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KORENIZATSIIA AND ITS DISCONTENTS:
UKRAINE AND THE SOVIET NATIONALITY POLICIES
DURING THE 1920s

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Ukraine and the Soviet Nationality Policies during the 1920s
A Review Essay

IRYNA VUSHKO

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Abstract

This essay reviews the recent literature on the nationalities policy in Soviet Ukraine during the 1920s. It brings together different Western (English and German) and native (Ukrainian and Russian) historical narratives, all produced after 2001. Different approaches to the Soviet nationalities policy, as this essay demonstrates, reveal broader methodological differences between historians working within distinct historiographical traditions. Despite the increasing contacts between historians, Western and native scholars often operate within distinctly different paradigms and pay little attention to the debates taking place in academic communities other than their own.

Keywords

Soviet Union, Ukraine, nationalities policy, korenizatsia, historiography.

Borisenok, Elena. *Fenomen Sovetskoi Ukrainizatsii, 1920-1930-e gody*. Moskva : Izd-vo "Evropa", 2006. 241 p.

Hirsch, Francine. *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005. xviii, 367 p.

Martin, Terry. *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001, xvii, 496 p.

Schenke, Cornelia. *Nationalstaat und Nationale Frage. Polen und die Ukrainer 1921-1939*. Hamburg/München; Dölling und Galitz Verlag, 2004. 476.

Smolii V.A. et al., *Ukrainizatsiia 1920-30-kh rokiv : peredumovy, zdobutky, uroky*. Kyiv : In-t istorii Ukrainy NAN Ukrainy, 2003. 391 p.

Snyder, Timothy. *Sketches from a Secret War: a Polish Artist's Mission to Liberate Soviet Ukraine*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005. xxiii, 347 p.

Built on the ruins of the Russian Empire, and formed largely of its former territories, in 1922 the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics opened up a new epoch in the history not only of those territories, but also of Europe on the larger scale. Ukraine occupied a key place in the Soviet Union as the second largest republic, after the Russian Federation, and situated as it was on the strategically important western borderlands of the Soviet empire.¹ Ukraine was also deemed one of the most 'national' republics, and between 1918 and 1921 it enjoyed a brief period of independent statehood within the Ukrainian People's Republic. The foundation of the Soviet Union was a major break with this experience of state building, but, because of the nature of Soviet policies, the early years of Soviet rule could also be seen as a continuation of the pre-Soviet Ukrainian past. In January 1923, the Bolsheviks announced the new nationalities policy that was meant to promote national culture, languages, and national elites over the entire Soviet Union. Because of the important role of Ukraine, the successes and failures of the Soviet nationalities policy in Ukraine could determine the fate of the policy in the entire Soviet Union. During the 1920s, Soviet Ukraine experienced an unprecedented period of cultural revival that manifested itself most notably in the developments of Ukrainian literature and arts. This cultural revival has received relatively little attention from scholars of the Soviet Union, but has been remembered by Ukrainian historians as one of the most stimulating periods in the history of Ukrainian territories, or, alternatively, Ukrainian history.

All the books under review here deal with different domestic and international issues of the Soviet nationalities policy in Ukraine during the 1920s within the context of western Soviet and East European, and native Ukrainian and Russian historiographies. Different approaches to the Soviet nationalities policy as I will demonstrate, reveal broader methodological differences between historians working within distinct historiographical traditions. Some of the most controversial topics of the Soviet past remain remarkably resilient to the ongoing globalization of scholarship. Despite the increasing contacts between historians, Western and native scholars often operate within distinctly different paradigms and pay little attention to the debates taking place in academic communities other than their own.²

¹ Ukraine, to be sure, was not the only borderland region, yet a combination of factors – the historical urgency of the national problem, the proximity to Europe, and the cross-border ties to Ukrainians in neighboring Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary – all rendered the special status of the republic within the Soviet Union.

² This claim goes against some conventional wisdom in the contemporary scholarship of Eastern Europe. In the latest issue of *East European Politics and Societies*, for instance, the editors stress the dismantling of boundaries between 'foreign', 'native' and 'émigré' researchers, one of the factors which should have contributed to the reconsideration of the old and the emergence of new paradigms in the scholarship of Eastern Europe. This

The formative years of the Soviet Union have long attracted much attention from historians and a large part of this scholarship has been produced since 1991.³ The fall of communism and the opening up of the archives, not only in Moscow but across the Soviet Union, sparked a renewed interest in things Soviet and allowed for a more nuanced research of Soviet policies from the provinces and the republics rather than exclusively from the center. This new archival research has had an impact on the development of Sovietology as a field with new subjects and new questions for research.⁴ In post-1991 Western historiography, the Soviet republics became fruitful cases upon which to base broader research on the Soviet Union. Soviet Ukraine is an excellent example of this.⁵ Each of the republics has at the same time its own distinct place within different scholarships.⁶ Ukraine secured its place in a number of studies on interwar Eastern Europe. East European studies and Sovietology had long formed two distinct yet related fields of historical research. They have drawn closer in recent years, and studies on Soviet Ukraine, Poland, and the Soviet-Polish borderlands during the interwar period form one example of this gradual convergence of the two fields.

