 1998), 137-138.

⁵⁴ GARF, f. 10121, op. 1, d. 30, l. 20.

⁵⁵ GARF, f. 10121, op. 1, d. 30, ll. 49-51.

⁵⁶ GARF, f. R9553, op. 1, d. 5263, ll. 130-131.

⁵⁷ The latter laws, though they established freedom of movement and choice of residence, still provided for the possibility of emergency restrictions to these rights by law. See article 56 of the 1993 constitution of the Russian Federation, as well as the decree “O prave grazhdan Rossiiskoi Federatsii svobodu peredvizheniia, vybor mesta prebyvaniia i zhitel’sтва v predelakh Rossiiskoi Federatsii.” Konsul’tantPlus. Accessed February 13, 2023. https://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_2255/

dire on the Black Sea Coast and other places of recreation and tourism, where in addition to two million residents there were an estimated 40 thousand foreign citizens—and more than 100 thousand refugees.⁵⁸ The head of Krasnodar Krai's administration requested 4,256 police as reinforcement “to strengthen the rule of law” in the region due to interethnic tensions and an increase in crime.⁵⁹ In the port city of Novorossiisk of Krasnodar Krai, a state of emergency was established due to a “massive influx” of people.⁶⁰ In the summer of 1992, the Novorossiisk Employment Center, unequipped to process the unprecedented registration and resettlement of refugees and forced migrants from newly defined international borders, went into a special “around the clock mode” to handle the increased workload. Claiming that migration constituted a “serious threat to social-political stability” in the region, regional authorities in Krasnodar Krai passed a series of laws beginning in 1993 to stymie migration.⁶¹ Across the North Caucasus in the 1990s, laws instituting the following were passed: restrictions on the choice of residence, an introduction of quotas for entry, some form of action authorizing temporary or permanent stay, and the inclusion of incentives to encourage in-migrants to return to their place of origin.⁶² As discussed in the previous chapter, collective settlement was especially discouraged in the population-dense parts of European Russia, which included Moscow oblast' and the south(west) areas of Russia. In some cases, migrants were physically removed from these regions.

⁵⁸ GARF, f. 10121, op.1, d. 99, ll. 6-7 (The Government of the Russian Federation on the problems of the North Caucasus and documents on their implementation. Volume 2.).

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ MOGN, f. R909, op. 1, d. 5, ll. 24-27 (Fond name: State Institution “Novorossiisk City Employment Center” of the Department of the Federal State Employment Service for the Krasnodar Territory of the Federal Service for Labor and Employment, 1991).

⁶¹ See “O regulirovanii migratsionnykh protsessov na territorii Krasnodarskogo Kraia,” N. 494, Garant. Accessed February 13, 2023. <https://base.garant.ru/23922554/>. The law was passed by the Administration of Krasnodar Krai on December 23rd, 1993.

⁶² See L. L. Khoperskaia, “Regulirovanie migratsionnykh protsessov na Severnom Kavkaze.” Tishkov, ed. *Vynuzhdennye Migranty i Gosudarstvo*, 137-138.

The plight of Russians from across the country and from neighboring North Caucasian autonomous territories gave some militarizing Cossack groups, including unofficial bands, an “us-versus-them” rallying cry. Many Russian migrants (some of whom had Cossack heritage) considered themselves native to the territories from which they fled. On September 30, 1992, in the newspaper *Kazach’i Vesti* (Cossack News), the KKV announced that: “due to the emergency situation in the South of Russia and the catastrophic price increases, social and political tensions are increasing. The number of hotspots is growing. The interethnic war is already at our doorstep, its breath is burning at the borders of Russia. Tens of thousands of Russians are refugees.”⁶³ The KKV also raised concerns that borders remained fluid and that the “use of weapons had become commonplace,” all of which, it warned, was a “slow slide” into civil and ethnic warfare. The article therefore concluded that:

In understanding the complexity of the current moment and seeing no other force capable of stabilizing the situation other than the Cossacks, we declare: the Cossacks are currently the only patriotic self-organizing force in Russia that can take responsibility for stabilizing the situation in the region and in the south of Russia as a whole, and to preserve the integrity and inviolability of the southern borders of the Fatherland. The first Cossack battalion has already been formed and sent to the border...Fellow citizens! We appeal to you! All who care about the fate of Russia and the Kuban, support the fund created to save the Motherland. Only unity, consent and action can preserve peace in the Kuban and throughout Russia.

Due to what it identified as urgent problems along the southern border, the KKV rose in arms and continued to mobilize. It asked for monetary support for the buildup of its militia, which it had already deployed (supposedly on its own volition) to strengthen the border. In fact, the KKV blamed the government for taking a neutral stance in the conflicts that emerged with the USSR’s collapse to avoid vexing international powers. The end result, the KKV feared, would be a national disaster.

⁶³ GARF, f. 10026, op. 4, d. 986, l. 27.

Cossack involvement in major areas of conflict became a point of contention. Cossacks groups from Russia acting with the state's awareness, but with unclear sanction, entered the armed conflicts in Moldova and Georgia to fortify the breakaway territories loyal to Moscow (i.e., Pridnestrovie, South Ossetia, and Abkhazia), where some Cossacks lived.⁶⁴ Telegrams from Moldova reported that Cossacks acted as part of the armed forces propping up the separatist region. In 1992, one telegram from a "one-thousand person collective" in a Moldovan state farm sent to the Russian parliament reported "hired Cossacks" as paramilitary units among "other armed killers of children and the elderly" who arrived from Russia to support the separatists.⁶⁵ They pleaded for Russian support of the separatists to cease. Contrastingly, in January 1993 the Don Oblast' Army (of Rostov-on-Don) of the Union of Cossacks petitioned the Russian government on behalf of Don Cossacks imprisoned by Moldova and demanded that a representative of the Don Oblast' [Cossack] Army serve in the state commission on Pridnestrovie.⁶⁶ The organization alleged that some Don Cossacks who lived in Pridnestrovie and retained military ties to Russia were subsequently arrested by the Moldovan government and tortured "for being Cossacks."

⁶⁴ GARF f. 10026, op. 4, d. 996, ll. 22-25.

⁶⁵ GARF f. 10026, op. 5, d. 800, l. 4 (Letters, appeals, telegrams of labor collectives, public organizations of the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic, the Republic of Moldova about the events in Pridnestrovie. 1992).

⁶⁶ GARF f. 10121, op. 1, d. 120, l. 5



Figure 9. “An appeal of the Kuban Cossack Army’s administration to fellow citizens” in *Kazach’i Vesti*, Cossack News, from September 30, 1992. GARF, f. 10026, op. 4, d. 986, l. 27

Local Cossack groups also attempted to use the lack of central control at Russia’s southern borders in the immediate post-Soviet period to enforce their own order, and in some cases, to violently target non-Slavic migrants. Ironically, the migrants they targeted, in many cases, fled titular nationalization and violence in the former Soviet space—which Cossack organizations supposedly united against. Paradoxically, some Cossack groups imposed ethnonationalist and violent policing on Russian territory. On September 17, 1992, 50 people recognized as Cossacks (likely by uniform or their signature raised hat) blocked the entrance to the Krasnodar airport with their cars, stopped all drivers, and asked each of them what their nationality was.⁶⁷ According to witnesses, airport patrol simply egged them on after they forcefully removed and beat victims. During this incident, it was claimed, violence was

⁶⁷ Tishkov and Cheshko, eds. *Severnyi Kavkaz*, 161-162.

specifically aimed at Armenian migrants who fled to the region in large numbers after the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh in the Caucasus. In the same month in Rostov, local Cossacks conducted a survey of Rostov residents (mostly likely to ascertain nationality) “right on the streets,” which caused interethnic skirmishes.⁶⁸ In October, several Cossack raids were carried out in Rostov, which ended in clashes with persons of Caucasian nationality. In Rostov, reportedly, there was increasing distance between the local Don Cossacks and the nation-wide Union of Cossacks and the Union of Cossack Troops of Russia. A report indicated that they had been involved in the unauthorized seizure of goods belonging to transit passengers of “Caucasian nationalities.”⁶⁹ In January 1993, protests by the All-Kuban Cossack Army effectively blocked a decision to permit the legal registration of Meskhetian Turks in the Abinsky District of Krasnodar Krai.⁷⁰

After the Soviet Union’s collapse, Cossack groups sent propositions offering their service to stabilize Russia’s southern border. In a letter addressed to Boris Yeltsin in February 1993, the official representative of the Kuban Cossacks in Moscow, O.T Bezrodnyi, argued that migrants entered into Krasnodar territory and committed “unpunished actions with the corrupt part of the local authorities,” thus endangering Cossack and Russian livelihood.”⁷¹ The south of Russia, Bezrodnyi claimed, had been especially destabilized by large waves of Armenian migrants, due to the Sumgait pogroms and the geopolitical conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. These were mostly young people, he claimed, who used their stay as a “recreation center,” or to obtain weapons and funds. The local population’s anger, Bezrodnyi contended, was justifiable.

⁶⁸ GARF f. 10026, op. 4, d. 996, l. 28.

⁶⁹ GARF f. 10026, op. 4, d. 996, ll. 22-25.

⁷⁰ Tishkov and Cheshko, eds. *Severnyi Kavkaz*, 159. See Osipov, *The Violation of the Rights of Forced Migrants*.

⁷¹ GARF, f. 10121, op.1, d. 120, ll. 19-22.

A government-backed revival of the Cossacks along the southern border, Bezrodnyi posited, would, furthermore, consolidate the Russian population who risked further displacement, which was another factor adding to the already unstable social situation. “The need for the revival and return of the Cossack population to this region seems extremely necessary,” he wrote, “since only this circumstance can stabilize the political, economic and interethnic situation in the Krasnodar Territory in particular and in the South as a whole.”⁷² Bezrodnyi suggested that, in this period of instability, loose bands of Cossacks were choosing unfit leaders, whom he called “demagogues,” which contributed to the overall unrest in the south. Bezrodnyi thus petitioned the government to harness the potential of the Cossack movement by institutionalizing Cossacks into state service. This move, he claimed, would resolve the unruliness that currently characterized the Cossack movement in Russia’s south. Institutionalizing Cossacks, Bezrodnyi asserted, also provided an opportunity to strengthen the border, which would prevent interethnic conflicts (that also displaced Russians and Cossacks), from further deteriorating. The Russian government, impelled to seek alternative means to stabilize the region, eventually accepted Cossack proposals to militarize, despite Cossack groups’ violent and questionable actions both in the North Caucasus and beyond the country’s borders.

