

Speaking Bolshevik in Ukrainian:  
The Development of Peasant Consciousness and Bolshevik Ideas on Nation-Building in  
the Ukrainian SSR, 1900-1928

by

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This study will look at how Bolsheviks understood the idea of “nation” and how they applied this conception to the development of Soviet society in Ukraine during the 1920s. I will argue that peasants in Ukraine prior to the 1917 revolution were largely parochial, lacking a coherent notion of themselves as part of a Ukrainian nation. The Bolsheviks assumed that the peasants did in fact define themselves along national lines, and undertook far-reaching measures in order to develop the Ukrainian nation within a Soviet context. I will further argue that the result of this was an event of nation-building: over a short period of time peasants were inducted into the Soviet state as both Soviet citizens and Ukrainians. The effect of the nation-building project in Ukraine was that peasants began to self-identify in a radically new way. While initially this new national identity was inextricably tied to Soviet identity, the Soviet state’s willingness to allow national growth served as a catalyst for new national identities that were not beholden to membership in the Soviet Union exclusively.

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## **Introduction: Revisiting Bolshevik Nation-Building**

After the revolution in 1917, the remnants of the Russian empire were thrown into civil war as the Bolsheviks attempted to gain control of the territory previously ruled by the Tsar. This period was particularly chaotic in the area now known as Ukraine, where the ruling government seemed to radically change on a monthly basis. At the same time, peasant uprisings were ubiquitous: in April of 1919 alone, there were 93 separate rebellions.<sup>1</sup> These rebellions were largely in response to the oppressive policies of Bolshevik power, which was characterized by grain acquisition and political repression in order to fuel their military campaign as well as root out perceived destabilizing elements within conquered territory.

Eventually, the Bolsheviks realized that in order to maintain stability in the countryside, it would be better to utilize the carrot rather than the stick. After losing power in Ukraine in 1919, Lenin submitted a resolution to the Eighth Congress of the Russian Communist Party calling for greater tolerance and understanding of Ukrainian culture and language.<sup>2</sup> After the formation of the Soviet Union in 1922, which included the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, the Bolsheviks encouraged the development of national cultures in Ukraine. This was done both in order to placate the various nationalities in Ukraine (particularly the Ukrainians themselves) as well as integrate these peoples into the socialist state as Soviet citizens. Many scholars have taken this national

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<sup>1</sup> Taras Hunczak, ed. *The Ukraine, 1917-21: A Study in Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 266.

<sup>2</sup> Robert S. Sullivant, *Soviet Politics and the Ukraine 1917-1957* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), 87.

growth as their starting point in looking at Bolshevik nation-building policies, describing how the Soviet state interacted with various nationalities.<sup>3</sup>

However, this approach is not entirely effective because it does not critically analyze what these nationalities actually were. Nations are often understood as given politico-cultural entities that need not be investigated as problematic social categories. Essentially, by employing a methodology that uses nations as a means to understand human interaction, we risk conflating categories of practice utilized by the Bolsheviks with categories of analysis that we use to understand Bolshevik state-building. Ultimately, we ignore the fundamental philosophical underpinnings of the modern nation-building project undertaken by the Bolsheviks, and risk placing the political development of the peasantry within a national narrative that is not necessarily reflective of how peasants understood themselves. Therefore, this study intends to use the experience of peasants in the Ukrainian SSR and the development of Bolshevik ideas on nation-building from approximately 1900 until 1928 in order to answer the questions of how the Bolsheviks understood nations, how they subsequently interacted with the peasantry with these notions in mind, and the effects of this interaction on the development of political consciousness among the peasantry. This is done in the hopes of opening a new discussion on Bolshevik nationality policy, and how we understand the role of nationality in the formation of identity.

Ukraine is an interesting case to consider for a variety of reasons. First, it occupies a unique position in the existing literature on the period. Due to the widespread

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Jeremy Smith, *The Bolsheviks and the National Question, 1917-23* (New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1999), Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), Robert J. Kaiser, *The Geography of Nationalism in Russia and the USSR* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

Ukrainian diaspora, particularly in North America, there is a surprisingly large amount of work that has been done in English on the Ukrainian experience both before and during the Soviet period. Many (but not all) such treatments view Ukraine and Ukrainian identity as central to the narrative. These works act as a form of nation-building themselves, articulating a distinct national idea culminating in the formation of the Ukrainian nation-state in the early 1990s.<sup>4</sup>

These nationalist works show a distinct, Ukrainian experience, particularly during the Soviet period. They reveal stark differences between Ukrainianness and Russianness, a difference that is often not discussed in histories of the Tsarist Empire and the Soviet Union, most of which lump the two together as being basically the same with minor regional variance. The particular experience of the area that is now Ukraine and the development of Ukrainian identity under socialism is usually either totally ignored or significantly reduced in importance in works that describe Soviet history on a macro scale. The tensions between Ukraine and Russia are usually lost in the seemingly grander tension between the Asian East and the European West within the Soviet Union. The result is that many studies conflate the Soviet Union with the Russian Soviet Socialist Republic (RSFSR), or distinguish primarily between the RSFSR and the Central Asian republics, with the implication being that the experience in the RSFSR can be generalized to the other western “European” republics like Ukraine.<sup>5</sup> Ukraine-centric works claim this assumption is incorrect, and thus using Ukraine as a case study for this work is an attempt

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Bohdan Krawchenko, *Social Change and National Consciousness in Twentieth-Century Ukraine* (London: The MacMillan Press Ltd, 1985), Paul R. Magocsi, *The Roots of Ukrainian Nationalism: Galicia as Ukraine's Piedmont* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2002).

<sup>5</sup> Oftentimes, this conflation is evident even in the titles of works that primarily discuss the RSFSR, or the RSFSR in contrast exclusively with Central Asia (for examples, see Peter Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917-1929* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) and Michael G. Smith, *Language and Power in the Creation of the USSR, 1917-1953* (New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1998)).

to simultaneously particularize the nation-building experience and create an opportunity to apply my results to other regions of the Soviet Union.

Another reason why Ukraine provides such an excellent case study is its shared socio-culturo-political heritage with Russia and in particular the Russian leadership in Moscow and St. Petersburg, despite being distinct. Prior to the revolution, Ukrainian peasants were oftentimes almost indistinguishable from their Russian counterparts besides some variance in language (although some so-called Ukrainians actually spoke Russian as a native language). Ukrainians by and large were white, Christian, Slavic speakers. In order to isolate how the Bolsheviks understood a term such as “nation” in its most fundamental form, it is more effective to look at how they interacted with peasants as a social class who were at once both seen as distinct while also being very similar. True, nation-building occurred in Central Asia as well (and oftentimes gets much more attention in English-language scholarship than Ukraine), but the differences between the indigenous peoples there and their new socialist rulers were compounded by religious and ethnic differences that were not present in Ukraine. In order to isolate how the Bolsheviks understood “nation” would require one to also unpack racial biases and notions of Otherness that extended beyond solely social stratification that simply were not present in Ukraine.

At the same time, the case of Ukraine illustrates different major social divisions that existed between it and the Soviet rulers in Moscow. Bohdan Krawchenko has pointed out that prior to 1917, Ukrainian was virtually synonymous with “peasant.”<sup>6</sup> The vast majority of Ukrainians were rural farmers, often with very little land of their own. The

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<sup>6</sup> Bohdan Krawchenko, *Social Change and National Consciousness in Twentieth-Century Ukraine* (London: The MacMillan Press Ltd, 1985), 21.

contrast between the poverty of the Ukrainian rural peasantry and the comparative affluence of the urban centres, coupled with the fact that the governments which often seemed to be at odds with peasants' interests were always based in major city centres, created a distinct tension between rural and urban. This is significant particularly in an area populated by non-nationalized peasants, since Bolshevik nation-building became more than merely awakening Ukrainian national consciousness. It was simultaneously a nationalizing and urbanizing project, where the cities were seen as the epitome of socialist progress and the peasants as backward and needing to be dragged into modern life.

Lastly, I intend to focus my analysis of Bolshevik nation-building ideas in practice on the period of 1923 to 1928. This time period is significant. In 1923, the Soviet Union had just been formed, two years after Lenin had introduced his New Economic Policy. The NEP significantly curtailed many of the more radical policies that the Bolsheviks had been using during the civil war. With the moderation of economic policy came a period of general openness and tolerance from the Soviet regime that allowed for spontaneous intellectual growth and cultural expression. The year 1923 marked the first period of Soviet governance as the Bolsheviks attempted to build a socialist state by integrating various nationalities into the state structure through their policy of *korenizatsiia* (indigenization). The nation-building policies that the Bolsheviks undertook throughout the 1920s significantly altered the social landscape of the Soviet Union, constructing national identities that would ultimately survive the Union's collapse.