In the post-Soviet republics, the year 1991 also brought a new turn in historical scholarship. The nationalization of history was one of the most important developments in Ukraine, where the Soviet communist type narrative was replaced by new national paradigms.⁷ The situation in which national history becomes the end in itself creates several methodological problems. It precludes the possibility of an at least somehow objective *outside* view of Ukraine's historical past, it excludes other – non-Ukrainian -- subjects, and it restricts debates with other historiographies that do not show the same degree of concern about the Ukrainian national past.⁸

The year 1991 also marked a reversal of relationships between Russian and Ukrainian historians and the reciprocal reversal of historical paradigms in Russian and Ukrainian historiographies. The famine of 1932-1933 became a highly contested issue in both Ukrainian and Russian historiographies, and other subjects were marginalized. Even more important, the focus on famine shapes the interpretation of the preceding events of the 1920s. These retrospective historical projections, not only in native Ukrainian and Russian but also in the Western historiographies, are not always well-justified. The 1920s, to be sure, set a certain stage for the consequent developments of

(Contd.) _____

scholarship, the editors argue, has not yet met the expectations raised in the wake of 1991. In this article, I seek to demonstrate that not all boundaries have been dismantled, some have proved to be remarkably resilient, and some of the most recent developments in scholarship in fact prevent the emergence of new debates, questions and paradigms.

³ The scholarship on the interwar Soviet Union is huge. Richard Pipes *The Formation of the Soviet Union. Communism and Nationalism 1917–1923* (. Revised Edition. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. Sixth edition, 1997), first published in 1954, and republished in numerous revised editions afterwards, remains the classic. There are a number of works specifically on Soviet Ukraine. See for example, George O. Liber, *Soviet Nationality Policy, Urban Growth, and Identity Change in the Ukrainian SSR 1923-1934*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992. This review focuses only on those books that are truly a product of the post-1991 era, not only in terms of publication date but also in terms of the research approach and methodology.

⁴ A good review of post-1991 scholarship on the Soviet Union is Stephen Kotkin, "1991 and the Russian Revolution: Sources, Conceptual Categories, Analytical Frameworks," *Journal of Modern History*, 70/2 (1998): 684-725. One of the most important developments is the shift of focus from Moscow to other regions of the Soviet Union.

⁵ At least several important works that testify to that trend have appeared in the last few years. See Serghy Yekelchuk, *Stalin's Empire of Memory: Russian-Ukrainian Relations in the Soviet Historical Imagination*. (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2004); Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of War: the Second World War and the fate of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

⁶ One example is the 2001 study of Soviet Turkmenistan by Adrian Edgar, research that places this Soviet republic within different yet overlapping historical contexts – the Soviet Union and Central Asia . See Adrienne Lynn Edgar, *Tribal Nation. The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001)

⁷ This tendency is characteristic of most post-Soviet republics. In order to avoid broad deductive generalizations in this article I will only address Ukraine, realizing, however, that some important developments are exemplary of the post-Soviet space at large.

⁸ This situation is caused by a variety of factors. The virtual absence of research libraries is one important factor that precludes serious research on non-Ukrainian topics. At the same time, the history of Ukraine, especially during the twentieth-century, itself became the subject of politics, thus adding market value to the field.

the Soviet Union. Yet not all, if any, choices and policy designs from the 1920s were preordained. Not all of them precipitated or led to the tragic events of the 1930s.

In the increasingly growing literature of the early Soviet Union, with the focus on Soviet nationality policies, two studies deserve specific attention. Published between 2001 and 2005, the *Affirmative Action Empire* by Terry Martin and the *Empire of Nations* by Francine Hirsch both focus on the formation of the Soviet Union and Soviet nationality policies during the 1920s.

Just months after the foundation of the Soviet Union during the Twelfth Party Congress in January 1923, the Bolsheviks, Martin explains, delineated the Soviet nationalities policy that entailed the support for national territories, national languages, national elites and national cultures. The party, Martin argues, became the vanguard of non-Russian nationalisms.⁽¹⁵⁾ The Bolsheviks ‘assumed leadership over the process of decolonization;’ they also took the lead in nationality policies, ‘systematically promoting national consciousness’ and ‘creating national republics.’

The party had both ideological and pragmatic reasons for introducing this new nationalities policy. Because, in Lenin’s view, nationalism was an inevitable stage in historical development, Martin explains, the new Soviet state could speed up the process of national self-determination by granting freedom of national expression, accelerate the process of class division and thus disarm nationalism in the long run. The Bolsheviks hoped that nationalism would lose its appeal and that national struggle would then become irrelevant. The Soviet Union, in Martin’s definition, was the first affirmative action empire that systematically promoted national consciousness among its subjects.

The Soviets employed the strategy of ethno-territorial proliferation and sought to form administrative units along national lines in the entire Soviet Union. (50) Only national majorities were to receive national soviets and administrative units and thus the 1920s witnessed the mobilization of national groups to avoid the status of national minority. Because the party considered great-power Russian chauvinism as the main danger for the new soviet state, Russians were treated as a national minority and were subjected to positive discrimination. First introduced in Ukraine, the system of national soviets and national territories soon spread to other territories of the Soviet Union. Despite these grand designs, *korenizatsiia*, Martin argues, never constituted a core Bolshevik policy; it was only a tool towards broader goals but never became a final aim in itself.⁹

The nationalities policy was never reversed, yet the period after 1932, Martin explains, witnessed substantial “scaling down of *konrenizatsiia*” in the Soviet Union and specifically in Ukraine. This reversal was shaped by the combination of domestic and international factors: the persistence of nationality politics, the war scare in the Soviet Union, the adoption of a more defensive foreign policy, and the grain requisitions crisis in Ukraine, which was partly attributed to the nationalities policy. The Bolsheviks expressed growing concerns that *korenizatsiia* produced adverse effects as it could result in the separation of Ukraine from the Soviet Union. A major turn in the nationalities policy came only in 1937-1938, when Stalin publically proclaimed that local nationalisms could be as dangerous as Russian great-power chauvinism. The rehabilitation of Russian culture began in 1933 and was in full swing in 1938. There was no forceful russification, yet both Russian culture and Russian individuals infiltrated Soviet republics. Even then *korenizatsiia* was not officially abandoned but the Soviet Union took on a new national construction in which Russians played a dominant role.