Defending the Fatherland: The Debate over Cossack Institutionalization

Despite citing concerns about the Cossack movement, the nascent Russian government frequently responded favorably to Cossack appeals. The Cossack movement spread to many other areas where Cossacks historically resided, or were deported to, some of which were along the Russian border, like the Altai Republic, Volgograd, the Urals, and areas in the Far East.⁷³ In

⁷² Ibid

⁷³ GARF f. 10121, op.1, d. 120, ll. 104-105.

the spring of 1992, for instance, Cossacks appealed to the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation claiming that the Katun Cossack public association, named after a river in the Altai republic, was illegally refused registration in the Altai Republic.⁷⁴ The association's mission supposedly was to promote the "spiritual, cultural values and traditions of the Cossacks." The Russian Ministry of Justice directly intervened in the case, determining that there were no legal grounds for the refusal, a decision the Supreme Court of the Altai Republic accepted.

On March 15, 1993, Yeltsin signed a controversial executive decree "On Reforming Military Structures...and State Support of Cossacks" meant "to strengthen statehood and the rule of law" in the Northern Caucasus.⁷⁵ Yeltsin's decree was undeniably a noteworthy gesture for the Cossack movement. The decree involved Cossacks within military units of the Russian armed forces, including border patrol, in support of the "fatherland." The decree was intended to centralize proliferating Cossack groups and to combine the dueling national Cossack organizations (the Union of Cossacks and the Union of Cossack Troops) into a single organization. The latter move, it was believed, would positively influence the "sovereignty and integrity of the Russian state."⁷⁶ The decree, however, caused considerable disagreement between Russia's dueling executive and legislative offices.

The Cossack movement, particularly in the North Caucasus, had already contributed to interethnic conflict, and so the decree militarizing the Cossacks became a heated point of debate. On March 23, 1993, Ramazan Abdulatipov, the Chairman of the Council of Nationalities of

⁷⁴ GARF f. 10121, op.1, d. 120, ll. 52-59.

⁷⁵ "On Reforming Military Structures, Border and Internal Troops in the Territory of the North Caucasus Region of the Russian Federation and State Support of Cossacks." "O reformirovanii voennykh struktur, pogranichnykh i vnutrennikh voisk na territorii Severo-Kavkazskogo regiona Rossiiskoi Federatsii i gosudarstvennoi podderzhki kazachestva." Elektronnyi Fond: Pravovok i Normativno-Tekhnicheskoi Dokumentatsii. Accessed February 13, 2023. <http://docs.cntd.ru/document/9006232>

⁷⁶ GARF f. 10121, op.1, d. 121, ll. 91-95 (Instructions of the Government of the Russian Federation on the problems of the Cossacks and documents on their implementation. Volume 2. 1993)

Russia's Supreme Soviet, wrote to Yeltsin in strong opposition to the decree.⁷⁷ He had received a barrage of telegrams and phone calls of protest. In contrast to what Bezrodnyi declared, Abdulatipov claimed that the institutionalization of a Cossack militia had the potential to undermine "peaceful solutions to territorial, interethnic and other problems."⁷⁸ He noted that it could inflame conflicts that were quieting down. For instance, a serious agreement was just reached in Kislovodsk, a resort town in Stavropol', over refugees and internally displaced peoples. Moreover, a North Caucasus Coordination Council was recently formed as a "permanent 'round table' of political parties and national movements," which united North Caucasian forces in opposition to extremists. Abdulatipov stressed that these negotiations were needed to resolve the interests of both Cossacks and the other peoples of the North Caucasus, where relations between nationalities were "complicated." The July 1992 Supreme Council decree "on the rehabilitation of the Cossacks," he pointed out, stipulated that the implementation of the measures listed in it should not infringe on others' rights and would not entail granting the Cossacks any special privileges.

The March 15 decree completely flew in the face of this, Abdulatipov argued. He contended that it was "hardly legitimate" to resurrect the military tradition of the Cossacks at the end of the twentieth century in a country whose "multi-ethnic composition" required the existence of "a single army, and military service by representatives of all nations, all cultural and ethnic groups on an equal basis."⁷⁹ Moreover, military formations based on class and ethnicity, he argued, would give ammunition to "extremists in the republics of the North Caucasus who have long been fighting for the same opportunity for the mountain peoples." In essence,

⁷⁷ GARF f. 10121, op. 1, d. 121, ll. 22-24.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

Abdulatipov argued that the decree blatantly privileging Cossacks was wildly irresponsible and would have serious consequences for interethnic relations in Russia. Not only would it spark widespread condemnation among other national groups, but it could also, ironically, destabilize the region the decree intended to secure.

In a letter to Yeltsin, the Deputy Prime Minister, Sergei Shakhrai, provided a remarkable response to Abdulatipov in favor of the decree.⁸⁰ He noted that the Cossack movement was already militarized—and therefore necessitated legal regulation. Cossacks were creating “territorial or armed formations” around individual atamans, he argued, “ostensibly for protection and self-defense” without any regulation. With the March 15th decree, Cossack formations would legally now have to be approved through the structures of the armed forces, the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of the Interior, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs.⁸¹ Cossacks would thus need to undergo military training, through the “general military regulations” of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation. Shakhrai argued that the Supreme Soviet recognized the right of Cossacks to serve in the armed forces and as border troops of Russia.⁸² He thus contended that the March decree would delegitimize the atamans’ haphazard military operations and would instead make Cossacks liable to central military structures. Though voluntary non-military Cossack formations were permitted through the decree, Cossack armed formations outside of the Armed Forces and border and internal troops would finally be banned.

⁸⁰ GARF f. 10121, op.1, d. 121, ll. 91-95.

⁸¹ As early as the first half of 1993, a list of Cossack formations and units of the armed forces (compiled by military personnel from among the Cossacks) was to be approved by the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Homeland Security, and the Ministry of the Interior. Cossack units and formations were to be provided with traditional names and norms for the establishment of Cossack military ranks, dress uniforms and distinctive signs. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs was considering drafting international documents to regulate the Russian Federation’s relationship with the CIS states “on the issues of the Cossacks” through bilateral negotiations. GARF, f. 10121, op.1, d. 120, ll. 41-43.

⁸² GARF f. 10121, op.1, d. 121, ll. 91-95.

Shakhrai, like the representative of the Kuban Cossacks in Moscow (Bezrodnyi), argued that the lack of Cossack centralization had intensified interethnic conflict. The Russian Cossack movement had become a “serious social force,” he noted, one that “required immediate organizational registration.”⁸³ Shakhrai thus posited that the only way to regulate the Cossacks’ fractured and potentially dangerous mobilization was to ensure that it was administered by the center. Mandated military training in a time of economic, political, and social crisis (and a weak federal government), however, did not necessarily equate to the creation of balanced military units. In 1992, the Russian Army was undermanned by 50 percent, with critical shortages in the North Caucasus.⁸⁴ It was therefore likely that the need to fill the army’s ranks contributed to Yeltsin’s decision to militarize Cossack units. “The qualities displayed by Cossacks, such as patriotism, readiness to serve the country, discipline, and efficient use of land must be put to the service of Russia,” Shakhrai avowed. Leveraging the Cossacks to protect Russia’s state border in the North Caucasus was necessary, he observed.⁸⁵ In the spring of 1993, however, the holdover parliament cited the March decree’s “incompatibil[ity] with the standards of a law-governed state” and the potential for “discrimination against the non-Cossack minority,” thereby repealing Yeltsin’s order on state support for the Cossacks.⁸⁶ It was for this reason that the Council of Atamans of the “red” Union of Cossacks switched to supporting Yeltsin, who promised to institutionalize Cossack organizations within the state. In September 1993, Russia’s Constitutional Court upheld Yeltsin’s March Decree on the State Support of Cossacks, claiming that it did not establish any “special regime” of service for the Cossacks nor any new military

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Hyrb, *Understanding Contemporary Ukrainian and Russian Nationalism*, 153-154.

⁸⁵ GARF f. 10121, op.1, d. 121, ll. 91-95.

⁸⁶ Hyrb, *Understanding Contemporary Ukrainian and Russian Nationalism*, 153-154.

formations. One month later, in October 1993, Yeltsin, employing the military, ousted the recalcitrant Supreme Soviet.



Figure 10. *Donskii Voiskovyi Vedomosti*, No. 15/59, March 1993, Don Military News Rostov-on-Don. This newspaper, titled in pre-Bolshevik reform orthography, celebrated Yeltsin's decree on the state support of Cossacks. It revived the Don Cossack newspaper title released from 1841 – 1871⁸⁷

Does the March 1993 decree reflect the Russian Federation's support of ethnonationalism as practiced by some Cossack groups and organizations? The answer to this question is complex. The zeal with which militarizing Cossack organizations proliferated across the country made them a force to be reckoned with. On the one hand, the state attempted to monitor and reign in the Cossack movement. On the other hand, it was aware of, and enabled, Cossack groups' foreign interventions, and the sometimes violent and discriminatory control regional Cossack

⁸⁷ O. O. Poplavss'kii, *Dons'ke kozatstvo iak instrument ekspansii kremliia na Ukrains'komu donbasi*. *Gileia*, no. 153 (2020): 140-148.

organizations waged to ostensibly “secure” the border from non-Slavic migrants. In a precarious moment for the country, Cossack organizations, fueled by official recognition, asserted further influence over borders, territory, and migrants. The Russian government found mutual benefit in Cossack offers to strengthen Russia’s borders, to supply military conscripts, and to revive a patriotic (and Slavic-oriented) culture precisely when national cohesion was faltering. The nascent Russian state, in other words, chose to co-opt Cossacks for the purposes of nation-building, rather than fight against them. By the summer of 1993, 13 Cossack units and 63 Cossack communities were created in Russia, including the Don Cossack Army, the Kuban Cossack Army, the Terek Cossack Army, and the Siberian Cossack Army.⁸⁸ In December of 1993, Russia’s Defense Ministry moved to acknowledge Cossack support, and issued another directive in which the Cossacks were promised that they would serve in combined army-units, airborne Cossack formations, and Cossack *spetsnaz*, or special Cossack military forces.⁸⁹

As part of the effort to secure Russia’s newly international borders, the government supported the Union of Cossacks’ entrenchment of para-military services on other Russian borders. In September 1993, for instance, A.G. Martynov, the Ataman of the Union of Cossacks, appealed to the Secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation to fund the resettlement of Cossack communities to the Pskov Region of Russia, bordering the Baltic states.⁹⁰ The Union of Cossacks entered into a partnership with the local government of the Pechora district entitled “Outpost” for which they would receive land for farming in exchange for providing assistance to the border guards. Five families displaced from Chechnya had already been resettled there. By January 1994, the Federal Migration Service (FMS) announced it was

⁸⁸ GARF f. 10121, op.1, d. 120, ll. 104-105.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ GARF f. 10121, op.1, d. 122, l. 78 (Instructions of the Government of the Russian Federation on the problems of the Cossacks and documents on their implementation. Volume 3. 1993).

ready to support the “Outpost” partnership. The FMS would provide interest-free loans for housing, while “socially unprotected categories of forced migrants” would receive free housing.⁹¹ In this way, the government used Cossack forced migrants, many of whom began to flee Chechnya in the late 1980s, to its benefit by ensuring that its borders had auxiliary controls, and symbolic and strategic displays of security. Similar supports existed for Cossacks in the Far East, at the opposite end of the country. In September 1993, the Council of Ministers reacted favorably to a proposal from the Ataman of the Ussuri Cossack army to develop the Primorskii Krai borderlands in the Russian Far East.⁹² One of the state benefits for this proposal, the Council of Minister’s Deputy Minister proclaimed, is that it would “stop the penetration of a large number of Chinese and Koreans into the territory,” which was a problem the Ussuri Cossacks (the Ussuri River separates the Russian and Chinese border) frequently reported to the state.