For the purposes of my research, 1928 was a logical endpoint due to the massive upheaval that occurred in that year. That year saw the consolidation of Stalin's power

within the Politburo, as well as the initiation of the first Five-Year Plan and the end of the NEP. The Bolsheviks' nation-building policies of the 1920s were significantly reduced in scope, and in fact by the mid-1930s the Soviet Union began a process of wide-ranging Russification.

In contrasting the different directions the Soviet Union took in its first two decades of power, it would be incorrect to say that the 1920s were a liberal utopia for all nations before being quashed by the oppressive policies of Stalinism. Indeed, even in the 1920s Soviet policies were understood to be steps along the way to realizing a fully-functioning socialist society. In this respect, the Ukrainian SSR in the 1920s provides a valuable case for understanding how the Bolsheviks understood the idea of "nation" and how they subsequently interacted with peasants in order to realize their ideas. This study will argue that the Bolsheviks understood nations to be vaguely defined social categories that were real, but useful only insofar as their (perceived) ability to easily mobilize the peasantry and spread the Bolsheviks' socialist message in a more palatable form. For the Bolsheviks, nations were instruments for integrating Soviet citizens; a means to an end. However, the Soviet state developed its policies of indigenization under the assumption that national sentiment was already present in peasant consciousness and that it was merely a matter of co-opting this idea into the regime's programme. In reality, most peasants did not identify themselves as part of a national community, and there was in fact very little in terms of a unified "Ukrainian" culture outside of a small group of urban intellectuals. The result of this misconception was a top-down process of integration into new social groups meant purely to remould the population into a fully functioning

socialist state, but which also ironically created a popular nation in a very short period of time where before there had only been nation sentiments of a small intelligentsia.

Secondary literature provided a substantial amount of information that would have been virtually impossible to acquire without access to archival sources. In my own research I focused on early Soviet journals, such as *Zhizn' natsional'nostei* (“Life of Nationalities”) and *Sovetskoe stroitel'stvo* (“Soviet Construction”), and the works of notable Bolsheviks, such as Vladimir Lenin. I also looked extensively at several reports made in the late 1920s concerning the progress of nation-building in Ukraine. For the purposes of understanding how the Bolsheviks talked about nations in the context of socialism, these proved invaluable. There were some definite limitations to my research, the biggest of which was that I did not have access to archival material. At this juncture it is difficult to say how much archival access would have impacted my own conclusions, but in the interests of full disclosure this needs to be mentioned.

I have divided this study into several chapters. Chapter One is a more detailed historiographical analysis than that which I provided above, establishing the importance of this study's contribution in the larger body of work on the Ukrainian nation and Soviet nationality policy. In chapter Two I outline my methodology, emphasizing the fluid and problematic nature of nation as a category of analysis, and placing my own research outside of the nation-centric narrative that permeates most historical works. Chapter Three is a detailed account of the political consciousness of peasants in Ukraine prior to the start of *korenizatsiia*. In this chapter I argue that there was no tangible Ukrainian nation outside of the small group of urban intellectuals that articulated it, and that it is difficult to speak of a Ukrainian people, in particular due to the absence of a “Ukrainian”

language. Furthermore, I emphasize the effect of non-national elements on identity formation, especially the distinctive legacies of the Romanov and Habsburg empires, and the role of land as an empowering element in the development of political consciousness in the peasantry.

Chapter Four discusses general themes in Bolshevik writings on the national question (particularly those of Lenin and Stalin) so as to establish how Bolsheviks generally understood nations and their role in society. I also discuss the primacy of language as an indicator of nationality and cultural allegiance among Soviet-era ethnographers and linguists in the 1920s. While not Bolsheviks themselves, these academics were important due to the definitive role that they had on the delineation of national borders in the Soviet Union, as well as the development of other nation-building tools like the 1926 All-Union Census. In this chapter I argue that Bolshevik ideas of nation were largely informed by the work of ethnographers, and that language was seen as the fundamental component of nationalist sentiment. Therefore, providing nationalities with the means to be integrated into the socialist project was just a matter of presenting socialist material in indigenous languages.

Chapter Five serves as the intersection between the discussions in chapters three and four, as I analyze Bolshevik nation-building policies, such as Ukrainization, which developed out of Bolshevik thought and was applied to the everyday life of nationally indifferent peasants. I argue that the Bolsheviks undertook this nation-building policy while attempting to keep it contained to specifically socialist-oriented content. In some ways, however, this policy was so effective that it actually created the very nations that the Bolsheviks had been trying to accommodate in their state-building project. I conclude

my study with a brief discussion of the eventful nature of Ukrainian nation-building, the implications and significance of this for the wider literature, and new areas of study that need to be investigated as a result of the findings in my own research.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> William H. Sewell Jr., “Three Temporalities: Toward an Eventful Sociology,” in *The Historic Turn in the Human Sciences*, ed. Terrence J. McDonald (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 262.

## **Chapter 1: Bolshevik Nation-Building in Historiography**

The formation of the Soviet Union and the Bolsheviks' subsequent attempt to create a multinational state out of the various peoples of the former Russian Empire has been a major area of investigation and analysis among historians. Not only did the Bolsheviks manage to successfully wrest power from various political groups in the ensuing civil war after 1917, but they also managed to do so by eventually pursuing a policy of tolerance if not outright encouragement of various nation-building projects within the new Soviet space. This Bolshevik practice is particularly significant given the standard Marxist-Leninist idea that nationalism is a bourgeois construction; "a historical category belonging to a definite epoch, the epoch of rising capitalism."<sup>8</sup> If anything, constructing a socialist society should have meant the removal of all remnants of capitalist culture, but instead the Bolsheviks wilfully encouraged their persistence.

The new state's struggle with this incongruity between theory and practice has been the subject of many scholarly works, with interpretations of Soviet nationality policy spanning the scholarly spectrum: the Soviet Union is seen in turn as anything from a prison of nations to an incubator and catalyst of nationalism.<sup>9</sup> Attitudes toward the Soviets in this regard have become noticeably less harsh in the West since the fall of the Soviet Union. Undoubtedly, this can be attributed to the end of the Cold War and the opening of archives, both of which contributed significantly to allowing Western scholars to engage directly with materials previously unavailable due to the hostile atmosphere that characterized relations between the West and the USSR. All of this has led to a better

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<sup>8</sup> J.V. Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question," in *Works*, vol. 2, 1907-1913 (Moscow: Foreign Publishing House, 1953), 313.

<sup>9</sup> Even a brief perusal of works can attest to this, with titles ranging from Robert Conquest's *The Nation Killers* to Terry Martin's *The Affirmative Action Empire*.

understanding of how the Bolsheviks conducted their nationality policy immediately after the revolution.

Yet if one wishes to understand how the Bolsheviks even understood what a “nation” was, and how they formulated this both explicitly in their own writings and implicitly in how they carried out practical elements of their policies, one would find a noticeable dearth in the literature, particularly concerning how these things were realized in Soviet Ukraine. Indeed, in this chapter I will argue that this study serves as a *de facto* intersection between two bodies of literature: the development of Ukrainian identity and Bolshevik state-building in the 1920s.

The development of Ukrainian identity has led to various works that were concerned with Ukraine’s history exclusively, even through periods where “Ukraine” was not a state itself. This has helped to facilitate a narrative of Ukrainian national growth up until the early twentieth century. Works dealing with the Bolshevik policies on nationalities, however, tend to take a macro-historical approach by looking at the Soviet Union as a whole, yet interestingly enough often discuss nation-building in Ukraine very little. Instead, these works often tend to emphasize nation- and state-building in Central Asia rather than in Europe, despite clear evidence that Soviet nation-building was occurring in the west as well as in the east.<sup>10</sup>

One reason for this discrepancy most certainly has to do with the fact that various works have been published that deal exclusively with how nationalism developed in Ukraine prior to the Soviet regime (as opposed to its virtual absence in Central Asia), and so this nationalism is generally assumed to be what the Bolsheviks were interacting with

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<sup>10</sup> For an example of a discussion of Soviet nation-building that is mostly concerned with Central Asia, see Hélène Carrère D’Encausse, *The Great Challenge: Nationalities and the Bolshevik State 1917-1930* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1992).

on a daily basis and attempting to placate. Furthermore, the existence of a large diaspora of Ukrainian émigrés (particularly in North America) has contributed to this trend in the literature. A history of a nation that simultaneously existed in several states itself becomes part of the nation-building project by portraying the Ukrainian “nation” as a real historical actor. The assumption that underlies much of this work is that peasants who did not already identify as Ukrainian were “proto-Ukrainians” awaiting nationalist awakening, which consequently makes any discussion of whether or not there was a Ukrainian nation unnecessary.<sup>11</sup> Yet works that deal with the politicization of peasants in the Soviet Union during the 1920s would indicate that this distinction between “nation” and “state” literature should not be seen as intuitively obvious. It is important to remember that peasants (in other words, the vast majority of the population) during this time did not immediately identify with the political projects presented to them in the way that the local governments desired and were not necessarily already self-identified members of a national community. The lack of work that successfully links the development of nationality in Ukraine with the concurrent growth of the Soviet state apparatus means that my study fills an important space in how these bodies of literature interact.