In her *Empire of Nations*, published four years after the first appearance of Martin’s *Affirmative Action*, Hirsch analyzes the creation of the Soviet Union and asserts the central role of the nationality question in the early Soviet years. National oblasts and republics, Hirsch explains, came to look like nation states. How and why this happened, and what role the ethnographic knowledge played in the process are two main overarching questions of her work. The division of the Soviet Union into ethnographic territories was not given, did not follow a ‘pre-existing plan,’ and at the time was considered as one of several possible solutions to the nationality question.⁽⁶³⁾

⁹ This is in itself a novel and compelling argument. At least some of the earlier literature considered *korenizatsiia* as a core policy in the Soviet Union during the 1920s. See, for example, James E. Mace, *Communism and the Dilemmas of National Liberation. National Communism in Soviet Ukraine, 1918-1933*. (Cambridge: Distributed by Harvard University Press for the Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, 1983), 74.

In the long run, the Bolsheviks sought to 'usher the entire population of the Soviet Union through the Marxist timeline of historical development' (8), and in the short term, promote economic and cultural modernization and assist the potential victims of Soviet economic modernization.

Because of the national complexity of the Soviet Union, different ethnicities were deemed to be at different stages of their historical and national developments, a factor that came to play a crucial role in shaping national policies and political borders across the Soviet Union in the 1920s. In order to determine which clans and tribes could eventually be formed into nations, the Bolsheviks co-opted the old intellectual elites from the Russian Empire and put Russian ethnographers in the service of a new regime. Ethnographic knowledge, which, Hirsch admits, is never neutral, proved very important in determining which clans and tribes can be formed into nations, and thus granted national soviets. Based on the premise that 'primordial ethnic groups were the building blocks of nationalities and that the state could intervene in the natural process of development,' the state, Hirsch argues, was 'constructing' modern nations. (8)

There are several broad theoretical frameworks of the research, which Hirsch explains in her introduction. First, she places the Soviet Union within the broader context of international history and modernization in twentieth-century Europe. The transmission of ideas between Western Europe and the Soviet Union played an important role in the foundation of the socialist state. In their work, Russian ethnographers and economists used Europe as a model. Second, the book addresses major controversies in the field of Soviet studies. The Soviet Union was not a prison of the people, Hirsch argues, thus rebutting the traditional argument in the historiography that defined the Soviet Union in exclusively oppressive terms. The foundation of the Soviet Union was an 'interactive and participatory process.' (5) The union of many nations was one result of this process. The Bolsheviks, Hirsch claims, never abandoned their nationalities policy, never retreated from the original designs, and the 1930s witnessed the further acceleration of revolutionary transformations across the Soviet Union.

Martin's and Hirsch's books have attracted much attention from historians as two groundbreaking works into the history of Soviet nationality policies during the 1920s and 1930s. Numerous reviews placed the two works within a broader context of studies on the Russian and Soviet empires and Soviet nationality policies. There have, however been few, if any attempts to discuss the two books within the context of each other. These two books, when taken together, are an excellent illustration of how different methodological approaches explain different interpretations of events and the significance this may have for the broader field of research.

Both Martin and Hirsch address similar problems from different perspectives, yet there is some overlap in their research. Both also explain difficulties which the Soviets faced in the east where people often defined themselves by clan, tribal identities prevailed and nations had not been fully formed. The lack of a clear-cut ethnic identity among these groups was one concern. The lack of political representation also proved to be a key issue. (Martin, 177) In the east, even to a larger degree than in the west, the ethnographic knowledge provided a crucial tool in determining which clans and tribes can be grouped to form new nationalities. Both Martin and Hirsch also admit the special status of the Ukrainians as 'too nationalistic', in Hirsch's definition, or one of the most developed nations, that took over the role previously played by the Poles in the Russian Empire. (Martin, 20)

These differences between east and west, tribes, clans and 'western' (in Martin's definition) nations shape the different methodologies and different arguments of Martin's and Hirsch's works. Martin focuses on central policy designs and intentions. Hirsch, instead, takes a more specific approach, and analyzes the role of the old elites and ethnographic knowledge in Soviet nationalities policy. Martin and Hirsch also have different geographical focuses. This dichotomy is well expressed by Hirsch's observation: when the Bolsheviks focused their attention on the western borderlands, ethnographers looked east.(31) This apt description could be also applied to Hirsch's and Martin's works.

Martin's work is geared towards the west of the Soviet Union, most specifically Ukraine, which came to occupy a very important place in the general structure of the *Affirmative Action Empire*. The book is based largely on extensive work in several Moscow archives, complemented by very important material from the archives in Kiev. Kiev is the only place, beyond Moscow, where

Martin conducted archival research for this study. Soviet Ukraine is the only republic that receives such extensive treatment as first, one of the most 'nationalistic' republics, second as a very important borderland, and third as the place where the policies of linguistic *korenizatsiia* generated many tensions and produced ambivalent outcomes.