Into the late 1990s, encounters involving Cossacks in Krasnodar Krai and Meskhetian Turks, who struggled to obtain housing registration in the territory, were particularly tense. During the Soviet period, most Meskhetian Turks had been unable to “return” to their place of origin in Georgia despite many attempts to receive approval to do so.⁹³ After the Fergana Valley Massacre, 17,000 Meskhetian Turks were evacuated from the region to parts of central Russia, where locals sometimes received them poorly, compelling them to move on. Within the year, more than 90,000 Meskhetian Turks had fled Uzbekistan, while continued “pressure” on Meskhetian Turks to leave Uzbekistan was reported up to April 1990 by the Supreme Soviet’s newly created Committee on Nationality Policy and Interethnic Relations.⁹⁴ Many Meskhetian

⁹¹ Ibid., 83.

⁹² GARF f. 10121, op. 1, d. 122, l. 81.

⁹³ See “Iusuf Sarvarov i dvizhenie meskhetinskikh turok za vozvrashchenie na rodinu,” *30 Oktiabria*, no. 40 (2004).

⁹⁴ Sergei Riazantsev, *Sovremennyi demograficheskii i migratsionnyi portret Severnogo Kavkaza*, 129-142.

Turks had established kinship networks in Krasnodar Krai since the 1970s, along with Crimean Tatars and Kurds, while the region was also closer in climate and proximity to their historic homeland.⁹⁵ Eventually about 15-16,000 Meskhetian Turks, as previously mentioned, relocated to Krasnodar Krai, though the territory restricted in-migration and residency. The Russian Constitution and the federal law “On the Right of Citizens to Free Travel...” from June 1993 did not vest any federal legislative or executive bodies with powers to oversee freedom of movement and so it turned a blind eye to the system of migration control in Krasnodar and elsewhere that were not brought in compliance with federal law.⁹⁶ Though unconstitutional, the *propiska* system continued to run in practice into the 1990s (and is still extensively employed to this day). The *propiska* became so widely implemented that by 1998 social service centers in the city of Krasnodar, which were established in 1994 to assist underserved groups, including forced migrants, were not accessible to those without a Krasnodar *propiska*.⁹⁷

Cossack groups, appropriated into local and regional power structures in the majority Russian regions of the North Caucasus, continued to police migrants on a selective basis by using the *propiska* system to legitimize the expulsion of non-Slavic newcomers. In addition to one’s place of birth, housing registration, as discussed in the previous chapter, was used to certify permanent residency de facto, and therefore, determined the de jure right to Russian citizenship in the wake of the USSR’s disintegration. Those who fled conflict in the former Soviet republics to territories like Krasnodar Krai that systematically denied permanent housing registration were consequently also denied an immediate claim to Russian citizenship, which legitimized them as “foreign.” In a meeting at the Krymsk town Cossack Circle in January 1994,

⁹⁵ Pilkington, *Migration, Displacement*, 93; Oral interview with author, January 18, 2022.

⁹⁶ See Osipov, *Russian Experience of Ethnic Discrimination*, 94-106.

⁹⁷ ADMK, f. R49, op. 1, d. 8, ll. 104-113; ADMK, f. R49, op. 1, d. 12, l. 140.

Cossacks announced that the “Slavic population of the district is brought down to the position of slaves” while “criminal” “refugees” were “leaders of the shadow economy,” who moved in a “continuous flow to the district.”⁹⁸ The Cossack circle declared that “with the connivance” of district leaders and law securing bodies, a large-scale registration of “foreigners” was under way.

Mobilized by Yeltsin’s federal backing, some Cossacks began to conduct raids to “secure” the North Caucasus border in concert with local officials. This marriage between Cossack institutions and local governments was embodied by A.S. Fedenko, for instance, who served as both the head of administration of Abinsky district and as its former district Cossack Ataman. In 1994, he labelled all criminals in Krasnodar Krai as “strangers from Transcaucasia.”⁹⁹ The local militia began to incorporate Cossack groups to conduct raids on non-Slavic migrants. In March 1994, a group of about twenty Cossacks together with the head of the militia “inspected” a total of 22 houses, for example, which led to the injury of six people. Alishanov Nureddin, one of the victims of the raid, stated that Cossacks tore up his temporary residence, and told him to leave within 10 days, which they declared was an order decided at a “Cossack meeting.” About 12 men broke into Zakhaddin Safarov’s house and demanded to see his family’s internal passports, which Zakhaddin said he would produce only in the presence of the head of militia (who had already moved on to “inspect” the local dance club). The Cossacks beat him and his wife and strangled his 17-year-old son. When Zakhaddin’s eldest son struck one of the Cossacks to intervene, they threatened to kill him. Criminal cases were filed against the group of 20 Cossacks, but the Meskhetian Turks involved were pressured to withdraw their claims. A Cossack individual even arrived from Kyrgyzstan declaring that Cossacks would “unleash new bloodshed” if they continued to pursue the lawsuit.

⁹⁸ Osipov, *The Violation of the Rights of Forced Migrants and Ethnic Discrimination in Krasnodar Territory*, 64-67

⁹⁹ Ibid.

On April 19, 1994, the Krasnodar Administration passed a law “On extraordinary measures in respect to the struggle with criminality” that gave members of Cossack organizations the right to serve as officers of law-enforcing bodies, therefore approving, on a regional level, the violent persecutions of migrants that Cossacks were implicated in.¹⁰⁰ Cossacks continued to carry out raids to inspect passports, and to conduct home searches and roundups at marketplaces. These violent acts became part of an increasingly common practice, which Cossack groups also committed in neighboring Stavropol’ Krai and Rostov Oblast’. On June 19, 1995, the Council of Atamans of the Ekaterinodar (Krasnodar) division of the KKV declared that “persons of Caucasian nationality” who lived in the area illegally were ordered to leave the city by July 1, 1995 “otherwise the Council of Atamans would not be responsible for any actions taken by Cossacks.”

Of course, not all Cossacks were antagonistic or discriminatory, and even in historically prominent Cossack communities, members of the host society displayed broad responses to migrants. Though many Cossack groups ordained with a policing role were hostile and occasionally violent, some were chastised for their behavior. In a municipal market in Abinsky in 1995, for instance, locals were seen defending the Meskhetian Turk targets of a Cossack raid to inspect documents.¹⁰¹ When Mila, a Russian speaker and Meskhetian Turk, relocated permanently to Krasnodar Krai from Tashkent in 1998 to join her family, some of whom had been displaced from Uzbekistan following the Fergana Valley Massacre, she noted that she had been pushed in line, mocked, and othered in crowded areas, while neighbors who became more

¹⁰⁰ For many more cases of Cossack-related assaults on migrants in Krasnodar, see: Osipov, *The Violation of the Rights of Forced Migrants and Ethnic Discrimination in Krasnodar Territory* and Osipov, *Russian Experience of Ethnic Discrimination*.

¹⁰¹ Osipov, *The Violation of the Rights of Forced Migrants and Ethnic Discrimination in Krasnodar Territory*, 52-67.

familiar were kind and their kids became friends.¹⁰² She still felt that she belonged in the local community; it felt familiar (*svoi*). However, her family was sometimes treated as foreigners, and tense incidents would occur in everyday spaces. Cossack groups, Mila described, would patrol at random. Though there were many episodes, she recalled two more specifically. One incident occurred when her nieces were playing, and another incident happened at night. Both encounters resulted in the demand for documentation, which they had luckily been able to purchase through bribes. Mila, for instance, paid \$7,000 to receive a residence permit for herself and her children. As a result of such dealings, however, they were labelled as black-market criminals, which validated their exclusion. “You were a guest, now leave!” some Cossacks, she recalled, yelled. Still, in the innumerable situations when Mila’s non-local and non-Slavic identity was revealed to strangers, usually due to a request for documentation, discrimination was often the result. In Krasnodar, Meskhetians Turks, Mila lamented, were denied wedding venues, jobs, schooling, even “a spot at the market,” which they could contest only through bribes, as many were denied the status of legitimate residents.

In Krasnodar, this discrimination continued into the 2000s, when waves of Meskhetian Turks left for the US as refugees, and when, for the first time, “Cossack” became a separate ethnic category on the census. In a survey of 1,688 Meskhetian Turk families from 2003, representing 8,524 people, only 52.4% had been able to obtain Russian citizenship, and less than half (47.7%) reported “normal relationships” with Cossacks.¹⁰³ In Krasnodar Krai, Cossack nationalism continued to dovetail with the state during the administration of Alexander Tkachev,

¹⁰² Oral Interview. December 2017.

¹⁰³ V.N. Petrov and V.I. Okhrimenko, “Obshchina turok-meskhetintsev v Krasnodarskom Krae: Cherty sotsial’nogo portreta” (Krasnodar: 2003). The report was funded by the Minister of Nationality Affairs of the Russian Federation, the Sociology Department of Kuban State University, and the Administration of Krasnodar Krai. It was sent to the author by V.N. Petrov.

who became the governor of the region from 2001 to 2015.¹⁰⁴ In a speech, Tkachev, with fervor, said, “you visited, now it’s enough. Go home, to Turkey, to Georgia, etcetera.”¹⁰⁵ In 2004, Mila fled the post-Soviet space altogether to finally arrive in the United States as a refugee.

Some transregional migrants, however, also alleged that they were received poorly by Krasnodar Krai locals. In the early 2000s, Iu. M., a forty-five-year-old driver, ended up in a psychiatric clinic in Krasnodar Krai after leaving Karachay-Cherkessia, where he was born.¹⁰⁶ He felt it had become unsafe to live in his birthplace and that it offered few prospects. His “rosy expectations” of life after relocation were turned upside down by disappointment regarding the local population’s reactions to new arrivals when looking for work and solving other social problems. Iu. M., whose nationality was unclear, felt worthless, “especially in relations with representatives of other nationalities,” which likely implied that he was not ethnic Russian (the majority nationality in Krasnodar Krai). All this caused “resentment, irritability, sleep disorders, increased fatigue,” as conflicts within his family, who relied only on his pension for income, increased. Iu. M. ultimately blamed himself for not being able to provide for them, while fearing for the fate of his children. Iu. M. resorted to psychiatric help when his wife threatened him with divorce.