In order to best illustrate how my own study both expands on and supplements existing works in these areas, this chapter will critically analyze these scholarly traditions in turn. Of the two, the scholarly tradition in the west that is larger and more diverse is the “state” literature. Many of these works are primarily concerned with the Bolsheviks’ attempts to first create and then consolidate power, culminating in the creation of the

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<sup>11</sup> Serhy Yekelchuk’s *Ukraine: Birth of a Modern Nation* is an exception, since he is conscious of the role intellectuals played in the creation of Ukrainian identity.

Soviet Union. Richard Pipes' *The Formation of the Soviet Union* and Hélène Carrère D'Encausse's *The Great Challenge* are both typical of this approach and so will be discussed together, although many other examples exist. Other works look at the Soviet nationality policy within a much larger timeframe. While Terry Martin's *The Affirmative Action Empire* and Francine Hirsch's *Empire of Nations* can broadly be categorized as similar, their approaches and emphases are also vastly different. Besides this, both are central enough to my work that they should be discussed separately.

Pipes' and D'Encausse's work both focus on the actual formation of the Soviet Union, and how the Bolsheviks forged a state in an area that was made up of vastly different national groups, many of which wanted broad freedoms not enjoyed under the imperial regime. Both Pipes and D'Encausse argue that the crises that took place immediately after the revolution stemmed from the Bolsheviks' fundamental lack of understanding as to how to properly incorporate national movements into a multinational state defined along class, not national, lines.<sup>12</sup> Pipes' and D'Encausse's focus on the political machinations of various state actors at this time is invaluable in developing an understanding of the practical, tangible element of Bolshevik conceptions of "nation," since these are things that are in fact measurable to a certain degree. However difficult it may be to determine how the Bolsheviks thought about concepts like "nation", the very nature in which these ideas were carried out also speaks volumes about how the problem was formulated. This was what Slavoj Žižek meant when he suggested that "every theory changes...in its practico-political application... [T]he 'truth' is not simply on the side of theory – what if the attempt to actualize theory renders visible the objective content of

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<sup>12</sup> Richard Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union: Communism and Nationalism 1917-1923* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), 296 and Hélène Carrère d'Encausse, *The Great Challenge: Nationalities and the Bolshevik State 1917-1930* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1992), 219.

this theory, concealed from the gaze of the theorist itself?”<sup>13</sup> A fundamental aspect of a theory or concept is its practical application, and the incongruence between the two can actually say more about the assumptions of the theorist in how the problem and solution were formulated, and thus provide a better means for understanding how Bolsheviks actually understood the idea of “nation” beyond merely how they talked about it themselves.

The strictly practical and tangible nature of Pipes’ and D’Encausse’s work also allows them to more easily extend the relevance of their work beyond the scope of their research. D’Encausse, for example, ultimately argues that the Bolsheviks incorrectly assumed that national movements would eventually be subsumed into the class-driven ideology of the state. By pointing out the abject failure of the Soviet project in her study merely five years before the very real collapse of the Soviet Union, D’Encausse’s work successfully links her research to more contemporary issues, which is possible at least in part due its emphasis on the tangible implications of political constructs.<sup>14</sup> In turn these connections can be useful for my own work in establishing its larger significance beyond the admittedly narrow purview of its subject matter.

However, both Pipes’ and D’Encausse’s work suffer for the very basic reason of when they were written. Prior to the end of the Cold War, Soviet archives were virtually impossible for many Western historians to access. Given the fact that both historians were attempting to write political histories that rely on the very documents they would have no access to, it is easy to see the disadvantage Pipes and D’Encausse had. Without access to all the necessary stenographic reports, correspondences, and other previously

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<sup>13</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *In Defence of Lost Causes* (London: Verso, 2008), 104-5.

<sup>14</sup> D’Encausse, 219.

classified government documents, it is impossible to determine the real accuracy of many of the arguments made in these works. In the preface to the revised version of his monograph, Pipes even admits as much, saying that he often constructed his arguments around “fragmentary and often unreliable evidence.”<sup>15</sup> While it would be incorrect to assume that unfettered access to archives automatically ensures a better argument, the shortcomings in Pipes’ and D’Encausse’s works, and the limits of their methodologies, are more easily spotted given more recent scholarship on Bolshevik practice after the revolution.

As political histories, these studies focus on the functions of political entities. However, by doing so they largely ignore the role of non-state actors in the decisions made by the states, and the socio-cultural factors that contribute to the success of certain initiatives or policies. This is particularly problematic given the weakness of the Soviet state immediately after its formation, and the very fact that most of the population were rural peasants. It seems illogical to assume that in an area where the state’s very existence was not certain for years, that the local population did not have just as much if not more of an important role than the government in defining its own identity. Yet in her book D’Encausse makes statements such as: “in October 1917, everything changed: now the Bolsheviks were in charge and had to make decisions.”<sup>16</sup> Such an oversimplification only serves to strengthen the assumption that non-state actors had no real role in what

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<sup>15</sup> Pipes, vii.

<sup>16</sup> D’Encausse, 73.

happened around them, and that the Bolshevik state started out basically already in total control.<sup>17</sup>

Terry Martin's *The Affirmative Action Empire* is a step in the right direction to addressing this problem. Martin's study covers the entirety of Soviet nationality policy up until the beginning of the Second World War, arguing that during this period the Soviet Union undertook the first "affirmative action" policy toward nationalities, cultivating indigenous cultures and making thousands of borders and delineations in an effort to promote all nationalities rather than subjugate them in the trend of older empires.<sup>18</sup>

Martin's research, particularly in regards to Ukraine, reveals how the Soviets created various nationally-defined regions throughout the Soviet republics in an effort to have all areas classified along national lines so as to empower those nationalities. In particular, the emergence of village soviets defined by the nationality of their inhabitants is important for my research, especially given that this phenomenon is not often discussed at length in other books on the topic. One reason for this could be, as Gerhard Simon has pointed out, that Soviet research often treated the relative "liberality" of the early Soviet period as completely taboo, with the official Soviet account of this period merely mentioning the soviets with no mention of their function, effectiveness, or reasons for dismantlement.<sup>19</sup> The seeming difficulty in accruing information on such an intriguing element of the Bolshevik nationality policy makes Martin's work even more valuable.

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<sup>17</sup> An assumption that is easily disproved when one looks at the fractured political landscape of the former Russian empire during the civil war following the revolution (see Vladimir Brovkin, "Identity, Allegiance, and Participation in the Russian Civil War," *European History Quarterly* 22 (1992))

<sup>18</sup> Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 1.

<sup>19</sup> Gerhard Simon, *Nationalism and Policy Toward the Nationalities in the Soviet Union: From Totalitarian Dictatorship to Post-Stalinist Society*, trans. Karen Forster and Oswald Forster (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991), 68 (n. 126).

More importantly, however, is Martin's inclusion of how local populations reacted to these political measures, thus filling a major gap in the work of scholars such as Pipes and D'Encausse. For example, Martin describes the difficulties the state had in convincing the population to see the national soviets as the government wanted them to. While the state argued that the soviets should not be seen as homogenous entities but merely as places where people should feel they can speak in their native language freely, many in the local populations saw these national soviets as new ethnic borders, which only served to intensify regional conflict.<sup>20</sup> The fact that the population acted differently from how the state anticipated is further proof of the necessity to discuss the role of society as an agent in the formation of the Soviet Union. It is not as simple as merely saying that village soviets were assembled, because the results of making these soviets had unforeseen consequences that would in turn affect future decisions the state made. There must always be a conscious understanding of the constantly fluctuating relationship between the state and the people.

However, Martin, Pipes, and D'Encausse all fall into the trap of describing nations and nationalities the way the Bolsheviks did without critically analyzing whether this should be merely assumed as true. All three assume that whether someone was Ukrainian or Russian was intrinsically obvious, that this is a quality that people inherently possess. For example, while describing Soviet attempts at educating children in their ethnic language, Martin mentions how many ethnic Ukrainians spoke Russian as a native language.<sup>21</sup> It is unclear, however, what the criteria were for determining whether someone was actually Ukrainian (as opposed to Russian, Polish, or any number of other

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<sup>20</sup> Martin, 42.