Hirsch also covers the entire Soviet Union and does not explicitly specify her preferences or research focus, whether for the east or the west of the Soviet Union. Yet the book itself reveals a strong preoccupation with the eastern nations, which, in turn, leads to different questions and different research methodologies than those applied by Martin. This focus on the east becomes obvious by the cover-illustration of the publication, and the consistent use of 'eastern' terminology – tribe and clan, for instance – throughout the book. Ethnographic knowledge, to be sure, played a much more important role in the Soviet east than it did in the Soviet west in determining which primordial group – tribes or clans – could develop into nations, and which could not.¹⁰

Above all, Hirsch challenges some of Martin's key interpretations. Martin's innovative category of affirmative action that constitutes the main pillar of his entire interpretation scheme is the main target of Hirsch's criticism. The category of affirmative action, Hirsch argues, is misleading because it 'disconnects Soviet policies and practices from their actual historical context.'(103) It was not an aim of the Soviet regime to make nations for their own sake, Hirsch claims. The reversal of *korenizatsiia* during the 1930s is another area of disagreement. In 1932, the implementation of policy came under scrutiny by the party. There was no retreat in nationality policies, Hirsch claims in contrast. The 1930s witnessed 'the further acceleration of the revolution', aiming to speed up the transition to the communist future. (Hirsch, 9) Despite arrests and persecution, the old elites played a key role in shaping Soviet policies. Hirsch stresses the continuous revolutionary efforts and the ever-growing role of Soviet ethnography at the face of the emerging race science in Germany, and the direct international threat from Poland.

Why was there a seeming retreat in Ukraine while nationality policies remained constant in the east? This convoluted controversy about the reversal of the nationalities policy in the Soviet Union may be addressed, if not resolved, by focusing on differences rather than similarities in the implementation of these policies in different Soviet republics and the broader political considerations that influenced specific policies. This urgency of the Ukrainian question in the Soviet Union, however, cannot be simply explained by references to the relatively advanced stage of national development in Soviet Ukraine. Ukraine's geopolitical location — on the borders with Poland — came to play a defining role in Moscow's plans and policy designs.

Ukraine was assigned to fulfill the Piedmont principle, 'as a center to unite, first culturally and then politically, the divided Ukrainian population of Poland, Czechoslovakia and Romania' (Martin, 9); 'to turn Poland's Ukrainian population against the Polish government and to minimize Polish and German influences over soviet minorities.'(Martin, 32) One of the diaspora nationalities, Ukrainians posed a special challenge to the party, Hirsch admits.(284) The Soviets were not the only ones to try to exploit the inter-border connections. While the Bolsheviks experimented with the Piedmont principle, presenting Soviet Ukraine as a model for emulation for its neighbors, Soviet neighbors developed plans for destroying the Soviet Union by creating an independent Ukraine, formed of the territories which at the time belonged to the Soviet Union.

Historians of the Soviet Union — Martin and Hirsch — alluded to the international conspiracies around the Soviet western borderland. It took an East Europeanist to be the first to explore these conspiracies in depth and assert the centrality of the national question on the Soviet Ukrainian borderlands. In his *Sketches from a Secret War*, Timothy Snyder analyzes the Soviet-Polish struggle for Ukraine. A specialist on Eastern Europe, Snyder clarifies several key questions in the field of Sovietology: the western borderlands did play an important role in the party's overall policy designs; intelligence and subversion operations on and around Soviet borderlands were real and not

¹⁰ Soviet Central Asia is itself a small, yet growing, field in historiography. A good review of some recent publications is Adeeb Khalid, 'Between Empire and Revolution. New Work on Soviet Central Asia,' *Kritika*, Vol. 7. N. 4 (Fall 2006), 865-84.

imaginary; equally real and important were the plans for the foundation of an independent Ukraine out of the territories of the Soviet Ukraine, a scheme, which, if successful, would have put into question the very existence of the Soviet Union.

In the 1920s, Ukraine became the theatre of several espionage networks, where men, sometimes working as double agents, were involved in various secret wars. These various intelligence schemes in and around Soviet Ukraine are the subject of Snyder's book. At the center of such conspiracies was the Promethean movement, 'an anticommunist international designed to destroy the Soviet Union and to create independent states from its republics.'⁽⁴⁰⁾ Supported by Britain and France, this project was carried out mainly through Poland and Poland's intelligence services. The Ukrainian question in the Soviet Union, as Snyder demonstrates, 'became freighted with an association with Polish military aggression and international imperialism.'⁽³⁶⁾

Prometheism was never officially endorsed by any of Poland's governments and relied heavily on personal contracts. At least some of these personal contacts dated to the pre-Soviet period, to 1920, when the Polish army of General Joseph Pilsudski and the Ukrainian army of Symon Petliura joined forces in an anti-Soviet campaign, which proved successful in the short-run. In 1920, this combined Polish-Ukrainian army launched a successful offensive and took Kiev into what came to be the first major defeat of the Soviet forces in the Soviet-Polish war. The Soviets managed to regain Kiev shortly thereafter and defeated the Polish-Ukrainian armies. Defeated in the long run, this Polish-Ukrainian cooperation of 1920 was renewed, in a different fashion, during the late 1920s, when Ukrainian territories were divided between the Soviet Union and Poland. When Pilsudski took power in Poland in 1926, as the result of a coup, he revived the almost forgotten cooperation between people from Petliura's political establishment and his army — many of them at the time in exile abroad — and people working for the Promethean project. Henryk Jozefski was one of Pilsudski's men involved in the Promethean project. An artist, a spy and a politician all at once, between 1928 and 1938 Jozefski served as a governor of Volhynia, Poland's Ukrainian territory on the border with Soviet Ukraine. In Volhynia, Jozefski promoted a policy of national and religious toleration, treating Ukrainian culture as equal to Polish. The modern Ukrainian nation in Jozefski's Volhynia received support from the Polish state and this became most notable in the cultural and religious spheres and manifested itself in the Ukrainization of the church, the establishment of Ukrainian schools and the promotion of Ukrainian culture. Jozefski considered political loyalties — rather than national identities — a major aim and a tool to secure the political foundation of the Polish state. He sought to achieve this loyalty through his policies of toleration and state-support of the Ukrainian minority.