¹⁰⁴ Osipov, *The Violation of the Rights of Forced Migrants and Ethnic Discrimination in Krasnodar Territory*, 61.

¹⁰⁵ The date of the video is unclear. In video footage from the Russian channel NTV, “Vragi Naroda.” NTV Kanal. <https://ok.ru/video/321848671>

¹⁰⁶ Marina Vladimirovna Ivanova, “Psikhicheskoe zdorov’e migrantov (klinicheskii, sotsial’no-psikhologicheskii i reabilitatsionnyi aspekty).” Ph.D. Dissertation, Rossiiskaia Akademiia Meditsinskikh Nauk Sibirskoe Otdelenie. (Tomsk: 2007), 90-92.



Figure 11. The weekly Cossack procession in Krasnodar by the Cossack monument at the Krai's Regional Administration Building. Photo taken by the author. July 2019

The Post-Soviet Russian-Cossack Diaspora and Cossack Irredentism

The Cossack question stoked considerable international tensions with the USSR's collapse, and a main cause of this was Russian state support of Cossack militarization. As previously discussed, Yeltsin's controversial March 15, 1993 decree (upheld by Russia's Constitutional Court) legally integrated Cossacks into the federal structures of the armed forces, the Ministry of Defense, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Cossack leaders demanded even further government concessions from the Russian Federation, however. To represent Cossack and Russian diasporas, some Cossack organizations lobbied the government for an active role over "all negotiations" pertinent to former Soviet space.¹⁰⁷ Though this request was ultimately denied, the Yeltsin government did broaden Cossack integration into the Russian government, even as the Cossack revival became a sensitive issue in Russia and elsewhere in the former Soviet Union.

¹⁰⁷ GARF f. 10121, op. 1., d. 120, l. 33.

What compelled the Russian Federation to enact these measures? The federal government struggled to contain the social, economic, and political problems proliferating across the country. Russian federal space was fragmenting. Regional and local leaders, oligarchs, and other “big actors” bought up state property from the collapsed state, while semi-legal and criminal organizations gained power and influence against a weak center—what Vladimir Shlapentokh referred to as the feudalization of Russia during the 1990s.¹⁰⁸ The Cossack cause arguably gave Yeltsin a unifying national concept to reclaim and strengthen the state’s legitimacy, and a national idea linked to Russia’s historic zone of influence. The Cossacks, tied to Russian historical tradition, offered a way to revive patriotism, a stronger military, and fortified (if not expansionist) borders, all necessary for the emergence of a strong, centralized Russian state. As military analyst V. Dudnik pointed out in 1993: “the Cossacks are part and parcel of Russia’s spiritual revival.”¹⁰⁹ This fusion between the Cossack resurgence, the state, and the country’s cultural ethno-national revival was indeed apparent. In July 1993, the Russian Ministry of Press and Information organized a “long-term” television campaign called the “Cossack Circle” to “intensify” the “propaganda” of Cossack historical traditions and customs, which included their “patriotic deeds and exploits in the name of Russia’s prosperity and protection.”¹¹⁰ The television campaign was designed to solicit funds to “help the needy” and “finance the construction and revival of Cossack villages, farms, the restoration of temples, and Cossack monuments.”¹¹¹ The Yeltsin administration even established a State Committee for Cossack Affairs to “ensure” that

¹⁰⁸ See Vladimir Shlapentokh and Joshua Woods, *Contemporary Russia as a Feudal Society: A New Perspective on the Post-Soviet Era* (New York: 2007). On the growing autonomy of regional authorities, see also Anastassia V. Obydenkova and Alexander Libman, *Causes and Consequences of Democratization: The Regions of Russia* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015).

¹⁰⁹ Hyrb, *Understanding Contemporary Ukrainian and Russian Nationalism*, 153-154.

¹¹⁰ GARF f. 10121, op. 1, d. 121, l. 30.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

Cossack organizations had a seat at the table in state bodies pertinent to military, land, and other administrative concerns.¹¹²

In the early 1990s, Cossack organizations representing Cossacks outside of Russia (primarily in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, where there were large and compact Cossack and Russian speaking populations) demonstrated against the perceived precarious situation of Cossacks in former Soviet republics. In November 1991, the Ataman of Kyrgyzstan Cossacks “raised alarm” at the Great Circle of the Union of Cossacks over interethnic tensions that could turn many into refugees.¹¹³ In February 1992, a Small Council for the Union of Cossacks was held in Moscow in which major items on the agenda included Cossacks outside the borders of the Russian Federation.¹¹⁴ The Russian State Committee for Nationality Affairs conceded that Cossack compact settlements outside of Russia were in “the most difficult” situation as their “traditional, cultural and historical ties were with Russia.” The Committee noted that some were unwilling to accept non-Russian citizenship, which was aggravated by the “ignorant (*negramotnoe*) approach by local authorities and “most national cadres” who did not consider “the interests of the Russian speaking population.” All of this, it declared, increased interethnic tension and social instability. It reported two main trends among Cossacks in the former Soviet space: 1) migration to Russia, which depended on one’s economic means, and 2) the defense of compact settlements “by all means,” which included the arming of these communities.

The Council of Atamans of the Union of Cossacks became especially vocal about perceived discrimination toward Cossacks in the former Soviet republics and wrote to Russian

¹¹² In accordance with the decree “On the rehabilitation of repressed peoples in relation to the Cossacks” dated June 15, 1992, and the resolution of the Supreme Council of the Russian Federation “On the Rehabilitation of the Cossacks” from July 16, 1992. GARF f. 10121, op. 1., d. 120, l. 29.

¹¹³ GARF f. 10026, op. 4, d. 996, ll. 7-10.

¹¹⁴ GARF f. 10026, op. 4, d. 996, ll. 1-4.

organs on behalf of Cossack communities outside of Russia. In August of 1992, the Council of Atamans of the Union of Cossacks of the Near Abroad, a branch of the Union of Cossacks focused on former Soviet space (colloquially referred to as the “near abroad”), declared that the Cossack revival was hampered in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.¹¹⁵ Here, the organization detailed, the Ural, Siberian, Semirechye (Seven Rivers) Cossacks, and other Cossack families deported to these republics during the Soviet period lived compactly. After the fall of the USSR, the Council proclaimed, “an undisguised anti-Russian and anti-Cossack policy” was pursued to create “mono-ethnic states.” The Kyrgyz and Kazakh governments, they contended, “took a position of complete rejection” of the Cossacks. It demanded that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs adopt additional protocols defining the status of Cossacks in the former Soviet space and that the parliaments of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan “immediately adopt the legal status of the Cossacks” on the territory of their republics, and laws on the rehabilitation of the Cossacks. In January 1993, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Committee for Nationality Affairs similarly received a telegram from an Ataman of the Kuban Cossacks, who claimed that the Kyrgyzstan government banned the registration of the Union of the Semirechye Cossacks, and who went as far as to call it a step in the direction of an “obvious genocide against the Cossacks by the leadership of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan.”¹¹⁶

Many Cossacks claimed the territories in which they historically resided and, in some cases, where they still lived compactly in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan as native, which stoked their call for further Russian intervention. In February 1993, the Union of Cossacks argued for a more assertive Russian policy in former Soviet space stating that that the State Committee of Nationality Affairs “failed to cope with the tasks assigned to it” as thousands were “falling

¹¹⁵ GARF f. 10121, op. 1, d. 120, ll. 16-17.

¹¹⁶ GARF f. 10121, op. 1, d. 120, ll. 9-10a.

victim to national conflicts” and becoming refugees as new governments began to “break (*drobit*) Russia and to divide Cossack lands.”¹¹⁷ A. Demidov, a driver who spent “33 years behind the wheel” shared these sentiments.¹¹⁸ He submitted a letter entitled “They Cut the Roots of the Ancestral Tree” to *Za Rus!* in 1993. The letter, which explained that he had Cossack heritage, bemoaned the loss of his ancestral “Russian lands to Kazakhstan” that he claimed the “Zionist-Bolsheviks” gave away. “Perestroika took from me my small motherland (*malaia rodina*),” Demidov decried, “and now the ashes of my ancestors are in a different government.”

A. Tarakanov from the city of Tambov expressed a similar sense that Russia was butchered (perhaps both geographically and spiritually) in the same edition of the newspaper. A.

Tarakanov’s poem “To My Compatriot!” read:

“O, Compatriot!
With a shudder rushes to you, my appeal:
Or do you not see
That Rus
 Is being brought to slaughter
And that crows circle above her?...
Do us, descendants of the Don and Nevsky
not see how our motherland is being shocked and torn?”

A Cossack separatist movement in northern Kazakhstan eventually emerged that roused international tensions. Yeltsin’s institutionalization of Cossack organizations into the highest levels of government was particularly problematic when Russian-backed Cossack organizations were implicated in an irredentist movement for “lost” Russian lands in Kazakhstan. The Cossack issue, which created major concern over inter-regional stability in Central Asia, eventually reached the attention of the President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, who appealed personally to Yeltsin on April 15, 1993. Nazarbayev was alarmed that Russian government

¹¹⁷ GARF f. 10121, op. 1, d. 120, ll. 26-28.

¹¹⁸ “Rubiati korni rodovomy derevy,” *Za Rus!* No. 3 (1993).

agencies condoned Cossack organizations, which he claimed enflamed interethnic tensions. Nazarbayev asserted that Russian Cossack organizations, including the Union of Cossacks, recently institutionalized into Russian state structures, were provoking “inter-regional” destabilization with their revanchist politics, precisely when “maintaining stability” was the “priority” of the newly formed CIS member states.¹¹⁹ Nazarbayev contended that Russian Cossack organizations exerted an “inflammatory influence on the Russian population of the republic.” The claim that Cossacks in Kazakhstan were experiencing persecution, he stressed, was false. There were no “facts of infringement of the rights of Russians, the Russian-speaking population as a whole and the Cossacks in the Republic of Kazakhstan,” Nazarbayev protested.