<sup>21</sup> Martin, 106.

nationalities). This is made even more complicated when we consider that the 1897 census, which the Soviets originally consulted for ethnographic information, used language as the primary means of determining someone's nationality.<sup>22</sup> Following the logic of the census, "ethnic" Ukrainians who spoke Russian were actually Russians. It is unclear how Martin defines intrinsic ethnic identity among peasants at this time.

Furthermore, many scholars have pointed to the extreme localism of peasant attitudes prior to the revolution.<sup>23</sup> This would suggest that peasants did not necessarily identify themselves within the national categories that Martin and others use. This is simply another example of not properly engaging with the agency of the vast majority of the population of the USSR as an angle of critical investigation. By focusing exclusively on *how* the Bolsheviks interacted with nations, Martin's work conflates categories of practice with categories of analysis, and the underlying ideological assumptions of the national categories used by the Bolsheviks are not critically analyzed.<sup>24</sup>

It is this issue that Francine Hirsch at least partially tries to address in her book *Empire of Nations*. Hirsch examines the development of ethnography in the early Soviet Union and how ethnographers collaborated with Soviet officials in order to proceed with census-taking in the 1920s, as well as solidify borders around republics where territory was contested. Borders and censuses are fundamental means by which states are able to classify their populations, and so in studying how Bolsheviks conceived of the idea of nationality, Hirsch's work is invaluable. Hirsch also draws attention to the relationship

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<sup>22</sup> Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 38.

<sup>23</sup> For example, see John Reshetar, *The Ukrainian Revolution, 1917-1920: A Study in Nationalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), 319-23.

<sup>24</sup> Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 15.

between nation and class, displaying how the Soviets distinguished nations in part by the economic development of the people, so as to best know how to proceed in advancing all Soviet peoples for the cause of socialism.<sup>25</sup> Ultimately, Hirsch's analysis of the development of Soviet ethnography provides many clues as to Bolshevik ideas on nation, and so in many ways my work is a continuation of hers.

However, despite her focus on a topic with obvious socio-cultural implications for the population it was enacted upon, Hirsch does not really discuss in-depth how the population itself was affected. In her discussion of the border disputes between the Russian, Byelorussian, and Ukrainian republics, there is nothing said of how these border disputes affected Soviet interactions with the peasant populations in these areas; something which deserves discussion given how much the various republic governments tried to emphasize "national" culture in all spheres (particularly in Ukraine during the 1920s once Ukrainization was undertaken).<sup>26</sup>

Hirsch also states that the formulation of the census and its various criteria were not merely a top-down process, but also relied on the advice and work of experts and local leaders. Furthermore, in order to interact with state officials easily peasants began using the same terminology, so that even if they were critical of the government, the way in which they expressed their displeasure actually enforced state norms.<sup>27</sup> In his work *Magnetic Mountain*, Stephen Kotkin has described this discursive phenomenon as "speaking Bolshevik": adopting a certain vocabulary that served as the easiest way by

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<sup>25</sup> Hirsch, 103. Ronald Suny has also made this connection in Ronald Grigor Suny, "Nationalism and Class in the Russian Revolution: A Comparative Discussion," in *Revolution in Russia: Reassessments of 1917*, eds. Edith Rogovin Frankel, Jonathan Frankel, and Baruch Knei-Paz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

<sup>26</sup> Hirsch, 155-6.

<sup>27</sup> Hirsch, 147.

which the state could determine the political correctness of its citizens, in essence helping to internalize Soviet social categories.<sup>28</sup> This argument raises an interesting question regarding the distinction between top-down and bottom-up forms of mobilization which is not thoroughly discussed. It would seem that if the means by which people were supposed to identify themselves were given to them from an outside entity, be it state or otherwise, this would connote a top-down process. In terms of understanding how the Bolsheviks understood the concepts they were working with, this would be an important distinction to unpack.

Ultimately, while all of these studies do lack elements which my work tries to provide, their diversity in topic, time period, and focus provide invaluable information that will allow me to illustrate the practical application of Bolshevik conceptions of nationality. Hirsch's work does aspire to do this as well, but she does not engage the Bolshevik interaction with peasants and peasant consciousness as viable avenues of analysis for her work. Ultimately, her work is focused on the "dynamics of Soviet rule," rather than engaging with peasants as contributors to the development of their own future identity (or not).<sup>29</sup>

The second (and significantly narrower) body of literature that my work interacts with charts the development of Ukrainian nationalism, particularly in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>30</sup> This is an important topic to analyze because while peasants were interacting with Bolsheviks, they were also in contact with self-described Ukrainian

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<sup>28</sup> Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 220.

<sup>29</sup> Hirsch, 18.

<sup>30</sup> Serhii Plokhy has written an interesting study on the development of premodern identities in Slavic regions, but argues that it is incorrect to "read the modern nation into the past," noting that premodern identities took radically different forms from the nationalist principles that emerged in the nineteenth century (Serhii Plokhy, *The Origins of the Slavic Nations: Premodern Identities in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 3).

nationalists. Therefore, it is important to note how these movements' ideologies developed. Furthermore, when the Bolsheviks opted to create national republics, the various Ukrainian "national" movements had significant impact in determining how the republic was created. Otherwise, there would have been no impetus to create a "Ukrainian" national republic in the first place. The cultivation of a loyalty to something other than state apparatuses, under both the tsarist and Soviet regimes, is an important element of conceptualizing how the Bolsheviks understood nationalism.

Paul Robert Magocsi's *The Roots of Ukrainian Nationalism* attempts to create a chronology of the development of Ukrainian nationalism with a specific focus on the area of Galicia, parts of which experienced rule under both the Habsburgs and the Soviets. For Magocsi, Galicia served as Ukraine's Piedmont, referring to the region which served as a focal point for Italian unification in the 1800s. He describes how Ukrainians living under the Habsburgs (in Galicia) were given the opportunity to develop a national consciousness early on, so that even through Soviet rule a notion of "Ukraine-ness" persisted that finally manifested in the birth of the modern state of Ukraine after the fall of the Soviet Union.<sup>31</sup> Magocsi is successful in describing how a notion of Ukrainian identity developed in Galicia in tandem with imperial identities, and thus his work is important for understanding the cultural identities that people in Ukraine especially had to contend with as the Bolsheviks were building their own state in the aftermath of the empire.

The major problem with Magocsi's work, however, is that it is impossible to really gauge how widespread "Ukrainian" nationalism was, or whether there was even

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<sup>31</sup> Paul Robert Magocsi, *The Roots of Ukrainian Nationalism: Galicia as Ukraine's Piedmont* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), x.

just one Ukrainian nationalist movement to begin with. First of all, the nationalism Magocsi describes only really concerned elites who lived in large multicultural cities. Magocsi cites the “stateless” status of Ukrainians as the reason for this.<sup>32</sup> With no government apparatus to inculcate people with the idea of national consciousness, it fell to the intelligentsia to articulate and spread this idea. The problem with this is that it is unclear how much this nationalism actually reflected the people it was supposed to represent, and not just the biases of those who argued for it. With the vast majority of Ukrainians living in the countryside, and not being particularly nationally conscious at that, it would seem strange that urban elites could accurately conceptualize the national identity that these peasants were supposed to have.

There is an unaccounted-for tension between the tendencies of nationalism and populism in Magocsi’s work. Is an ideology truly national (that is, a reflection of a large community of people), if it is not also populist? The fact that Magocsi spends a lot of time describing cultural programs set up by these elites to educate the masses on their own national identity would seem to indicate that this tension is not important to him, since Ukrainian nationalism seemed to flourish only after the education and enlightenment of its subjects, at least in the east.<sup>33</sup>

Identifying people by nomenclature that they did not necessarily use themselves places the chronology of events in a narrative that is removed from the immediacy of the events one is trying to describe. In other words, Magocsi adopts terms to describe people that were not used by those people themselves, suggesting that he conceptualizes the events in a way that is artificially laden with labels that did not exist. From here, it is easy

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<sup>32</sup> Magocsi, 56.

<sup>33</sup> Magocsi, 119-158.

to see the teleological nature of Magocsi's study, where the end result of the narrative is read into all earlier elements as well: that is, the formation of the Ukrainian state.<sup>34</sup> Magocsi even tacitly acknowledges this, pointing out that the general trend in the literature on nationalist movements is to analyze and judge movements based on their success or failure in creating a nation-state.<sup>35</sup> Such a teleology is inaccurate and unhelpful, however, especially given the fact that identities during the civil war and shortly after were so transitional, and it was not necessarily clear even at the time how people would view themselves once the dust settled. Georgiy Kasianov has further argued that a teleological understanding of national history leads to essentialism: where the Ukrainian nation is seen as a constant throughout different historical periods. The result, Kasianov argues, is that "categories of ideological or political practice...take on scholarly analytical status, and the distinction between scholarship and ideology disappears."<sup>36</sup> Simply by describing a Ukrainian nation outside of historical context, works like Magocsi's enforce national ideology.

