

Citizenship, Territoriality, and Post-Soviet Nationhood

“This fine book captures a moment in the identity negotiations of three lesser known communities of the former Soviet space: Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Moldova. Among other things, it shows the resilience of identity in the old developed cultures vis-a-vis its mutability in the recent artificially-created ones. It also underscores the error of regarding the development of identities in post-Soviet nations as a function of a natural inclination for liberal democracy. Full of fascinating data, the book should be of interest to every student of PSS.”

—Liah Greenfeld, *Professor, Sociology, Political Science, and Anthropology,
Boston University, USA*

“This book represents an invaluable contribution to present-day scholarship in a number of respects. It provides extensive information on the contemporary situation in three ex-Soviet border states, where Western governments have thus far not been able to compete effectively with Russia for influence because of the Russians’ far greater knowledge of the area. As an expression of the pre-modernist school of nationalism studies, this book also explains clearly and in detail the historical background which led to and still influences the situation in these countries, as a corrective to modernist studies which have left their readers bewildered when history reared its head. From a theoretical perspective, this study draws a crucial distinction between civil nationalism, based on liberal-democratic values, and territorial nationalism, based on birth in the territory which a state occupies, showing that conflation of civic and territorial nationalism has been the product of a naive assumption, based upon a particular interpretation of the Euro-American experience and resulting in systemic misunderstanding of the political situations in other areas of the world, that they are both manifestations of the same political impulse, when in fact, territorial nationalism can be motivated by factors which are not liberal-democratic at all. The book also gives comparative insight into the motivations which governments have for adopting one or another policy regarding dual citizenship, a topic which will inevitably be addressed in broader circles as more and more people around the world avail themselves of this option.”

—John Myhill, *Full Professor, English Department, University of Haifa, Israel*

“Maxim Tabachnik has revolutionized the study of citizenship and nationalism in general by reformulating the ‘ethnic’ (bad) ‘civic’ (good) distinction into one between ‘ethnic’ and ‘territorial.’ He has demonstrated convincingly, using the example of the post-Soviet states, that an ethnic/territorial distinction is much better able to account for differences in the outlooks and policies of these and other states than the traditional paradigm. The book also provides a fascinating study of the development of citizenship thinking throughout the ages. In short, this is a book from which both regional specialists of the post-Soviet space and students of nationalism in general have much to learn.”

—André Liebich, *Honorary Professor of International History and Politics, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Switzerland*

“This book makes important advances in the study of citizenship, nationalism, and national identity politics. Drawing on extensive primary research in and on Azerbaijan, Georgia and Moldova, the book offers rich empirical account of how and why elites in the post-Soviet region craft more or less inclusive citizenship rules. The author’s central argument that territorial and civic nationalism, while often used interchangeably, are in fact distinct concepts of collective identity both in their historical origin and in their impact on citizenship policy making in modern states will engage scholars of nationalism far beyond the post-Soviet region.”

—Oxana Shevel, *Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, Tufts University, USA*

“This book makes an important contribution to the scholarship of citizenship in post-Soviet states by exploring the origins of citizenship laws in Azerbaijan, Moldova and Georgia. This is an interesting book that highlights how ethnic identity, territorial nationalism, concerns of territorial integrity and geopolitics collide to define boundaries of citizenship in these countries. The book is rich with detail and relevant to contemporary events in the post-Soviet region. Sociologists, political scientists, historians studying nation-state-building in the contemporary era should read it.”

—Shushanik Makaryan, Ph.D., *Researcher, Population Research Institute, Pennsylvania State University, USA*

Maxim Tabachnik

Citizenship,
Territoriality,
and Post-Soviet
Nationhood

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in Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Moldova

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Maxim Tabachnik
Department of Politics
University of California, Santa Cruz
Santa Cruz, CA, USA

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*To my grandparents and all victims of the Second World War
and ethnic genocide*

PREFACE

This book, based on the findings of my Ph.D. research, was born out of my fascination with ethnicity and ethnic belonging. I grew up in the Soviet Union, in the city of Ufa, the capital of what is currently known as the Republic of Bashkortostan, a subject of the Russian Federation. Bashkirs, the titular ethnicity, constitute less than a third of the region's population, the rest shared almost equally between Russians and Tatars. Street signs and much of the local media, however, was in Bashkir, even if most of Bashkir speakers lived in rural areas. Bashkirs also dominated leadership positions in the region. This situation seemed strange to me growing up.

While I haven't examine my home region's history specifically, now, of course, I know that the borders cutting across ethnic populations are the result of the infamous Soviet nationalities policy, masterminded by the Commissar for Nationalities Joseph Stalin in the early 1920s. The overrepresentation of the titular ethnic group in leadership position is the likely effect of *korenizatsiya*, the 1920s policy of "rooting" ethnicity-based administrative regions in titular cultures to increase support for the newly established Bolshevik regime.

One of Stalin's policy goals was to avoid pan-Turkism, or the nationalist idea of unifying all Turkic-speaking people into one political state. From that point of view, it was important to break them down into as many ethnic groups as possible (those were meticulously established by Soviet social scientists) and, just as it was done with other ethnic groups, to mismatch administrative and ethnic borders. I assume that the clearly

reduced borders of the potentially insurgent Tatar Republic are the result of the same preoccupation. Tatars had been the most politically and culturally active Turkic ethnic group in the Russian Empire. Bashkortostan ended up with more than double territory of Tatarstan. Many, if not most, of Bashkortostan's Tatars live in the districts that border Tatarstan.