Nazarbayev further argued that Cossack campaigns breached international norms as they provoked separatism, and thus created grounds for serious conflict. The people of Kazakhstan were confounded, he attested, by the Union of Cossacks Council of Atamans’ call to “restore” traditional Cossack territories and administrative divisions.¹²⁰ Nazarbayev also blamed Russian newspapers for “systematically” publishing materials that incited interethnic relations and “fabrications about the belonging of part of Kazakhstan’s territory to Russia.” These ideas, he claimed, were supported by “biased statements about the violation of Russians in our country.” The unnamed newspapers, Nazarbayev bemoaned, “propagandize ideas of Cossack autonomy,” and “contain direct appeals” for Cossacks to “persistently fight ‘for reunification with their historical homeland—Russia’.” Therefore, Kazakhstan’s territorial claim to its northern regions, where much of the ethnic Russian communities was concentrated, was put into question. Nazarbayev asserted that representatives of Russian Cossack organizations were agitating for Russian irredentism within Kazakhstan with “radical and separatist-minded associates in

¹¹⁹ GARF f. 10121, op. 1, d. 120, ll. 69-73.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

Kazakhstan” who intend to form “illegal, extremist” groups. Moreover, the Russian-backed Union of Cossacks, Nazarbayev attested, actively recruited among the Ural and Semirechye Cossacks of Kazakhstan as conscripts for the Russian Federation’s border protection services—in the interests of another country, which was a complete violation of the norms of international law.

Nazarbayev alleged that “the entire population of Kazakhstan” was negatively influenced by the Cossack revanchist campaign.¹²¹ Some Kazakh “national patriots,” he noted, were using the issue as a pretext to escalate interethnic tensions and to criticize the Kazakh leadership’s diplomatic relations with the Russian Federation. Nazarbayev beseeched Yeltsin to take “additional measures” to prevent the “interference” of Russian Cossack organizations in international affairs. Yeltsin agreed to the start of a “negotiation process” between the two sides that would include the participation of Russia’s Cossack organizations to begin over the summer of 1993. The two sides, however, continued to differ over the matter.

Yeltsin apparently remained unnerved by the international tension created over the activities of Cossack organizations. On July 5, 1994, Yeltsin signed a decree to form a Cossack consultative body under the President created for the purpose of advising the president on questions of the “Rebirth of the Brotherhood of Russian Cossacks and the unification of Cossack societies” and on “determining state policy in regard to the Russian Cossacks.”¹²² Though the decree sought to further consolidate Cossacks, it also acknowledged their immense national influence. The same month, the Kazakh Justice Minister warned the Semirechye Cossacks, who obtained registration as a public association, that they stepped outside of established legal

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² The decree was entitled “On the Council for Cossack Affairs under the Russian Federation’s President.” Hyrb, *Understanding Contemporary Ukrainian and Russian Nationalism*, 158-159.

boundaries by acting as a “military organization pursuing political and commercial aims.” If their association continued to break the law, they were informed that they would be suspended. The Kazakh Justice Minister was compelled to make a statement on national TV proclaiming that the association’s actions ran counter to “our laws, our constitution, our law on public associations, our law on the administrative territorial division of the country, and our law on universal military service.”¹²³ A few months later, the Kazakh Justice Minister, Nasgasgybay Shaykenov, issued a decree suspending the activities of the Alma-Ata region Cossack society, and the Semirechye Cossacks were finally accused of making military contact with Russian-based Cossack organizations. Nikolay Gunkin and Viktor Achkasov, Cossack activists, were detained and received prison sentences. The situation reached a head when the Russian Foreign Ministry issued a statement that Russia was ready to protect the interests of the Kazakh Cossacks.

The support that Cossack organizations had in the nascent Russian Federation was remarkable given the problems they created both internally and internationally. Despite the irredentist campaign they were accused of, a clear adversarial move toward the government of Kazakhstan, Cossack organizations retained their status in the Russian government. As previously stated, the Deputy Prime Minister, Sergei Shakhrai, believed that institutionalizing Cossacks was the best way to control their militarization. Nazarbayev argued, however, that Cossack organizations were taking advantage of the Russian government’s backing to militarize citizens of other governments and provoke interethnic discord. Instead of immediately calling for these international Cossack campaigns to cease, Yeltsin initiated a mediation process that brought Cossacks to the negotiating table. This seemed to prove Nazarbayev’s concern: the Yeltsin government empowered Cossack organizations, even outside of Russia’s border.

¹²³ Ibid.

Cossacks, evidently, were esteemed players in Yeltsin's nation-building process. Cossack organizations were pushed to further adhere under Yeltsin in April 1995 when he called on Cossack commanders to "unite Russian Cossacks" and "renew their best traditions."¹²⁴ On May 1, 1995, Cossack atamans from 59 regions of Russia dutifully signed an agreement to do away with all differences between Cossack communities to "serve the people and the Fatherland."¹²⁵

The Repressed Peoples Confederation: A Rehabilitation Movement in Comparative Perspective

The state's attention to the rehabilitation movements of non-Slavic repressed nations further highlights how provocative the Russian Federation's support of Cossack organizations was. The Repressed Peoples Confederation was founded in 1989 in the North Caucasus to represent and advocate for repressed national groups in the (former) Soviet Union. It made initial gains when the RSFSR passed the April 1991 decree recognizing "repressed" status and acknowledging that ethnic-based deportations were criminal acts by the state that constituted genocide.¹²⁶ The decree also established the right of national groups persecuted by the state to territorial rehabilitation and compensation. While Cossacks entered the highest ranks of the Russian government, and fomented an irredentist campaign while doing so, federal support for other repressed nations outside of Russia paled in comparison. The Confederation was met with constant resistance while urging the Russian Federation to implement these rehabilitation measures, while many struggled to receive the reparations owed to them due to bureaucratic challenges.

¹²⁴ Hyrb, *Understanding Contemporary Ukrainian and Russian Nationalism*, 162.

¹²⁵ The agreement was entitled "On the unity and accord of the Cossack community of Russia." Ibid.

¹²⁶ "Zakon: O reabilitatsii repressirovannykh narodov," Garant. Accessed February 13, 2023. <https://base.garant.ru/10200365/>

Cossacks were among others categorized as “repressed nations,” but it was only the Cossack revival that was closely intertwined with, and heavily sponsored by, the burgeoning Russian state. Contrastingly, the Repressed Peoples Confederation, which represented the movements of ten repressed groups across the former Soviet space, struggled to obtain support for its rehabilitation campaign. In the early 1990s, the government, concerned that implementing the April 1991 law “On the rehabilitation of repressed nations” would prove too complicated, shied away from realizing it. Rehabilitating repressed nations ultimately meant facilitating the right of return to historic homelands, which, it worried would continue to provoke or snowball territorial conflict. Some historic homelands, moreover, were not located in Russia. In December 1992, for instance, the Ministry of Finance of the Russian Federation denied an appeal from the Supreme Soviet of Crimea to (further) fund the return of Crimean Tatars formerly deported from the peninsula.¹²⁷ The government of Ukraine, it asserted, was now responsible for financing programs of Tatar relocation to Crimea. Crimea had been a part of the RSFSR when the deportations took place, however, and it was only later transferred to Ukraine. The Russian Federation, it asserted, was strapped with a migrant crisis, which was an immense financial burden. The Russian Federation, the Ministry detailed, had to support around 400,000 “refugees from the former Soviet republics.” It stressed that “[n]ot one of the former republics that people have been forced to flee” carry any of these expenses, which further deteriorated its financial situation.

The Russian Federation’s government, however, applied a contradictory approach to Cossack rehabilitation, which incited considerable interethnic tensions both domestically and

¹²⁷It claimed the Russian Federation had already provided 500 million rubles to this purpose. GARF f. 10121, op 1., d. 70, l. 41 (Instructions of the Government of the Russian Federation on the rehabilitation of repressed peoples, Volume 4).

internationally. The state continued to provide Cossack organizations with unparalleled support and obliged their campaign for militarization. In its inaugural congress in February 1992, the Repressed Peoples Confederation (in which Cossacks were “observers,” but not members) claimed that the Russian Federation had “not ensured” and even “disrupted” the implementation of the law “On the rehabilitation of repressed peoples.”¹²⁸ The Confederation contended that the Russian Federation had “no interests” in its implementation, nor for supporting it with the necessary financial and material resources, and that no mechanism for the realization of the law had been developed. Despite the “unanimity” in which “almost all the repressed peoples voted for Boris Yeltsin,” placing hope in his liberal politics, Ismail Aliev, the Confederation’s president claimed, the President took “no effective steps” toward their rehabilitation.¹²⁹ He asserted that, instead of reviving nations, the nascent Russian state ignored national problems. As a ruse to distract attention away from the state’s failings, Aliev contended that the government cultivated a fear of Caucasians, and constructed national minorities (*natsmeny*), a term popularly used in a derogatory fashion toward the USSR’s non-European nationalities, as “evil.”

In contemporary Russia, Aliev decried, there was “no shortage” of both “imperial-chauvinistic and nationalist slogans and their bearers.”¹³⁰ Aliev blamed the Russian leadership for its “manipulative” games and “flirtat[ion] with the Cossacks.”¹³¹ Russia’s intent, Aliev claimed, was to “flex its ‘muscles’” toward the Caucasus by “exploiting Cossack patriotism.” Aliev’s prognostication for the future state of repressed nations in the CIS states was even more dire. “Judging by the processes taking place in these states,” he wrote, it was “not difficult to

¹²⁸ GARF f. 10121, op. 1, d. 66, ll. 33-40 (Instructions of the Government of the Russian Federation on the protection of the rights and interests of national minorities. 1992)

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

imagine” that the multiple repressions faced by the deported Meskhetian Turks (in reference to the Stalinist deportations and the Fergana Valley Massacre of June 1989) “would cease to be unique phenomena.” Aliev contended that repressed nations in the former Soviet republics needed to “anticipate such a danger” and to take “preventive measures.”

Though steps were taken toward implementation of the law, it continued to suffer from inadequate governmental support, which was blamed on the complexity of the matter. On June 30, 1992, the State Committee of Nationality Policy reported some progress toward the rehabilitation of repressed peoples.¹³² A collective letter signed by 18 members of the Congress of the People’s Deputies who represented repressed peoples, however, proclaimed that the commissions enacted on behalf of repressed peoples were inactive. It went further to claim that this was the result of “the systematic and purposeful activity of the forces in the Russian parliament, government and individual regions of Russia that have long opposed the adoption of this Law.” The deputies requested the President, the Parliament, the Constitutional Court, and Russia’s Security Council to enact “urgent and effective measures” to implement the Law and the “suppression of the actions of persons obstructing its implementation.” The Ministry of Internal Affairs concluded that the “unsatisfactory” implementation of the law had to do with the lack of a proper mechanism for its execution. The Federal Archive Agency (Roskomarkhiv), for one, indicated that the matter was too complex to take on bureaucratically. The appeals for documentation requisite for rehabilitation certificates (to prove one’s history of repression) exceeded the capacity of the archival centers, Roskomarkhiv reported, while there was no “uniform sample” for the archival certificate that would meet the qualifications necessary for

¹³² GARF f. 10121, op. 1, d. 68, ll. 45-55 Instructions of the Government of the Russian Federation on the rehabilitation of repressed peoples Volume 2.) In 1992, proposals were advanced to form government commissions on the Ingrian Finns, Koreans, Meskhetian Turks, Crimean Tatars, and Greeks. A Department of Repressed Peoples, including a specified department for Volga Germans and, of course, for the Cossacks, had been developed.

repressed nations to receive their benefits.¹³³ Roskomarkhiv also stated that it would be too difficult to facilitate negotiations between the authorities in places in which repressed peoples resided and the authorities in the places where representatives of the deported peoples were supposed to return. Moreover, with the disintegration of the USSR, it noted, housing privatization and other market factors also made implementation of the law extremely challenging.