The Soviet policy of *korenizatsiia* in Ukraine presented the Prometheans with a unique opportunity to exploit this nationalities policy with the aim of destroying the Soviet Union from within. The Promethean project, as Snyder explains, relied on the intelligence work of Ukrainian operatives in Soviet Ukraine who could supply information and carry out intelligence operations inside the Soviet Union. Such projects involved the danger of counter-espionage, and at least some of the operatives ended up as double agents, working for Polish and Soviet intelligence at the same time. In this entangled world of intelligence and counter-intelligence, Moscow proved to be more effective, in the long run. In a series of intricate maneuvers, it crushed Poland's intelligence operations surrounding Soviet Ukraine by infiltrating Poland's intelligence services with Soviet agents who intentionally supplied false information to Poland's agents.

This collapse of Poland's Soviet intelligence proved to be a major blow to the Promethean project. Equally important to this collapse in intelligence were Poland's failures to secure the domestic support of the national minorities, most notably, Poland's large Ukrainian population. On the two extremes of the political spectrum, Ukrainian nationalists and communists united in their opposition to Poland's Ukrainian policies. For Ukrainian nationalists, an independent Ukrainian state was the main goal, and Jozefski's policies of toleration could prove to be a major obstacle on the road towards Ukrainian statehood. Had this (Polish) regime found support from average Ukrainians, the nationalists would have found it increasingly hard to mobilize the Ukrainian population in support of their cause. At the same time, Ukrainian communists in Poland, mainly members of the KPZU (Communist Party of Western Ukraine) saw Soviet Ukraine as the model for a Ukrainian state and

they regarded Poland's tolerant political center as an obstacle toward achieving their goals.¹¹ Polish concessions, Snyder explains, 'would weaken the appeal of communism inside Poland and the hold of Soviet power in Soviet Ukraine.'(33)

Soviet nationalities policy, on the other hand, achieved at least some of its objectives and generated support from Ukrainian communists within Poland. While Ukrainian communists in interwar Poland were becoming active supporters of the nationalities policy in Soviet Ukraine, some Ukrainian communists in Soviet Ukraine came to take an increasingly critical stance towards these Soviet policies. Communism in early twentieth-century Eastern Europe was a complex phenomenon, where men, who all considered themselves true Marxists, disagreed on the strategies for putting Marxist ideas into practice. From the pre-1923 period, Ukraine inherited several communist parties, each older than Lenin's Bolshevik party. These 'older' communists, among them Olexander Shumskyi and Mykola Skrypnyk, had come to play a key role in the process of Ukrainization, and hoped to push it much further than Moscow intended. Both Shumskyj and Skrypnyk, formed as communists during the wars and the revolutions, advocated their own vision of Soviet Ukraine, Ukrainian both in its form and in its essence. Nationality, to be sure, had not vanished away to be replaced by new class-based identity. Nationalism was instead becoming a crucial and ever more urgent issue.

While successful in drawing support from outside, the policy of Ukrainization backfired inside Soviet Ukraine. The strategy that meant to secure and strengthen the integrity of the Soviet Union threatened the very existence of the state which initiated the policy. During the late 1920s and 1930s, Moscow uncovered and put on trial members of several political organizations in Soviet Ukraine who allegedly conspired for the destruction of the Soviet Union. The 1929 trial of the Union of the Liberation of Ukraine was widely publicized across the Soviet Union and abroad. The Union, Snyder explains, may or may not have existed. But the idea and the policies along these lines, with the aim to create an independent Ukraine, did circulate in Soviet Ukraine during the 1920s.

The Soviet nationality policies backfired, but Poland's toleration policies were also fraught with many contradictions. The controversies of Poland's minorities policies and their ambivalent outcomes, while interesting and important in their own right, help to explain Soviet strategies, Ukrainian mobilization, and the overall outcomes of the nationality policies in the Soviet Union. The controversies around Poland's Ukrainian policies, specifically in Volhynia, are the focus of Cornelia Schenke's book *Nationalstaat und Nationale Frage. Polen und die Ukrainer 1921-1939*. Soviet Ukraine and the policy of Ukrainization reach beyond the main areas of Schenke's research. Yet her references to the *other* Ukraine remain important for our understanding of the complexity of the policies across borders. Pilsudski and Jozefski, Schenke explains, sought to construct an independent Ukraine from the Ukrainian territories across the Polish border — in Soviet Ukraine. At the same time, they intended to leave the Ukrainian territories within Poland intact, as part of the Polish state. Schenke discusses the vibrant political life and the varieties of representation within the Ukrainian political spectrum, a development that indeed became possible as a result of the tolerant policies of the interwar Polish state. Yet at least some of these Ukrainian parties had their own vision of Ukrainian statehood that conflicted with Pilsudski's and Jozefski's vision of Polish-Ukrainian coexistence within a Polish state. Polish politicians, Schenke explains, underestimated the dynamics of Ukrainian nationalism and overestimated the attractiveness of Polish culture. The ambivalences of *korenizatsiia* and its eventual reversal could only be understood within this broader context of international politics on the Russian-Polish borderlands between 1917 and 1938.