The fall of the Kazan Khanate (a prominent descendant of the Mongol empire) to Ivan the Terrible in 1552 (commemorated by the construction of the postcard-famous St. Basil's Cathedral in Red Square) is a key milestone in the political consolidation of the Russian state and the catalyst of its spectacular territorial expansion into Siberia and beyond that has made Russia by far the largest territorial state in the world, even today, after the loss of many of its possessions during the rise and fall of the Soviet Union. Russian Federation is an inheritor of the empire with an uneasy relationship between ethnic Russian collective identity and that of over 160 other ethnolinguistic groups.

To explain my interest in ethnicity fully, I have to come back to my family history. My mother Irina, an ethnic Russian (or so she was convinced before I discovered her Ukrainian roots) married my father Mark, an ethnic Jew. The ethnic tension within the family was ever-present during my childhood, which went along with the overall anti-Semitic general sentiment I encountered among my peers, despite of the Soviet ideological values of ethnic equality and brotherhood we were taught in school. When I started secondary school, I had to choose my "nationality" from the two options available to me (nationality was an infamous "fifth graph" entry in the Soviet passport). My teacher told me to put down "Russian" because it is better. My family thought so, too. My patronymic (derived from my father's first name) and my last name (Jewish-Ukrainian) remained "Jewish," however, which led to frequent questions.

The more I dug into my family history, the more I realized how drastically ethnic identity affected it. My paternal grandmother Lyuba grew up in a Jewish-Ukrainian village on the border with Poland. She spoke many languages fluently, including Yiddish and Ukrainian. One day she went for a brief visit to her aunt in Kiev. Turned out, it was destiny's way to save her from an imminent death. All her numerous immediate family perished during the first day of the War as the Nazi troops crossed from Poland into Western Ukraine, leaving her the sole survivor. She never recovered from that trauma fully. I also found out that maternal great-grandmother Katya, the key person during my childhood, was an ethnic Ukrainian. Her "kulak," or rich peasant, family was stripped of possessions in Chernigov,

Ukraine, and sent on a wheel cart to Siberia. Throughout her life, she always traveled to the West, spending long periods of time in Lvov and in Riga as she lost all her three husbands to the War and the Stalinist repressions. The two family branches met in Ufa, a safe place just West of the Ural Mountains away from the Nazis for one, and a half-way escape from the Siberian exile for the other (of course, Ufa is also famous for being the exile destination of Vladimir Lenin during the tsarist regime).

One of Katya's daughters Lyusya moved westward, first to Kazan and then to Riga, Latvia, together with many other Russian-speakers recruited by the Soviet state to man newly built factories there. Thanks to Lyusya, I was able to spend summers in Riga, which retained its Germanic and Western European feel despite decades of Sovietization in the aftermath of the Soviet annexation of the Baltic states as the result of the secret Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. I was able to witness the surge of the nationalist movement in Latvia, and even the entry of Soviet tanks into Riga during the August Coup against Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev in 1991, which led to the dissolution of the country that I grew up in. Upon Latvia's independence, Lyusya, like most of the Russian "invaders," became stateless and received the "passport of non-citizen" of Latvia, which served as her identification document. As all government and business communication was switched into Latvian, her daughter Galina's Latvian skills became crucial for survival. Later, during my years spent in Barcelona, I was shocked about how similar the Catalan nationalist movement was to the Latvian one, but also to the Bashkir one, to the Tatar one, to the Russian one. Ethnic nationalism clearly had very defined ideological qualities.

The logical continuation for my curiosity about the nature of ethnic consciousness was to delve into the existing scholarship on nationalism during my graduate studies at Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona and the University of California, Santa Cruz. The first thing I discovered, to my surprise, was that the term "nationalism" meant different things in the West and in the East. By nationalism in Russia (and probably the rest of Central and Eastern Europe), we mean to say "ethnic nationalism." In the West, the term refers to the principle of organizing the world into territorial nation-states, a type of political organization that has become standard practice since the French Revolution (with the important precedents of English and American Revolutions).

This difference gave me great insight and threw me into the midst of the biggest conceptual debate of the nationalism field over the ethnic/civic

dichotomy. This concept is a renamed version of the contradiction between Eastern and Western nationalisms described by Hans Kohn at the end of the Second World War. He suggested that nationalism in the East is based on blood and in the West on liberal-democratic values. While most scholars agree that there are two types of nationalism, their definitions, nature, and origin are still widely debatable, not unlike the very concept of ethnicity itself. As such, I discovered that the central idea of ethnic identity and ethnic nationalism, a community of blood and descent, was somehow deemphasized and even completely lost, possibly due to political correctness, especially when looking through the prism of US-based academia. Moreover, empirical cases didn't always seem to fit theory and definitions either, which led to many scholars giving up on applying the ethnic/civic dichotomy to real-life cases of nationalism.

This book is a response to these observations. It comes up with its own interpretation of the history of nationalism. While constructing a history of nationalism is a gargantuan task, my attempt at it has allowed me to argue that Western/civic nationalism has two components, one—inherently related to the rise of the West (read, individualism and liberal democracy), but the other one based on a community of territory. The latter has been in continuous tension with ethnic collective identity since times immemorial. Not only the subdivision of ethnic nationalism into liberal-democratic and ethnic components recasts the way we see the history of civilization but it makes the ethnic/civic dichotomy applicable in empirical research, not only for Western cases but also for those of the rest of the world, including the former Soviet Union.

Last but not least, behind it all stands my belief in the intrinsic seductive danger and unfairness of ethnicity and blood descent as a political ideology. I hold this belief because of my family history as well as the historical examples from the Second World War and the wave of inter-ethnic atrocities committed as the Communist bloc collapsed (let alone endless others in the history of humankind). This book is homage to all victims of ethnically induced violence and, ultimately, to the importance of remembering our history and the realization that it deeply shapes of who we are today, in ways often unforeseen. Through my study of nationalism in Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Moldova, I invite you to make your own conclusion about ethnic nationalism and its place in history and current political life.

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