Ultimately, however, the October 1991 law, “On the rehabilitation of victims of political repression,” and the mechanisms for compensation established under it, would encompass people repressed for national, social, or other reasons. This broader classification for repressions under the Soviet regime made sense as thousands of deportees were subjected to other charges, and the line between political and national repression was blurred.¹³⁴ Criminal charges were sometimes brought against deportees for attempted escapes from “special settlements” (some simply to another “special settlement” to reunite with their families), for example, or for “anti-Soviet agitation,” “treachery,” and “banditry.”¹³⁵ A 1992 law of the Russian Federation limited compensation mechanisms only for people repressed either on the territory of the Russian Federation or living in the country (who received the proper rehabilitation documents from the

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ “Zakon RSFSR ot 18 oktiabria 1991 g. N. 1761-I ‘O reabilitatsii zhertv politicheskikh repressii.’” Garant. Accessed February 13, 2023. <http://ivo.garant.ru/#/document/3961226/paragraph/20410:1>

¹³⁵ It also specifically referred to deported peoples by referencing special settlements and all other types of state-mandated exiles and expulsions, which made both laws applicable to them. See “Zakon RSFSR ot 18 oktiabria 1991 g. N. 1761-I ‘O reabilitatsii zhertv politicheskikh repressii.’” This was also guaranteed by article 3-1 of the April 1991 “On the rehabilitation of repressed nations.” See “Zakon: O reabilitatsii repressirovannykh narodov,” Garant. Accessed February 13, 2023. <https://base.garant.ru/10200365/802464714d4d10a819efb803557e9689/> More research is needed on the returns of repressed peoples to historic homelands in the post-Soviet period and their use of reparations mechanisms. Between September 1944 to October 1, 1945, 13,000 deportees were subject to criminal charges. Yaacov Ro'i, “The Transformation of Historiography on the “Punished Peoples.” *History and Memory* 21, no. 2 (2009): 150-76.

respective states where repression transpired).¹³⁶ The latter stipulation made it impossible for the thousands of repressed nations still residing in Central Asia, where many were deported to (and by this legal definition, where the repressions took place), to receive reparation payments from the Russian Federation.

Repressed nations residing on the territory of the Russian Federation, however, also faced bureaucratic hurdles as regional authorities were granted broad powers to resolve such questions.¹³⁷ This diminished the continuity and consistency of the rights finally established for repressed nations. The State Committee of Nationality Affairs received numerous letters and telegrams complaining of the state commissions' failure to implement territorial rehabilitation, while many appealed for help in receiving the compensation owed to them according to the rehabilitation laws.¹³⁸ Many reported difficulties in obtaining the requisite archival documentation. Letters asked for assistance to obtain archival information from the Information Centers of the Department of Internal Affairs, the KGB, military enlistment offices, prosecutors' offices, and other local public services—documents that they needed to obtain compensation payments. Letters complained that local authorities replied uncooperatively, stating that there were “no instructions from above” and “no mechanism for implementing these laws,” or they ignored them entirely. There were numerous complaints about the difficulty in obtaining archival certificates in Russia, but the matter was reportedly worse in Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine.¹³⁹

¹³⁶“Postanovlenie Pravitel'stva RF ot 16 marta 1992 g. N. 160 “O poriadke vyplaty denezhnoi kompensatsii i predostavleniia l'got litsam, reabilitirovannym v sootvetsvii s Zakonom Rossiiskoi Federatsii ‘O reabilitatsii zhertv politicheskikh represii,’” Garant. Accessed February 13, 2013. <https://base.garant.ru/102419/>

¹³⁷“Konstitutsionnyi sud predpisal obespechit' prava zhertv represii na poluchenie zhil'ia.” Interfax. December 10, 2019. Accessed February 13, 2023. <https://www.interfax.ru/russia/687385https://www.interfax.ru/russia/687385>

¹³⁸ GARF f. 10121, op. 1, d. 66, ll. 84-92

¹³⁹ The same applied for victims of political repression, the State Committee for Nationality Affairs admitted, according to the State Committee for Nationality Affairs.

The rehabilitation mechanisms—or the lack thereof—continued to confound individuals seeking reparations as repressed peoples into the late 1990s and beyond. The matter was further muddled, as previously mentioned, by the law “On the rehabilitation of victims of political repression,” which was made applicable to repressed nations. State agencies acted without uniformity, and many repressed peoples, in practice, were not able to obtain compensation. Some turned to the former Soviet metropole for reparation payments despite living outside of the Russian Federation’s territory. In February 1998, for instance, a 70-year-old pensioner of German nationality whose family was deported from Moscow wrote from the Kazakh city of Satpaev, where he lived. The pensioner claimed that he had been “rehabilitated” according to the law “On the rehabilitation of victims of political repression,” and had received a certificate of rehabilitation, accordingly, from the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs.¹⁴⁰ Receiving the allotted benefits, the pensioner complained, proved difficult. “We don’t know where to turn,” the pensioner noted. He had even turned to the German Organization “Rebirth,” but was told that “the train had already left the station” in regard to compensation payments.¹⁴¹ The Pension Fund of the Russian Federation soberly clarified that the pensioner was repressed outside of the Russian Federation’s territory and was not eligible for payments.

Ambiguities also remained regarding the children of repressed nations. Kori, who had been born in Kyrgyzstan in 1958 to a repressed family, appealed from the Russian city of Nizhnevartovsk (north of Kazakhstan) to the legal site Pravoved for clarity on the right to

¹⁴⁰ GARF f. 10158, op. 7, d. 25, ll. 21-24. (Appeals of foreign citizens on pension provision, social benefits and compensation payments for 1998 in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, January-December 1998).

¹⁴¹ This may have been in reference to German-sponsored programs. Germany funded repatriations of ethnic Germans (and supported German organizations in the former Soviet space) circa the Soviet Union’s collapse until it began to restrict these sponsorships in the late 1990s. See: Olga Zeveleva, “Political aspects of repatriation: Germany, Russia, Kazakhstan. A comparative analysis.” *Nationalities Papers* 42, no. 5 (2014): 808-827.

compensation.¹⁴² He received several contradicting responses from lawyers, one of whom stated that Kori had not been personally subjected to repressions, and was therefore not eligible for reparation benefits.¹⁴³ In 2019, three women born in “exile or special settlements” (*v vysylke ili spetsposelenii*) had to turn to the Russian Federation’s Constitutional Court to petition for the right of return to the locales their families were deported from (which happened to be in coveted Moscow).¹⁴⁴

The formation of national districts, national rural settlements, and village councils, which harkened back to the early Soviet period when national units of the very smallest level were created for national minorities, in fact became a way the Russian Federation addressed the territorial rehabilitation problem. In the summer of 1992, to stabilize minority problems within Russia, Yeltsin introduced national districts, national villages, and other national rural localities.¹⁴⁵ The decree allowed for the formation of national units on the territory of historic homelands, or in places of compact residence of national minorities, without enshrining this right explicitly in federal legislation.¹⁴⁶ In fact, some national groups had already acted. In February 1992, for instance, the Azov German National District was formed in the Omsk Oblast’.¹⁴⁷ If the

¹⁴²“Vyplaty repressirovannym i posle reabilitirovannym.” Pravoved. Accessed February 13, 2023.

<https://pravoved.ru/question/1011827/>

¹⁴³ One lawyer responded that Kori was not eligible according to the 1992 law compensation mechanisms for the victims of political repression, which applied only to people personally subjected to repression. Another lawyer stated that Kori first had to start by registering as a rehabilitated person at the Ministry of Internal Affairs of his region, which could bring certain benefits according to a 2011 law.

¹⁴⁴The Court established the actions of the regional authorities unconstitutional, and thus ruled in their favor.

“Konstitutsionnyi sud predpisal obespechit’ prava zhertv represii na poluchenie zhil’ia.”

¹⁴⁵ GARF f. 10121, op. 1, d. 66, ll. 13-26. The right to national-administrative territories was encoded in the April 1990 USSR law “On the free national development of Soviet citizens living outside their national entities, or not having them,” which became the basis for Yeltsin’s temporary measure. “Ukaz Prezidiuma Verkhovnogo Soveta Rossiiskoi Federatsii: Ob obrazovanii Azovskogo nemetskogo natsional’nogo raiona V Omskoi oblasti.” Accessed February 23, 2022. http://pravo.gov.ru/proxy/ips/?docbody=&link_id=6&nd=102014675.

¹⁴⁶ See Kirill Sukhanov, “Natsional’nye administrativno-territorial’nye obrazovaniia—Atavizm ili potentsial dlia samoorganizatsii natsional’nykh men’shinstv?” *Proceedings of the Institute of State and Law of the Russian Academy of Sciences*, 15, no. 5 (2021): 164-187.

¹⁴⁷ The legal basis for the formation of these national units would become petitions of those who constituted the majority in the national district, village, or rural locality. However, if the national unit in question was “of traditional settlement of small-numbered peoples” then it could be formed regardless of majority status.

regional authority (the Krai, Oblast' or Republic) in which the national unit was located approved, the national unit would also be legally allowed to provide for the return of people native to a national unit in question. Though the decree enabled national units to form by majority choice, the return of people to their historic homelands depended on approval by the regional authority. The latter was unlikely for repressed nations involved in bitter disputes over territories that were transferred or dissolved and now "belonged" to another national group (e.g., Ingush claims over the Prigorod District transferred to North Ossetia).

Implementing the law "on the rehabilitation of repressed nations" was an immensely complicated undertaking. The Russian state feared aggravating interethnic hostilities, especially over territorial rehabilitation, and it claimed to lack the proper resources to intercede on behalf of repressed nations in the former Soviet space. Contradictorily, however, Russia was ready to endure severe censure in the international area over the militarization and institutionalization of the Cossacks. The nascent Russian government, from the onset of the Cossack movement, not only tolerated Cossack organizations that aggravated interethnic tensions and stirred heated debates both domestically and in the former Soviet space, but also coopted them into state structures. In many ways, the weakened nascent state capitulated to, was influenced by, or embodied the ethnonationalist aims that Cossack organizations promoted as major social forces from the local to the international level. In the process, the Cossack resurgence, which once lacked unity and direction, evolved into a state-sponsored revival that the Russian state embraced as a part of its nation-building course.