All of these different studies, on the one hand, reveal a demarcation between Sovietologists and East Europeanists, two schools that have long formed different, however related, fields in Western historiography. On the other hand, all of these works, when considered together, demonstrate the gradual convergence of these two fields. The influences between different scholars and schools are reciprocal. With the recent post-1991 shifts in Soviet historiography, historians pay increasing attention to different regions within the Soviet Union. Such a tendency is well reflected in Martin's

¹¹ On the KPZU see Janusz Radziejowski, *The Communist Party of Western Ukraine, 1919-1929*, transl. Alan Rutkowski. (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 1983).

and Hirsch's works with their analysis of central Soviet policies seen through the prism of different republics and ethnicities. At the same time, 'East Europeanists' increasingly move into the field that was traditionally reserved for 'Sovietologists.' *Sketches from a Secret War* and *Nationalstaat und Nationale Frage. Polen und die Ukrainer 1921-1939* are good examples of how research on interwar Eastern Europe can clarify some key questions in the interwar history of the Soviet Union.

This convergence of fields in western historiography — both Anglo-American and German — however, has barely had an impact on the state of, for example, 'native' Ukrainian scholarship of the Soviet period. Despite the increasing contacts with the West, much of Ukrainian historiography is still dominated by a national narrative, in which the sufferings of the Ukrainian people under Soviet rule play a key role. Much of this domestic historiography, produced in Ukraine even in the twenty-first-century, remains rhetorical rather than historical. In his 2001 publication of a history of Ukraine during the twentieth-century, for example, a leading Ukrainian historian Iurii Shapoval claimed to shed 'the light of truth that pulses in the deep waters of Soviet totalitarianism and lighten our future.'¹² Within this narrative of victimhood and suffering, the Soviet 1930s occupied a key place. Such a perspective has been challenged by a cohort of younger historians, yet the concept of victimhood and suffering remains a core theme of a Ukrainian master narrative.¹³

The Soviet policy of nationalization and its impact on Soviet Ukraine during the 1920s, to be sure, did not escape the attention of Ukrainian historians. A collective work edited by yet another leading Ukrainian historian, Volodymyr Smolii, and published in 2003, addressed some major questions relating to the Soviet *korenizatsiia* policy and its impact on Ukraine.¹⁴ *Korenozatsiia* was a temporary adjustment that never formed a core policy, the authors claim, in a statement that would resonate well with at least some of their western colleagues. While admitting the positive, however short-term, results of Ukrainization, the authors proceed to claim that this policy was reversed, in a radical manner, starting from the early 1930s. The reforms of the 1920s were inconsistent, and Ukrainization produced rather ambivalent outcomes. Their reversal was full, radical, and unequivocal. Soviet Ukrainization, seen in this light, was really only a temporary strategy that had no significant long-term impact, and was replaced, within years, by a new radical policy that aimed at the destruction, rather than the promotion of Ukrainian nationality.

This Ukrainian publication raises several important issues that have been only marginally addressed by Western scholars. First is the issue of chronological continuity. In contrast to their western colleagues, Ukrainian historians tend to place the Soviet nationalities policy within the context of the nationalities policy that promoted Ukrainian culture and Ukrainian elites in the short-lived Ukrainian People's Republic between 1917 and 1921. The second important issue is the national and cultural revival in Soviet Ukraine during the 1920s. During the 1920s, Soviet Ukraine, the authors explain, experienced a cultural revival, 'the national-cultural movement of masses, subordinate to the aims of national revival.'⁽⁷⁾ Both issues — continuous Ukrainization and cultural national revival — reflect the strictly national focus of this Ukrainian publication. In this account, the Ukrainian people play a role as an active agency that willfully carried out the policy of Ukrainization, both before and during the Soviet period. The cultural developments in Soviet Ukraine appear to be unrelated to the concurrent policies of Ukrainization, and are presented as an authentic development within a Ukrainian society, unrelated to the concurrent Soviet policies.¹⁵ The Bolshevik nationality policies

¹² Shapoval, 5.

¹³ There are some notable exceptions. Yaroslav Hrytsak, *Narysy istorii Ukrainy: formuvannia modernoi Ukrainskoi natsii XIX-XX stolittia* (Kyiv: Heneze, 1996) places Ukraine within a broader context of modern European history.

¹⁴ Apart from monographs, there have been several bibliographical publications listing relevant sources and publications on the 1920 nationality policies in Soviet Ukraine. For example, P. Bondarchuk et al, *Polityka ukrainizatsii v radianskii Ukraini (1920-1930-i roky): Naukovo-dopomizhnyi bibliographichnyi pokazchuk*. (Kyiv: Instytut NAN Ukrainy, 2003). This extremely detailed registry should be very helpful for researchers. Yet it also reveals the obscurity of historical scholarship in both soviet and post-soviet Ukraine. Some seemingly interesting articles appeared in obscure journals which are hard to locate.