In Ukraine's case an imposed national narrative is particularly problematic given that modern-day Ukraine was not only split between two empires for a very long time, but also had significantly different experiences when it came to encouraging "national" movements. While the Habsburgs often encouraged peoples to create separate cultures, the Russian empire aimed to crush all attempts at nationalism, grouping Ukrainians in

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<sup>34</sup> This is a tendency that may be unavoidable in self-described "national" histories (see Yekelchuk, *Ukraine* for another example)

<sup>35</sup> Magocsi, 38.

<sup>36</sup> Georgiy Kasianov, "'Nationalized' History: Past Continuous, Present Perfect, Future...," in *A Laboratory of Transnational History: Ukraine and Recent Ukrainian Historiography*, eds. Georgiy Kasianov and Philipp Ther (New York: Central European University Press, 2009), 16.

with Russians and Byelorussians as simply all the same people.<sup>37</sup> Thus national movements in these nations diverged more and more under different socio-political conditions. By Magocsi's estimate, approximately 85% of Ukrainian peasants did not even live in Galicia, but in the Russian empire.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, the formulation of Ukrainian identity that developed in Galicia was only one of many that existed by the 1920s, largely as a result of the differing legacies of the Tsarist and Habsburg empires. This only further illustrates the problem of nationalized histories, as it is virtually impossible to discern which of the various "nationalist" movements represented the true Ukrainian nation, or if it was a combination of various movements, or neither. This ambiguity makes a discussion of Bolshevik understanding of nationality that much more important, since it was certainly not merely an appropriation of one or the other nationalist ideology of the time. This is largely evident given the Bolsheviks' compounded desire to integrate socialist elements into the national identities they encouraged within state perimeters. Therefore, while Magocsi reads the spread of Galician Ukrainian nationalism as the realization of these people's true cultural identity, it could also be read as several divergent peoples with similar linguistic and cultural backgrounds internalizing entirely new cultural and political identities that they did not possess before.

Steven Lan Guthier's work on the spread of Ukrainian nationalism among peasants makes a lot of progress in filling some of the more noticeable gaps in works like Magocsi's. To begin with, Guthier uses Ukrainian peasant culture as his point of departure, rather than elite discourse. Guthier points out that peasants in Ukraine were

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<sup>37</sup> Serhy Yekelchuk, *Ukraine: Birth of a Modern Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 38.

<sup>38</sup> Magocsi, 119.

extremely parochial, and that Ukrainian history had no single historical entity as its focus. This is an extremely helpful way to frame the issue, because it removes any ideological or teleological assumptions from any discussion of “Ukraine”; it becomes purely a blanket term for cultures and ideologies that have no better means of being categorized on a macro-scale.<sup>39</sup> Guthier argues that by 1917, however, peasants had by and large become strongly nationalist. They voted consistently with parties that expressed nationalist sentiment, and increasingly called for national autonomy in the government.<sup>40</sup> In Guthier’s analysis, the peasants themselves are the focus of investigation, opposed to the nationalist groups interacting with them. What this means is that Guthier is able to discern the specifics of why peasants were politicized, and what elements of the nationalist programme they were won over by. This also provides us with a better understanding of the nuances of politicization and mobilization, something that is incredibly important for my work.

Unfortunately, Guthier’s analysis is entirely concerned with peasants only up until 1917. Seeing as how peasant nationalism happened so quickly in 1917, it would be helpful to know whether this sentiment persevered through the civil war and beyond. Otherwise, it could very easily have merely been that Guthier recorded merely the opportunism of peasants, rather than any real embrace of nationalism. Others, such as Vladimir Brovkin, have noted how chaotic and multi-polar the political climate in the

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<sup>39</sup> Steven Lan Guthier, “The Roots of Popular Ukrainian Nationalism: A Demographic, Social, and Political Study of the Ukrainian Nationality to 1917” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1990), 33.

<sup>40</sup> Guthier, 230.

countryside was after the revolution, and if peasants were so quick to turn to nationalism at first, they may have just as easily dropped it in the following years.<sup>41</sup>

On this point, Ronald Suny has also argued that Guthier assumes that peasants who voted for peasant-nationalist parties were also fully aware of the nationalist agenda, or adhered to the party for that particular reason (and not for things like land reform). He goes on to indicate that a distinction should be made between ethno-cultural awareness and political nationalism; political nationalism being the active commitment to political autonomy, not just cultural autonomy in existing states.<sup>42</sup> It is totally understandable why a peasant would vote for a party that spoke in his own language and advocated for things that would directly benefit him and his community, but that does not necessarily entail loyalty or interest in a nationalist ideology.

What this conflation in Guthier's analysis really brings to light is the problem of accounting unequivocally for the nature of peasant consciousness. Nevertheless, Guthier's assessment of the tangible, political manifestations of peasant political consciousness does still provide key insights into the people whom the Bolsheviks governed. The question that Magocsi's and Guthier's work raises in my own is the role that this Ukrainian identity played in the Bolshevik understanding of nations. If the Bolsheviks understood their message as "nationalist in form, socialist in content", how does the cultural tradition that Magocsi tries to capture fit into this?<sup>43</sup> What do the Bolsheviks use in their own creation of "nationalist form" and what do they leave out?

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<sup>41</sup> See Vladimir Brovkin, *Behind the Front Lines of the Civil War: Political Parties and Social Movements in Russia, 1918-1922* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1994).

<sup>42</sup> Ronald Grigor Suny, "Nationalism and Class in the Russian Revolution: A Comparative Discussion," in *Revolution in Russia: Reassessments of 1917*, eds. Edith Rogovin Frankel, Jonathan Frankel, and Baruch Knei-Paz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 228-9.

<sup>43</sup> For a discussion of this tenet of Soviet thought, see Yuri Slezkine, "The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism," *Slavic Review* 53, No. 2 (1994): 418.

Understanding what the Bolsheviks drew from Ukrainian national movements in the creation of their own Soviet-style national project allows for a better conception of Bolshevik ideas on “nation.”

This leaves us with the question of where the present study fits into this larger body of work. It has been the intention of this chapter to demonstrate that my study of Bolshevik conceptualizations of nationalities serves as a bridge between two traditionally distinct bodies of literature. On one hand, the works on soviet state-building provide excellent practical evidence of Soviet attempts to organize their state along national lines, yet they miss a fundamental aspect of understanding the nature of Bolshevik thinking on nationality: the direct impact these state-building exercises had on peasant populations and their self-perception, the implications of which speak volumes of Soviet ideas on the nature of nations.

The works on Ukrainian nationalism provide in-depth discussion of the emergence of the specific ideology of Ukrainian nationalism, and Guthrie even discusses its success among the peasantry. Yet these studies miss two essential points which my work attempts to address. First, Magocsi’s work in particular does not address the problem of peasant self-identification, which is crucial to an understanding of the effect that nationalist politics had on the masses, let alone how successful the Bolsheviks were at creating new identities for these people. Secondly, even assuming that the nationalism described by Magocsi and Guthrie did permeate peasant society, neither study addresses to what extent the Bolsheviks adopted this nationalism into their own state-building project. Clearly the Bolsheviks had an understanding of what “Ukrainian” meant, but

how did this compare to the “Ukrainian” that nationalists espoused? And again, how did this impact the peasant populations who this affected most directly?

Both the works on Soviet state-building and on the development of Ukrainian nationalism have been central to the development of my own work, but so far the literature has proven unable to provide a clear understanding of how the Bolsheviks understood this idea of nation and nationality that pervades all aspects of these works. Furthermore, the peasantry is largely relegated to a passive role in the existing literature, whereas understanding Bolshevik ideas on nationhood require acknowledgement of the active role peasants played in Bolshevik interactions with them. A rigorous investigation into this seemingly simple and fundamental question must be done in order to give the existing literature on these topics that much more meaning and significance.

## **Chapter 2: Deconstructing the Nation-Matrix**

The question of the Bolshevik understanding of “nationality”, while seemingly simple, relies on the major assumption that nations and nationality are fluid constructions which can be given different symbolic meanings by various actors. In utilizing nations as part of their state-building project, the Bolsheviks infused the concept of nation with new meanings that were previously not part of Ukrainian nation-building projects. It would be incorrect to simply assume that the fluidity of national content is given. Therefore, the rest of this chapter will be dedicated to illustrating the fluid nature of nation and nationality as social categories, rather than as concrete concepts with inherent meaning. Following Rogers Brubaker’s work, I contend that most work on Soviet nationality policy conflates “categories of practice” with “categories of analysis”. That is, historians have tended to uncritically utilize the same social categories (such as nationality) that the Bolsheviks used without critically investigating how those categories were constructed, the content of these categories, and their specific purpose in Soviet society.