CONCLUSION

The Soviet Union, as this dissertation has shown, did not simply break up into fifteen nation-states when the country collapsed. Its collapse involved manifold conflicts, displacement, mass migration, and the mobilization of extraterritorial communities (the territorially displaced peoples who lived outside of “home” territories) and nontitular peoples (those without them), as well as mixed families. In many respects, it was a contested process. What shaped these problems? The ideology of socialist proletarian internationalism, or global communist revolution, internally adapted by the Bolsheviks involved a domestic policy of telic national development that was intended to bring the ostensibly unequal nations of the former Russian empire into communism. The Bolsheviks established an intricate system of thousands of national territories with languages, cultures, and elites for all nationalities regardless of their size or status. After the late 1930s, however, the smallest national territories were phased out, a shift that quickened national assimilation and consolidation, and prioritized the titular nations of the USSR’s surviving ethno-territories. At the same time, however, the Soviet Union promoted the greater Russification of the country as a means for unity, patriotism, and the eventual merger of Soviet nations. This created conflicting state policies: the nationalization of increasingly nation-like territories (though primarily the republics that gained greater autonomy in the post-Stalin period), and Russified centralization. These contradictory policies were touted as part of a dialectical process toward communism that would eventually transcend the (Russified) Soviet *narod*, or people, over remaining national differences. The state, however, never anticipated the extent to which this dual state approach could fail in practice.

The tensions between republican nationalization and centralization deepened when republican autonomy first expanded after Stalin’s death and under Nikita Khrushchev’s reforms

while Soviet internationalism and its end goals were simultaneously promoted to a greater extent. Internationalism reflected the spectrum of Soviet nationality policies: on one end, it promoted ethnic particularism and national development—national rights that were enshrined in the Soviet constitution—while its end goal was the merger of nations into the Soviet *narod*. Soviet internationalism was employed by the country’s various nationalities, including titular nations in “their” national territories, to make sense of their national rights. Internationalism was widely practiced, however, as a nationality policy that moderated nationalism through mechanisms deployed at the national, regional, and local levels. Internationalization was promoted broadly, like the “friendship of peoples,” to encourage Soviet multiculturalism, but also to sponsor a Russified Soviet identity. The USSR implemented international *vospitanie* (training, education, or cultivation) in multinational industrial enterprises and regions, and it increased international *vospitanie* after moments of confirmed conflict or national tension. For these reasons, internationalism legitimated and safeguarded the USSR’s extraterritorial and nontitular communities.

As a nationality practice, Soviet internationalism provided an important recourse for those residing in another group’s nationalizing titular territory. Extraterritorial and nontitular petitioners used Soviet international practices to report perceived nationalism and to address such grievances. Their complaints of overt nationalism and discrimination often necessitated a *proverka*, or a verification, of the places and people put under question. These evaluations examined (among other things, like charges of corruption) national composition as well as how Soviet international policy, like practices of international *vospitanie*, functioned. Republican authorities were most often charged with addressing these issues, and distrustful or perpetually aggrieved extraterritorial and nontitular communities continued to evoke socialist principles like

internationalism to win central intervention instead. Ironically, after a *proverka* was conducted, some petitioners were accused of nationalism, or failing to abide by internationalist practices themselves.

The USSR's southern tier became the site of the most violent conflicts when the Soviet Union dissolved. This region, which included the republics of Central Asia, the (North and South) Caucasus, and to a lesser extent, Moldova, had an established trend of outmigration. Most of these regions, correspondingly, also underwent national consolidation due to titular growth and outmigration. In Central Asia and Azerbaijan, (rural) titular growth was especially extensive, which set these republics up for a manual labor surplus, and growing unemployment or underemployment. The privileging of Russian speaking skilled labor in some enterprises also left many in "their" titular territories disadvantaged, even as some continued to hire external labor. Concomitantly, the post-Stalin era often correlated with increased titular representation in local and regional administration, while the republics were sometimes granted—and agitated for—more control over their own affairs. In Central Asia and the Caucasus, many, in turn, complained of increased titular favoritism, corruption, and blatant nationalism, problems that were also sometimes confirmed by the state. Tensions between nationally consolidating titular nationals and privileged Russians and Russian speakers exploded in Tashkent in 1969 (see chapter one).

When Mikhail Gorbachev initiated the perestroika reforms that loosened party controls and sent the economy into a tailspin, nationalism accelerated. As titular nationalism, violence, and tensions spread across the USSR's southern tier, many extraterritorial and nontitular peoples, as chapter two argued, underwent a moment of heightened "groupness."¹ The "ethnic" violence and harassment that primarily targeted people perceived of as Armenians in Azerbaijan, most

¹ See Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 2004).

notably in the Sumgait 1988 and Baku 1990 pogroms, for instance, affected other communities, as well as mixed families, and it highlighted the mutual vulnerability of various extraterritorial and nontitular groups across the USSR. Many petitioned for enhanced central oversight and intervention or condemned the center's acquiescence to national movements. Communities not directly targeted by titular violence mobilized in response to titular nationalism through collective appeals and other affiliations. Others requested transfers, or fled, to Russia, the Soviet metropole. Some decried that their "official" passport nationalities did not align with their identities as internationalists, Soviet citizens, or Russian speakers, as they begged for the right to relocate to Russia. The displaced, however, were encouraged to return to their places of origin or to turn to "their" titular territories. This confounded those born and raised elsewhere, members of mixed families, or people who otherwise viewed these nationalizing spaces as increasingly hostile or foreign. Claiming their citizenship rights, some Soviet "refugees" determined to stay in the Soviet metropole also collectively mobilized, and some resorted to squatting. Extraterritorial and nontitular appeals revealed the disastrous consequences of state-sponsored nationalization and centralization. The state believed in a dialectical resolution to these contradictory processes, but the reality was that the tension between them produced catastrophic effects. The devolving state, unsure of what to do with the communities it once lauded as ideal modern Soviet citizens, physically removed some migrant groups from the metropole to "their" titular territories or their closest equivalent.

After the Soviet Union collapsed, the boundaries separating republics transformed into international borders, while new regulations for citizenship reshaped relocation to the former Soviet metropole. The USSR's collapse left over 25 million ethnic Russians and about 30 million *rossiiane*, or civic Russians outside of the newly established Russian Federation as diasporas in

the former Soviet space. The USSR's former southern tier was transformed by nation-building, changing language laws, and myriad conflicts. The latter included conflict over the fate of former sub-republican autonomous regions (e.g., South Ossetia, Abkhazia), separatist and breakaway regions (Pridnestovie, Chechnya), continued armed conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, as well as civil war (Tajikistan). In the early 1990s, the Russian Federation, strapped with economic hardship and growing tensions between its legislative and executive powers that culminated in the 1993 Constitutional Crisis, did not establish a repatriation or compatriot program for ethnic or civic Russians in the former Soviet space. The "Russian question," or debates about the state's approach to this problem, interplayed with the nascent country's ethno-cultural revival. Concern about Russian plight influenced sentiments that Russians were victims of the Soviet experiment, which gave momentum to ethnonational movements. As chapter four has shown, public associations representing Russia's co-ethnics interchanged with these developments to win Russian sponsorship. Some were successful in their attempts to gain Russia's support for collective repatriation and other supports, and by doing so, helped to shape the Russian compatriot program that was first unveiled in 1994.

The Russian North Caucasus borderland became the zone of the most in-migration amid the USSR's dissolution, but the region was also unsettled by the legacy of Soviet nationality policy in the region that involved deportation, the disbanding of autonomous territories, and their eventual reinstatement under Nikita Khrushchev in 1957. Some repressed nations of the North Caucasus, mobilized by collective tragedy and injustice, also evoked internationalism and socialist principles to push for "full" rehabilitation after they returned to reinstated territories. This became an immensely complicated matter in the borderland that involved the fate of different communities and provoked conflict. The state's lumbered application of Soviet

nationality policy in the region, which united many national groups in shared autonomous territories, added to regional discontent and tensions. Soviet international practices struggled against this legacy of Soviet nationality policy, as chapter three reveals, while enduring ethnic mobilization and reactive movements complicated social dynamics in the borderland. As national movements emerged under the perestroika reforms and many sought refuge in the North Caucasus, a rehabilitation movement for repressed peoples in the region took off.

Unlike the social tensions in the southern tier's republics, people in the borderland were more commonly mobilized by a shared resentment toward Soviet nationality policy that made ethno-territories, and one's place in the Soviet hierarchy of nations, especially contested. The movement for the rehabilitation of repressed peoples thus exacerbated and exposed regional conflicts. The Chechen national movement created an additional, but interrelated, layer of complexity to the region. The largest repressed nation in the borderland, Chechens accumulated myriad grievances in "their" autonomous republic, in which many Russians and Russian speakers historically resided, or to which they moved, sometimes forcibly. As nationalization of the autonomous republic accelerated during perestroika, thousands fled their homes. Russian intervention escalated the disruption of everyday life in Chechnya, which declared independence from Russia, as war broke out in 1994, displacing hundreds of thousands of people, including many who considered the territory native.

The Cossack revival, which grew out of the rehabilitation of repressed nations during perestroika, interconnected with all the aforementioned issues in some fashion. The Cossacks experienced an unrivaled resurgence in the (former) Soviet metropole as a formerly repressed group. Frustrated with the lack of state attention to the displacement of Cossacks and Russians from nationalizing territories, many Cossack groups mobilized and took up arms to intervene in

conflicts on behalf of breakaway regions, like Pridnestovie. Faced with an unstable North Caucasus, a newly international border, and the feudalization of Russia, Boris Yeltsin, to the vexation of many (including the perestroika holdover parliament), militarized Cossacks within the ranks of the Russian Federation's armed forces.² This move had serious implications at the local and regional level, especially in the majority Russian areas of the North Caucasus (Krasnodar and Stavropol' Krai and Rostov Oblast'), where some Cossack groups had spontaneously taken on a policing role toward non-Slavic migrants. Acting as sanctioned local government forces, Cossack groups then continued to conduct raids and the policing of non-Slavic migrants. Major Cossack organizations, like the Union of Cossacks, went further by lobbying for Russian and Cossack diasporas in the former Soviet space, igniting international tensions over its support of a separatist movement in northern Kazakhstan. The Russian Federation's notable support for Cossack groups and organizations was especially stark in comparison to its lackluster response to the rehabilitation of other (non-Slavic) repressed nations and the Repressed Peoples Confederation, which represented them. The Cossack movement, and the issues that mobilized it—the plight of Russians and Cossacks with the USSR's disintegration and the desire to resurrect a “great” Russian state—interchanged with Russia's broader ethno-cultural revival.