¹⁵ The 1920s witnessed a great cultural revival in Ukraine that manifested itself, above all, in Ukrainian literature and also in the arts. There are several works that address Ukrainian culture during the 1920s. See Myroslav Shkandrii, *Modernists, Marxists, and the Nation: The Ukrainian Literary Discussion of the 1920s*. (Edmonton;

thus come out in a very different light in this context as a product of circumstances rather than an intentional strategy.¹⁶ Even if *korenizatsiia* was only a temporary strategy, it could be at least partly explained in reference to the pre-1923 period and the Bolsheviks' failures to reverse the 'achievements of the Ukrainian revolution.' (26)

Equally interesting is this book's explanation of the causes of the reversal of Ukrainization. The communist party of Western Ukraine, the authors argue, caused major concerns for the central authorities in Moscow. Ukrainian national communists, most notably Shumsky and Skrypnyk, promoted a comprehensive nationalities policy that conflicted with Moscow's plans for Ukraine. The tensions between Ukrainian communists, Soviet apparatchiks in Ukraine and the central authorities in Moscow escalated during the late 1920s and eventually led to the reversal of nationality policies. This argument gives Ukrainian national communists a central role in influencing the reversal of Soviet central policies during the 1930s (in contrast to Martin and Hirsch). This thesis of the crucial role of Ukraine's national communists in the process of Ukrainization reflects a broader framework of the book with its strong emphasis on the role of Ukrainian nationalists — whether communist or not — in the Ukrainian revival during the 1920s.

Communism, to be sure, invokes few, if any, positive associations among Ukrainian historians. The recent Ukrainian historiography of the Soviet era in Ukrainian history reflects well these rather ambivalent attitudes towards communism. The main focus of the research is on the 1930s, and the major debates revolve around the issue of the genocide and famine in Soviet Ukraine during the 1930s.¹⁷ In their preoccupation with the 'Ukrainian tragedy' of the 1930s, Ukrainian historians sometimes fall into a teleological trap and define the 1930s as a logical and anticipated outcome of the policy line in the Soviet Union during the 1920s. Thus, the allegedly radical reversal of the *korenizatsiia* policy in 1932, according to this Ukrainian account of the Soviet nationalities policy, is deemed more important than the nationalities policy itself. Such an approach is geared towards a conventional narrative of Ukrainian history, in which both the Soviet and Polish states during the interwar period are described as major obstacles in the process of Ukrainian state building.

This teleological view of Ukrainian history — one that starts and ends with disaster as the result of foreign, in this case, Soviet occupation — sets this Ukrainian publication apart not only from Western studies on related topics, but also from Russian scholarship. Russian historians do not always share the Ukrainians' preoccupation with the 1930s; most of them, as Elena Borisenok has argued, do not consider the Bolshevik policies as genocide. (Borisenok 19). At the same time, Russian scholars pay little attention to the question of Ukrainization, which remains marginal.

In her 2006 book on Soviet Ukrainization during the 1920s and 1930s, Borisenok seeks to approach this period of Soviet Ukrainian history as an uninvolved outsider. This Russian publication is, to my knowledge, one of few (if not the only) attempt to bridge Ukrainian, Russian and Western scholarship. Borisenok is thoroughly familiar with the debates in the Western historiography of the Soviet Union, even if her discussion of this historiography follows a rather conventional Soviet-style review of the literature, full of description yet short on analysis. Some roots of Ukrainization, Borisenok admits, can be traced to the policies of the Ukrainian People's Republic, between 1917 and 1921. This short-lived Ukrainian state did not have a chance to fully develop and materialize these policies. Bolshevik nationality policies during the 1920s marked a new beginning, yet in Soviet Ukraine the Bolsheviks were building, intentionally or not, on the achievements of Ukrainian nationalists during the period of 1917-1921. The nationalities policy was designed to ensure the national outlook of Soviet republics, and as such, Borisenok claims, it served Soviet geopolitical goals well. (83)

(Contd.) _____

Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 1992); George S.N. Luckyj, *Literary Politics in the Soviet Ukraine, 1917-1934*. Revised Edition. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990).

¹⁶ Some of the older English-language literature also adopted a similar view. 'The Bolsheviks, unable to reverse what the Ukrainians had achieved, attempted to place themselves at the head of the movement,' James Mace wrote in his 1983 history of Ukrainian communism. See Mace, 87.

¹⁷ History and politics became closely intertwined in contemporary Ukraine. Ukraine's efforts to press for the international recognition of the 1930s famine as genocide coincided with a constantly rising number of historical publications on the subject.

Borisonok notes that Ukrainian historians consider the communist party an ‘alien body’ in Ukrainian tradition, yet the communists played a key role in Ukrainian politics before and during the 1920s. Ukrainian communists took an active part in the Soviet nationalities policy. This policy received positive resonance among some circles of the Ukrainian intelligentsia in Poland’s part of Ukraine, Galicia and Volhynia. A number of Ukrainian intellectuals were impressed enough by Soviet Ukrainian achievements to take the difficult decision to return to Soviet Ukraine in the 1920s. Many of them would later perish as a result of Soviet terror in the 1930s. In the 1920s, their positive acceptance of the Soviet regime served as a promising indication of the successes of Soviet policies.

Ukrainizatsiia, Borisonok explains, was just one version of the Soviet *korenizatsiia* policy. The reversal of *korenizatsiia*, which Borisonok places in 1932, cannot be explained by the political developments in Soviet Ukraine alone. A broader turn in Soviet policies between 1928-1932, industrialization, collectivization, the liquidation of private property, also shaped new strategies on the nationality question. Borisonok argues that it was only possible to achieve full control over the Ukrainian peasantry through full control over the Ukrainian party administration. Some members of this party, especially Ukrainian communists of the pre-1923 generation, had a different view of the status of Ukraine within the Soviet Union than their Moscow superiors. The resistance of the Ukrainian countryside, and thus Soviet failures to procure an adequate food supply, were attributed to the lack of compliance among Ukrainian Soviet intelligentsia, ostensibly one result of Soviet nationality policies.