However, this contention poses a methodological dilemma. If I am to situate my work outside of the “nation-matrix”, a narrative in which nations are given concepts that need not be critically analyzed, I need to utilize alternative analytical categories so as to situate my work in concrete terms. Thus this chapter will also briefly discuss how conceptualizing Bolshevik nation-building outside of the nation-matrix allows us to see how different factors, such as the effects of empire and borders, contributed to the formation of peasant consciousness. Doing so does not render discussions of the discourse and practice of nationhood irrelevant, but rather more accurately contextualizes their impact in a space not intrinsically defined by the nation-matrix.

Regardless of whether its nature is inherently amorphous or not, “nation” as a concept has most certainly changed over the years as scholars developed a more nuanced understanding of nationalism’s social, cultural, and political intricacies. In the early- to mid-twentieth century, so-called “primordialists” like Harold Isaacs and Clifford Geertz argued that nationalities were intrinsic qualities that had ancient origins.<sup>44</sup> Such notions are now considered significantly outdated, and have been roundly rejected by most theorists as obsolete and unhelpful. Given how little impact they have on current, scholarly understandings of nationality (besides being what modern nation theory was a reaction against), they will not be discussed further.

The advent of modern nation theory came with the work of scholars like Ernest Gellner, Eric Hobsbawm, and Benedict Anderson, who shifted the emphasis of national construction away from essential categories toward processes of politicization and modernization. Nationalism is ultimately a political endeavour, “which requires that ethnic boundaries should not cut across political ones.”<sup>45</sup> For Gellner in particular, nationalism represents the realization of the modern state in contrast to old feudal governments. Nationalism provides an ideology for a regulated, homogenous society administered by the imposition of a “high culture” to replace the decentralized, idiosyncratic “folk cultures” of pre-modern society.<sup>46</sup>

The degree of consciousness involved in this process differs among these thinkers. Hobsbawm characterizes the process of nation-forming as the conscious activity of elites

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<sup>44</sup> See Harold R. Isaacs, “Basic Group Identity: The Idols of the Tribe,” in *Ethnicity*, eds. Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 29-52, and Clifford Geertz, “The Integrative Revolution: Primordial Sentiments and Civil Politics in the New States,” in *Political Development and Social Change*, eds. Jason L. Finkle and Richard W. Gable (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1966), 655-69.

<sup>45</sup> Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 1.

<sup>46</sup> Gellner, 56.

trying to “structure at least some parts of social life...as unchanging and invariant.”<sup>47</sup> Anderson, on the other hand, adopts a much more cultural approach. He argues that national identity appeared out of the convergence of print capitalism’s rise and the decentralization of society through the proliferation of written works in different languages and the slow dismantlement of traditional hierarchical structures (such as the church).<sup>48</sup> For both Anderson and Hobsbawm, however, nations are ultimately a political tool for realizing a modern sense of community that extends beyond merely the village or region. Understanding the work of these scholars has become virtually required for any modern discussion of nations and nationality, and these works have provided me with the ability to better articulate the differences and similarities between Bolshevik conceptions of nations and how they are understood in general discussions today.

The main problem presented by these works and their successors is that in trying to articulate a coherent theory of nations, the particularities of regional variance in how nations came about, and their actual social content, becomes obscured. This is not a slight problem when one realizes the vastly different interpretations of what constitutes a nation that encompass our general understanding of the term. Theories of nationalism often use the western European experience as the ideal type for conceptualizing nations, but this becomes problematic in the eastern European context, where multiethnic empires transitioned into a series of nation-states (as in the Habsburg and Ottoman empires) or into a new multiethnic state (as in the Romanov empire, which became the Soviet Union). Miroslav Hroch has identified this discrepancy in modern nation theory, arguing that nationalism as it appeared in Western Europe was exclusively concerned with giving “an

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<sup>47</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions,” in *The Invention of Tradition*, eds. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 1.

<sup>48</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983), 40.

absolute priority to the values of the nation over all other values and interests.” Hroch points out that this was hardly the mission of many so-called nationalists in Eastern Europe, and that it is more accurate to see “nationalism” as merely one manifestation of a national movement that cannot be applied to all instances of nation-building.<sup>49</sup> Analyzing how the Bolsheviks understood nations thus provides a re-contextualization of nation-building in the Soviet Union, providing an opportunity to rethink what nations meant outside of the western European paradigm, and how they fit as categories of practice into the Soviet state.

Scholars like Gellner, as shown above, tend to understand nations as politicized forms of ethnic groups, a term which Anthony Smith has defined as “named human populations with shared ancestry myths, histories and cultures, having an association with a specific territory and a sense of solidarity.”<sup>50</sup> In this sense, a nation is an ethnic group that has taken active political interest in its own wellbeing as a collective. Robert Kaiser, in his work on nationality policy in the Soviet Union, adopts a nearly identical definition of nationalism as Gellner’s, while drawing attention to the objective, tangible aspects of nationhood (such as language and culture) and the subjective “myth-symbol complex” one adheres to as a part of cultural as well as psychological assimilation into a particular ethno-national identity.<sup>51</sup> Certainly in a Soviet context, the idea of nationality (*natsional’nost*) was in direct reference to ethnic identity, and so work on the period has often tended to use the terms almost interchangeably.

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<sup>49</sup> Miroslav Hroch, “From National Movement to the Fully-formed Nation: The Nation-Building Process in Europe,” *New Left Review* 198, No. 1 (1993): 6.

<sup>50</sup> Anthony Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 32.

<sup>51</sup> Robert J. Kaiser, *The Geography of Nationalism in Russia and the USSR* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 4-9.

However, various scholars have taken issue with such a narrow definition of nation. Joshua Sanborn has argued that the Bolsheviks conflated the ideas of nationality and ethno-nationality. Instead of directly linking nationality to ethnic identity, nationality should be defined as “the desire for a particular type of social and political cohesion based on belonging to a historical, territorialized community that is politically sovereign.” In effect, Sanborn argues that ethnicity is only one means by which a nation can be created, and that family policy and rhetoric should be studied as much as ethnic policy.<sup>52</sup> Sanborn’s articulation highlights the *form* of nations over their content. The conflation of ethnicity with nation in modern historiography has obscured the abstract political function that nations possess and has tied them inextricably to an ethnocentric narrative, thus precluding any possibility of alternate national forms.

Liah Greenfeld, however, has argued that there are in fact three distinct types of nationalism that have developed: Individualistic, collective, and ethnic. While both individualistic and collective nationalisms contain an element of civic loyalty, and thus active participation, Greenfeld argues that ethnic nationalism sees nationality as “determined genetically, entirely independent of the individual volition, and thus inherent.”<sup>53</sup> Greenfeld’s formulation of nationality thus seems to include virtually any political activity (or in the case of ethnic nationalism, mere existence) directed toward the realization of larger community, with several distinct subcategories. More important for our purposes, however, is the fact that the concept of nation seems ultimately to be

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<sup>52</sup> Joshua Sanborn, “Family, Fraternity, and Nation-Building in Russia, 1905-1925,” in *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin*, eds. Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 93-4.

<sup>53</sup> Liah Greenfeld, “Nationalism in Western and Eastern Europe Compared,” in *Can Europe Work? Germany and the Reconstruction of Postcommunist Societies*, eds. Stephen E. Hanson and Willfried Spohn (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995), 20.

ambiguous. This ambiguity in national content, combined with the widely agreed-upon notion that nations are ultimately socio-political constructions rather than concrete entities, display a remarkable methodological problem in discussing nationality as a finite concept, since while there may be some agreement as to the form nations take, what they actually consist of is less clear.

This is further exacerbated by the primacy with which the nation as a concept is treated in modern academia. As Tara Zahra has argued, despite wide acknowledgement of nations' ambiguous content, historical accounts generally continue to frame events using nationalities as self-evident entities.<sup>54</sup> This is a phenomenon that we have already seen in the previous chapter. Rogers Brubaker has described this as a conflation of categories of practice with categories of analysis.<sup>55</sup> For self-described “nation-states,” the nation is important as a discursive tool, yet scholars have adapted these categories as a platform for further analysis without critically analyzing these categories themselves. Thus, the focus of nation theory has become the role of nations in society, rather than how these nations are created and internalized.

The vast majority of scholarly work, especially concerning the Soviet Union, has developed within a “nation-matrix,” wherein the discursive tools, used either consciously or not by the Bolsheviks, have been adapted to effectively shape the trajectory of scholarly understanding of the period. This is not necessarily due to a desire to construct a sense of national identity among a group (as is often the case in nationalist literature), but is rather the effect of what Andreas Wimmer has called “methodological nationalism”:

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<sup>54</sup> Tara Zahra, “Imagined Noncommunities: National Indifference as a Category of Analysis,” *Slavic Review* 69, No. 1 (2010): 97.