By July 15, 1991, the Soviet Union's collapse left more than 800,000 people as (registered) Soviet “refugees” in the rapidly dissolving country.³ In the Russian Federation alone, more than 1.5 million people became registered as either refugees or forced migrants between

² On post-Soviet Russia as a feudal society, see Vladimir Shlapentokh and Joshua Woods, *Contemporary Russia as a Feudal Society: A New Perspective on the Post-Soviet Era* (New York: 2007).

³ GARF, f. R9654, op. 6, d. 329, l. 16 (Materials on interethnic relations: conflicts, problems, refugees)

1992-2003.⁴ Immigration, in fact, became an important source of population growth in the Russian Federation throughout the 1990s.⁵ In the immediate post-Soviet period, between 1992-1994, it compensated for a remarkable 80% of the losses from the natural decline of the population. For this reason, in Orel, one central Russian region, (where migrants progressively turned to, given the complications in Moscow and in the North Caucasus), regional authorities with depleting populations even welcomed migrants with “open arms” policies.⁶ Egor Stroeve, the popularly elected head of the administration of the region (who later became governor) believed that Russia, like some public associations representing Russia’s co-ethnics asserted, could actually benefit by welcoming “persecuted people” from the former Soviet periphery “into its heart.” The primarily agricultural region lost 700 villages over a period of thirty-five years (presumably to low population growth and out-migration), and Orel authorities saw an opportunity to revive the region through in-migration. Here, registration (for forced migrants and refugees) was granted liberally, a different approach compared to other regions.⁷ Unlike the response of some Cossack groups and organizations in the North Caucasus to non-Slavic migrants, many permanent residents no doubt came to the aid of newcomers and the displaced. More research is needed to understand the social histories of the millions who made their way to “their” titular territories, and the former Soviet metropole, when the USSR collapsed.

The Russian Federation continued to serve as a “primary migration magnet” within the former Soviet space. By the mid 1990s, socioeconomic factors grew in importance as motives for

⁴ Andrei V. Korobkov, “Post-Soviet Migration: New Trends at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century,” Cynthia J. Buckley, et. al. eds. *Migration, Homeland, and Belonging in Eurasia* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 2008), 77.

⁵ Ibid., 79.

⁶ Hilary Pilkington, *Migration, Displacement, and Identity in Post-Soviet Russia* (London: Routledge, 1994), 96-105.

⁷ It was the exception, for instance, that migrants from Kazakhstan were refused status in the Orel region. Ibid., 96-105.

flight to Russia (as compared to national and political ones), while after 1996, temporary, labor, and undocumented migration grew.⁸ Vladimir Putin (who came to power after Boris Yeltsin's resignation in December 1999), attempted to strengthen the "law enforcement aspects of migration policy," clamping down on illegal population flows. In 2005, likely due to enduring demographic concerns about the Russian population's decline, Putin liberalized migration policy, which even included a limited legalization of undocumented migrants. In 2006, the state also launched a resettlement program broadly applicable to different "former Soviet citizens competent in Russian and possessing professional skills."⁹ In general, however, post-Soviet migration was increasingly characterized by shifts from registered to unregistered movement.¹⁰ Between 1992 and 2006, Russia received more than 11 million migrants from the former Soviet space, a net in-migration of 4.8 million people.¹¹ Between 1989 and 2004, however, only 5.8 million migrants were registered, while undocumented migration in this period was what doubled this volume.¹² These migration flows also consisted less of ethnic Russians over time, which continued to influence troubling ethno-nationalist trends. In 1990, 52 percent of the Russian population condemned ethnic slander, but by 2004, 68 percent viewed ethnic immigrants

⁸ Korobkov, "Post-Soviet Migration," 76-79.

⁹ Oxana Shevel, *Migration, Refugee Policy, and State Building in Postcommunist Europe* (New York: Cambridge University, 2011), 86-92.

¹⁰ Korobkov, "Post-Soviet Migration," 78-79.

¹¹ From the three Transcaucasian states and Tajikistan, where major conflicts and war broke out, half or more of the Russian population left between 1989-2005. From the rest of the Central Asian republics (excluding Tajikistan) about a quarter of Russians left. In Moldova (where the Pridnestovie breakaway region supported by Russia was established) and the Baltics, approximately one in eight Russians left. Korobkov, "Post-Soviet Migration," 69-78. Peter Gartrell cites that "mounting discrimination" caused 10 million people to move to Russia from Central Asia and the Caucasus between 1991 and 2001, some under duress and others due to fear that their Russian ethnicity would disadvantage them in the future. Peter Gartrell, *The Making of the Modern Refugee* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2013), 259-260. This misrepresents the statistics of some scholars of post-Soviet migration. Migration flows, according to Andrei Korobkov, consisted of 64 percent of ethnic Russians from 1993-2000, so they clearly included titular residents of the CIS states as well. Socioeconomic and political factors also became a greater motive for flight. See Korobkov, "Post-Soviet Migration," 73-78.

¹² Timothy Heleniak, "An Overview of Migration in the Post-Soviet Space," Cynthia J. Buckley, Blair A. Ruble and Erin Trouth Hofmann, eds. *Migration, Homeland, and Belonging in Eurasia* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 2008), 34.

negatively.¹³ In 2005, 58 percent of the Russian population supported the expression “Russia for Russians,” while in 2006 the number of ethnically motivated hate crimes had grown compared to 2004.

In February 2022, the world was stunned when Putin, proclaiming himself the defender of the Russian *mir* (world), ordered a merciless invasion of Ukraine. Though this dissertation doesn’t purport to tell the whole story of how Putin came to view himself this way, it does offer some pieces of this historical puzzle. The symbolic and strategic importance of Russia’s diasporas was amplified through the Soviet collapse. The “Russian question” (or the “Russian factor”) as it played out in the 1990s was interconnected with the phenomenon of mass flight across the (former) Soviet space, which cast Russians as long-suffering victims. This popularized belief influenced domestic movements, like the Cossack revival, that pushed the state to do more for “their own.” Some impelled the Russian state in its political and crisis-stricken infancy to act on the “Russian question,” to integrate Russians and Slavs from former Soviet space into the national imaginary, and therefore, to uphold the authority of a “Great Russia” beyond its borders. The phenomenon—or narrative—of Russians and Russian speakers as “victims” of the Soviet legacy requiring harbor and protection no longer circulated widely by the mid-2000s when forced migrants made up a minuscule portion of total migration to Russia.

The sentiments of the 1990s persisted—at the very least—in Cossack circles, however, which continued to interlink with the state under Putin. Cossack revivalist groups fixed on reclaiming “lost” Russian lands throughout the 2000s, in fact, played an important role in fostering, as in Kazakhstan, a Russian irredentist campaign in Ukraine.¹⁴ Cossack organizations

¹³ Korobkov, “Post-Soviet Migration,” 90.

¹⁴ See O. O. Poplavss’kii, *Dons’ke kozatstvo iak instrument ekspansii kremliia na Ukraini’komu donbasi*. Gileia, no. 153 (2020): 140-148. On February 25, 2003, a presidential decree “On the improvement of activities for the revival

shaped revanchist aims toward the Donetsk and Luhansk (Donbass) region(s) of Ukraine by claiming that these were historical lands of the Don Cossacks. In moves strikingly parallel to Kazakhstan in the 1990s, Russian Cossack organizations successfully subordinated Cossacks of the Ukrainian Donbass into the Russian All-Great Don Cossack Army (established in 1997), and in 2012, Donbass Cossacks even joined the ranks of the Union of Cossacks. In February 2014, Luhansk Cossack cells acting as part of the All-Great-Don Cossack Army—a militarized organization serving Russian interests—accepted Putin’s appeal to provide military assistance in Ukraine in the event of political deterioration. Ukraine’s Maidan Revolution, like the aftermath of the Soviet collapse, thus developed into another Cossack call-to-arms in Russia and beyond.¹⁵ Kuban Cossack groups participated in the annexation of neighboring Crimea, while Cossack groups from Rostov-on-Don predominately intervened in the adjacent Donbass. According to various estimates, about 80% of the occupied Luhansk territory was controlled by Cossack detachments toward the latter half of 2014. Until they began to cause trouble for separatist leaders, there were even attempts to create a Cossack republic there.

In his address to the Russian people on February 24, 2022, when Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine invasion began, Putin alleged that the people of the Donbass region of Ukraine faced a “genocide” following Ukraine’s Maidan Revolution in 2014.¹⁶ The West, he decried, supported “neo-Nazis” in Ukraine. Putin argued that the weakening of the USSR, and its eventual collapse led to a “paralysis of power” that legitimated a “disregard and disdainful

and development of the Russian Cossacks” was signed and the position of the adviser to the President of the Russian Federation for Cossack Affairs was created.

¹⁵ For some sources on Maidan and the 2014 conflict, see Mychailo Wynnnyckj, *Ukraine’s Maidan, Russia’s War: A Chronicle and Analysis of the Revolution of Dignity* (Stuttgart: ibidem-Verlad, 2019), Klaus Bachmann and Igor Lyubashenko, eds., *The Maidan Uprising, Separatism and Foreign Intervention: Ukraine’s Complex Transition (Studies in Political Transition)* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2014).

¹⁶ “Obrashchenie Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii,” Prezident Rossii. February 24, 2022. Accessed February 16, 2022. <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/speeches/67843>

attitude” toward contemporary Russia. He claimed the Soviet Union’s collapse provided a “great lesson”—a weak state led to “complete degradation and oblivion.” In contrast, Russia, despite significant losses, Putin declared, was “one of the most powerful nuclear powers in the world” – again a “great Russia” that could assert itself in its historical zone of influence. Putin’s desires to elevate Russian “greatness” vis-à-vis the West, which he blamed for snubbing Russia and myriad internal and external problems (like the situation in Ukraine) wildly backfired. The Russian invasion, and the widespread devastation (and displacement) it caused, generated a Ukrainian resistance that has inspired worldwide admiration—a brilliant contrast to the “millions of people” Putin alleged “rel[ied] on Russia.” The Russian Federation, in lieu of the rising “great state” Putin and others imagined is now viewed as a global pariah by most of the world’s democracies. Indeed, some have claimed that “Putin’s barbarism” makes it “impossible, even once the war is over, for Russia to reenter the ranks of the civilized world.”¹⁷

¹⁷ Tom Nichols, “Russia’s Depraved Decadence.” *The Atlantic Daily*. January 3, 2023. Accessed February 16, 2023. https://www.theatlantic.com/newsletters/archive/2023/01/russias-depraved-decadence/672632/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=atlantic-daily-newsletter&utm_content=20230103&utm_term=The%20Atlantic%20Daily

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APPENDIX

REFERENCE MAPS



Figure 12. The former Soviet space. Map created by Liao Zhang via Python



Figure 13. Cities of the North and South Caucasus. Map created by Liao Zhang via Python