These different historical accounts of Soviet nationalities policy address in various ways one of the most debated issues in contemporary Ukrainian historiography and politics, the 1932-1933 famine in Soviet Ukraine. Ukrainian historians consider the famine genocide. Ukrainian politicians seek official international recognition of this genocide. Russian historians in their majority instead reject the genocide claims.¹⁸ If the famine was genocide, and thus a product of the specific policy that targeted the Ukrainians as a nation, then such a policy could be linked, and explained, by the Soviet nationalities policy and its reversal in Ukraine around 1932. The national interpretation of the famine and the reversal of the Soviet *korenizatsiia* dominate the Ukrainian narrative. Western scholars, however, take a more nuanced view by placing Ukraine within the context of broader Soviet policy rather than focusing on Ukraine *per se*. The first, early, famine of 1928 and 1929 in Soviet Ukraine, as both Martin and Snyder explain, had natural causes. Yet Stalin interpreted it in a certain way, and blamed the grain crisis on the Ukrainian peasants, the Ukrainian party cadres, and foreign propaganda: ‘Ukrainian nationalism and Polish conspiracy, collaborating to prevent grain collection.’ (Snyder, 107) ‘The national interpretation,’ Martin explains, ‘was not a cause of the grain requisitions crisis and famine. Rather, it emerged as a consequence of it.’ (Martin, 303) The national or any other interpretation of the famine can only make sense when analyzed and presented within a broader context of politics in the entire Soviet Union during the 1920s and the 1930s.

Both Ukrainian and Russian historians pay little attention to these *foreign* interpretations of the events in Soviet Ukraine. Borisonok notes that Russian historians showed little interest in Ukrainian topics and, more specifically, the history of Soviet nationality policies in Ukraine during the 1920s. Yet this lack of interest is, in a way, reciprocal, for Ukrainian scholars rarely show interest in things non-Ukrainian and deal with Russian or Soviet history only as a matter of necessity. This lack of communication between scholars, however, crosses Russian-Ukrainian boundaries, too. The increase of interest in related topics, such as for example, the interwar period in Soviet history, both in the West and in the former Soviet republics, rarely results in any substantial dialogue between scholars. Because of various methodological and ideological issues, several different scholarships on related issues exist in separate universes and rarely, if at all, communicate with each other.

¹⁸ One of the strongest arguments in Russian historiography that undermines the Ukrainian genocide claims is that famine was not restricted solely to Ukraine but took place in other regions of the Soviet Union (Kazakhstan is one notable example), and even in Russia proper. It is thus framed as the tragedy of the Soviet people in general, rather than genocide against one specific nation. For this argument see, for example, Viktor Kondrashin, *Golod 1932-1933 godov.* (2008). The Ukrainian famine has been widely debated in recent years in different Ukrainian media and the debates draw much public attention.

Chronology is one of the most noticeable differences across different scholarships. The short-lived Ukrainian People's Republic, between 1917 and 1921, set a precedent of Ukrainian statehood, before Ukrainian territories had been incorporated into Poland and the Soviet Union. This pre-Soviet past, however, occupies different places in different historical accounts. It is at the center of the Ukrainian publication; at the background of Snyder's and Schenke's books, and is marginal in Martin's and Hirsch's studies. Different analysis of chronology reveal broader methodological differences, not only between Western and local scholars but also among Western scholars themselves. Martin and Hirsch, working within the broader framework of the Soviet Union, approach Soviet nationalities policy as part of the larger project of the creation of the Soviet Union. Martin takes 1923 as the starting point of his research, and only briefly refers to the pre-1923 periods. He explains the Bolsheviks' nationality policies, or rather the absence of coherent national policies, during the 1917 revolution. Yet the rest of the book is structured around different periods in Soviet state-building: 1923-1928 — the new economic policy; 1928-1932 — the socialist offensive; 1933-1938 — the great retreat. Hirsch is more attentive to chronological continuities. She analyzes in detail the Bolsheviks' stance on the nationality question before the foundation of the Soviet Union, the role of the 1917 revolution in the foundation of the Soviet State and the frequent border changes during "the turbulent 1920s." In her main narrative, however, she pays little attention to how these pre-1923 developments could have influenced the domestic and international status of the Soviet Union, as a whole, and its specific republics.

This lack of close attention to the pre-1923 period forms a sharp contrast to Snyder's and Schenke's works on related topics. Snyder and Schenke approach Ukrainian territories from an East European perspective, and the specific attention to pre-1923 or pre-1921 developments is part of this approach. The Ukrainian intellectual and political elites, formed during WWI and the revolutions and civil wars that followed, played a key role in post-1923 developments in both the Polish and Soviet Ukraine.

Even more significant are the different chronological interpretations of the reversal of *korenizatsiia*, in 1932, 1938, or never at all. Ukrainian historians are most radical of all in their determination to place the end of *korenizatsiia* squarely at 1932. Borisenok, while admitting some changes to the nationalities policy around 1932, admits the continuous Ukrainization through 1938. Martin, too, admits important changes in 1932, yet explains the policy itself was never officially abandoned. The final date of the nationalities policy defines broader arguments of each of these works.

Despite the increasing contacts between scholars from different fields and countries, national historiographies and certain subjects remain remarkably resilient to outside influences. The Ukrainian historiography of the Soviet nationality policy during the 1920s is one example of such resilience. This lack of communication between different historiographies has detrimental effects not only on the native historical scholarship in post-Soviet republics, but, to a different extent, to Western scholarship as well. And in the meantime, these different scholarships on related subjects often remain isolated, and little attention is paid to the debates outside of the immediate academic community.

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