<sup>55</sup> Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 15.

an assumption that modernization implies nation-building.<sup>56</sup> In so doing it has allowed for the possibility that the very subjects of analysis have been misrepresented; that the terms used to describe them do not segue with how they viewed themselves. Brubaker and Frederick Cooper have even gone so far as to say that we should re-evaluate the type of work “identity” refers to, since how the idea of identity is currently used either runs the risk of essentializing (and thus misrepresenting) human existence, or is so filled with qualifiers that it loses all practical meaning.<sup>57</sup> The ambiguous nature of “nation” makes it even more problematic as an effective category of analysis, and makes an investigation of Bolshevik ideas on nation that much more important for understanding the socio-political functions that such ideas had in people’s lives. To borrow Brubaker’s phrase, while work on the Soviet Union has tended to conflate categories of practice with those of analysis, the Bolsheviks’ category of practice is the very thing that I will analyze.

The notion that nations are ultimately a reified discursive construct is not, of course, a universally held one even in modern academia. Alexander Motyl has argued that if national identity can be called a belief system of sorts, then it is logical to surmise that different peoples may not use that exact word to explain the same phenomenon, or use that word to describe something else. It then follows that what we describe as a “nation” may certainly have existed before the word itself came into usage, and to do otherwise would be to “conflate the etymology of the word with the phenomenon’s origin, or reduce the phenomenon to a word or words.” The implication being, Motyl argues,

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<sup>56</sup> Andreas Wimmer, *Nationalist Exclusion and Ethnic Conflict: Shadows of Modernity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 72.

<sup>57</sup> Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, “Beyond ‘Identity’,” *Theory and Society* 29, No. 1 (2000): 1.

that language constitutes all of reality.<sup>58</sup> However, Motyl over-generalizes. Surely, it would be inaccurate to say that language does not shape reality in some ways, and in some cases. Even if national identity is ultimately discursive in its origins, it is no less real in the eyes of the social actors that construct it. In other words, despite its origins national identity has become real in many people's eyes, and my approach does not discount this. Nevertheless, Motyl's insistence on inferring the existence of nations prior to the existence of the word both displays another example of the nation-matrix lens, and consequently runs the risk of misrepresenting how people self-identified, and what the socio-political landscape constituted before the internalization and reification of national identity. In order to not misrepresent the political consciousness of peasants in Ukraine, it is necessary to be aware of other elements in identity formation that have equal if not more significance for them at the time, rather than projecting a narrative where proto-Ukrainians existed *a priori*.

The difficulty in this, as Zahra as pointed out, is that the vast majority of modern historical works have used nations as their point of reference for discussing other socio-political issues, as it has proven to be a convenient way to organize and conceptualize human activity. A conscious analysis of the category of practice will require a similar frame of reference for grounding my research, but it must necessarily be outside of the nation-matrix, lest this work merely commit the same methodological mistakes that are already so prevalent in the existing literature. For this reason, I propose two alternative elements in identity formation that will serve to re-contextualize the nation-building process in Ukraine after the revolution: the function and effects of both empire and

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<sup>58</sup> Alexander J. Motyl, "Inventing Invention: The Limits of National Identity Formation," in *Intellectuals and the Articulation of the Nation*, eds. Ronald Grigor Suny and Michael D. Kennedy (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 61.

borders. Both of these categories are concerned with identity-formation (whether it is imposed, internalized, or both) but do not require nation-based analysis in order to determine their significance. These categories will also serve the purpose of showing how I have conceptualized the socio-political landscape of the Ukrainian SSR during the 1920s.

The first alternative category, empire, is important because of the political development of Ukraine prior to the 1917 revolution. Throughout much of the latter half of the millennium, what would become the Ukrainian SSR was split between two empires: Austria-Hungary and Russia. Frederick Cooper has shown the formative role that empires play in society. He defines an empire as a “political unit that is large, expansionist (or with memories of an expansionist past), and which reproduces differentiation and inequality among people it incorporates.” This element of incorporation is vital to understanding the impact of empires, because through policies of coerced assimilation or more gradual integration, empires can become homogenous or nation-like, with individual identities being subordinated to the ruling authority of the state.<sup>59</sup> The liberal policies of the Habsburgs and the extremely oppressive policies of the Romanovs, while very different from each other, were both attempts to reinforce the state structure. While done ultimately out of state self-interest, imperial policies had real effects on the political development of the peoples living in these empires.

The effects that imperial rule had on the future Ukrainian SSR, particularly in identity formation, are important for understanding the socio-political climate in the area. The Habsburg and Romanov states were tangible political bodies that had a direct impact

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<sup>59</sup> Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 27.

on the lives of their subjects. In particular, they played an active role in the politicization of their people. If we are to assume that nationality and nations are not inherent qualities, then the pre-national identities as imperial subjects forged before these empires' collapse need to be taken seriously, rather than placed within a national trajectory. This is especially important given that self-described nationalists also often took on the role of political dissidents (especially in the Russia), making national and imperial identities inextricably tied together.

Using “empire” as a category of analysis can create some problems if not used correctly, however. Mark Beissinger has drawn attention to the inherently ambiguous nature of empire, in that the difference between a state and an empire is largely subjective, and stems from whether government action is seen as “ours” or “theirs.”<sup>60</sup> Indeed, popular usage of “empire” has often been pejorative in recent decades, rather than a neutral descriptor of a type of political organization.<sup>61</sup> Historically, the empire has represented the Other of the nation-state, which has now established itself as the norm for political legitimacy. I would therefore be reticent to discuss “empires” generally in the context of my analysis, if only because I would run the risk of essentializing different political traditions that are only vaguely related to each other (and perhaps in that case, mostly just due to temporal proximity). Therefore, when I speak of “empire,” I am exclusively referring to the functions of the Habsburg and Tsarist state structures.

One such function, as Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson have pointed out, is the construction of politicized space: the division of space into political units that give them

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<sup>60</sup> Mark R. Beissinger, *The Persisting Ambiguity of Empire: State- and Empire-Building in Post-Soviet Politics* (Washington, D.C.: National Council for Soviet and East European Research, 1995), 5.

<sup>61</sup> An example being Ronald Reagan’s “evil empire” speech.

more discursive significance.<sup>62</sup> In fact, this process has become so central to common understandings of space that we tend to overlook the processes by which that place became a singular “place” at all. The delineation of borders and boundaries is an essential part of identity formation, and it is for this reason that it is my second alternative category of analysis. Andrew Abbott has argued that we should not look at the boundaries of things, but rather the things of boundaries: the process by which delineations were made in the first place to create distinct, atomistic units. In other words, we should develop an understanding of borders that does not presuppose the existence of “entities.”<sup>63</sup> This is an important goal, since the placement of spatial boundaries can determine who is a minority, an alien, or any other label.<sup>64</sup>

The importance of boundaries as formative elements is not limited to their impact on spatial relations, however. In his influential *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, Fredrik Barth argues that the boundaries between differing ethnic groups need also be examined, so that the focus of inquiry becomes the “the ethnic boundary that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses.”<sup>65</sup> Borders also become the source of distinct power relations, where one group’s ability to make social labels stick better than another’s indicates the need to understand that borders and boundaries are strong discursive as well as political tools of identity creation.<sup>66</sup> In the Soviet case, these are particularly important

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<sup>62</sup> Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, “Beyond ‘Culture’: Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference,” *Cultural Anthropology* 7, No. 1 (1992): 12.

<sup>63</sup> Andrew Abbott, *Time Matters: On Theory and Method* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 261-5.

<sup>64</sup> Nick Baron and Peter Gatrell, “Population Displacement, State-Building, and Social Identity in the Lands of the Former Russian Empire, 1917-23,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 4, No. 1 (2003): 57.

<sup>65</sup> Fredrik Barth, “Introduction,” in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Difference*, ed. Fredrik Barth (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1969), 15.

<sup>66</sup> Hastings Donnan and Thomas M. Wilson, *Borders: Frontiers of Identity, Nation and State* (Oxford: Berg, 1999), 25.

concepts to keep in mind, as the organization of nations within established borders was a prerogative of the state. The delineation of the Soviet Union into nationally-defined administrative units created new national identities

Ultimately, these alternative means of defining identity formation are necessary because of the proven methodological problems that come with the concept of “nation” as an analytical tool. When scholars agree that nations are constructed, most scholars still treat nations as given concepts, which suggests a much deeper internalization of reified notions of nationality, and thus makes a study of how nations were constructed in Ukraine that much more pertinent. Yet it is not enough to merely render problematic nation as a category of analysis. In order to fully break out of the nation-matrix, and provide alternative historical narratives, one must find different concepts with formative qualities in order to establish a setting that does not require using national labels. In analyzing the nation in Bolshevik thought and practice as a category of practice, this study reveals the formative effect that empires and borders had on peasant consciousness, which allows me to study Bolshevik conceptions of nation as political tools of discourse, without assuming that these national categories already exist and it was merely a matter of revealing them. This will allow me to look critically at the tangible effects that Bolshevik ideas on nations had on local populations, who were affected by the imperial legacy and spatial/social delineations before internalizing any nation-centric categorizations that the Bolsheviks implemented.

These alternative analytical categories merely provide a better way of conceptualizing identity formation, and do not inform all aspects of this study’s argument. Obviously, “nations” still need to be discussed at length in order to understand Bolshevik

ideas of them. However, in terms of understanding the processes by which peoples in Ukraine understood themselves (and were understood by others), it is necessary to provide a more accurate means of illustrating these processes that does not rely on inherent qualities allegedly held by peasants in Soviet Ukraine. It is ultimately not useful to conceptualize the peasantry as being “proto-nationalists,” awaiting a catalyst for their national awakening.

### **Chapter 3: Peasant National Consciousness Before 1923**

If Ukrainian peasants saw themselves as part of a political and cultural community that existed beyond state borders, then the question of how Bolsheviks understood the idea of “nation” becomes a much less pertinent question to ask. Presumably, a nationally conscious peasantry would have meant that the Bolsheviks need not introduce entirely new categories of social organization among the peasants, teaching them how to even be a nation before teaching them how to be a Soviet nation. However, this chapter will argue that peasants in Ukraine were in fact largely not conscious of the national community that they ostensibly represented, that they were much more concerned with local and regional interests than that of a “Ukrainian” political entity. The lack of a unified nation among peasants in Ukraine is reflected by the differing experiences in nation-building peasants had in the Habsburg and Romanov empires, the lack of a unified Ukrainian language that was broadly intelligible to all so-called Ukrainians, and the series of conflicting efforts to politically mobilize the peasantry during the First World War, revolution and civil war that followed. All of these factors combined to ensure that peasants who lived in Ukraine did not see themselves as “Ukrainian,” or if they did, it had a vastly different meaning from other peasants who claimed the same.

The question of peasant national consciousness is important to consider for two reasons. First, in determining the non-nationalized and consciousness of peasants, we can better reveal the top-down nature of Bolshevik nation-building projects after the civil war. It illustrates the major politico-cultural assumptions held by Bolsheviks as to the nature of nations, and the people who are supposed to belong to them. If peasants did not see

themselves as Ukrainian (or even speak the variant of “Ukrainian” adopted by the state), then all efforts to create this nation were exercises in coercion and alienation. This is in stark contrast to the notion of bottom-up nation-building, where the people being categorized would have a say in the shape of the political community that was being created for them.

Secondly, analysing peasant national consciousness engages with the peasantry as agents in the tumultuous process of nation-building and politicization. This is not insignificant. In the 1897 census (the last major census taken in the Russian Empire before the revolution), 93% of all Ukrainian-speakers were classified as peasants, with 87% of Ukrainian-speakers earning their livelihood from agriculture.<sup>67</sup> This is a population of over 22 000 000 whose political development cannot be ignored.<sup>68</sup> At the same time, any analysis that engages with the peasantry as agents in social change needs to be sure not to impose narratives that misrepresent what the nature of that social change was. In this case, one needs to be sure not to use national categories when the vast majority of the population was not nationalized. In an effort to work around this, Tara Zahra has argued that national indifference is most useful as an analytical tool, used as a starting point for understanding how people become nationally mobilized.<sup>69</sup> I would further argue that any political mindset (indifferent or not) must be investigated, and its causes understood and analyzed. To do otherwise runs the risk of not doing justice to the

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<sup>67</sup> *Pervaia vseobshchaia perepis' naseleniia Rossiiskoi imperii 1897 goda* (St. Petersburg: 1897-1905), tables xxi and xxii. It is important to note that the census uses the term *malorusskii* (or ‘Little Russian’) for Ukrainian. This is indicative of the Russian Imperial government’s belief that Ukrainian was merely a rural dialect of Russian, and not a distinct language.

<sup>68</sup> *Perepis'*, table xiii.

<sup>69</sup> Tara Zahra, “Imagined Noncommunities: National Indifference as a Category of Analysis” *Slavic Review* 69, No. 1 (2010): 118.

particularities of any given case, as well as minimizing the importance of formative experiences that resulted in a particular mindset.

The pervasiveness of nation-oriented analysis makes it difficult to characterize peasant consciousness outside of it. This is not just a problem confined to the secondary literature, however. Zahra has pointed out that, particularly in Eastern Europe, “national indifference has long been effaced from the historical record by the nationalist frameworks, narratives, and categories that dominate historical analysis and the sources historians rely on.” Nationalist categories were relied upon for population organization even in the nineteenth century, meaning that often times even the material historians are analyzing are informed by assumptions about the role of nationality in political consciousness. Furthermore, groups that are indifferent to such trends (if they can even be called a group), are often not organized in any meaningful way, and therefore lack substantive historical records.<sup>70</sup> However, alternative means of identity formation do exist, and it is possible to articulate their effects on the political consciousness of peasants. In particular, the lack of a unified Ukrainian identity among peasants prior to the advent of Bolshevik nation-building projects can be attributed to the differing experiences Ukrainian peasants had under both the Habsburg or Romanov imperial governments.<sup>71</sup> Indeed, the practically antipodal policies these states implemented regarding ethnic minorities had dramatic effects on how these peoples saw themselves and how they developed.

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<sup>70</sup> Zahra, 106.

<sup>71</sup> While describing these peasants as “Ukrainian” (especially before Ukraine as a unified country even existed) may seem counterproductive to my purposes, for the sake of brevity peasants who spoke a dialect broadly considered Ukrainian by today’s standards and who lived in territories that the secondary literature today now identifies as Ukraine will be described as Ukrainian. I do so without implying any sort of unifying political community that these peasants were beholden to (or even that they saw themselves as being Ukrainian), but merely to differentiate them from peasant communities with radically different culturo-linguistic heritages (such as, for example, Jews).

Austria-Hungary's rather liberal treatment of the peasantry in Galicia and Bukovina, the provinces with the most notable Ukrainian-speaking populations, was quite conducive to creating a politicized national community. As early as the 18<sup>th</sup> century, education reforms made elementary education mandatory, and many schools taught in the native language of the region. One notable example of this was a Ruthenian college maintained at Lviv University for the first twenty years after the university's opening.<sup>72</sup> By the mid-nineteenth century Austria-Hungary had also encouraged the introduction of the Cyrillic alphabet for writing in the Ukrainian language, which had up until then been merely a peasant language with no written counterpart that the average peasant could understand.<sup>73</sup>

The relatively open attitude of the Habsburg state also allowed the creation of various nationalist organizations among the burgeoning intelligentsia. Organizations such as the Prosvita Society (formed in 1868) and the Kachkovs'kyi Society (formed in 1874) actively worked toward educating the masses and creating cultural and national awareness amongst them. These organizations published journals and pamphlets in a vernacular understandable to the average peasant, and held annual meetings that further encouraged a sense of national belonging among peasants from around the province.<sup>74</sup> In Galicia and Bukovina this was a particularly effective process. The Ukrainian identity promulgated by the intelligentsia appealed to peasants in Galicia and Bukovina who could now identify itself much more effectively in contrast to elites who spoke a different

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<sup>72</sup> Yaroslav Hrytsak, *Narys istorii Ukrainy: Formuvannia modernoi ukrains'koi natsii: XIX-XX stolittia* (Kiev: Heneza, 1996), 41-5.

<sup>73</sup> Serhy Yekelchuk, *Ukraine: Birth of a Modern Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 46. The small group of Ukrainian-speaking intelligentsia in Austria-Hungary had previously adopted a mixture of Church Slavonic with various words from Polish, German and Latin for the purposes of publication in Galicia, which was virtually incomprehensible to most peasants.

<sup>74</sup> Paul R. Magocsi, *The Roots of Ukrainian Nationalism: Galicia as Ukraine's Piedmont* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2002), 120-32.

language and did not share the peasants' cultural background. Besides being largely peasant in class-structure, Ukrainians lived in provinces where a different ethnic group characterized the vast majority of the elites (Poles in Galicia and Romanians in Bukovina). The work of groups like Prosvita was successful because their message empowered peasants who were otherwise marginalized by the ruling class.<sup>75</sup> Ukrainian identity was not only a cultural identity but a social one as well.

National aspirations among Ukrainians in Austria-Hungary were also enabled by Austria's modern infrastructure. By the mid-nineteenth century Austria-Hungary had a modern railroad system, as well as viaducts, railroad stations, and suspension bridges.<sup>76</sup> While in places like Galicia this was less prevalent, the benefits of such a system could still be felt. Areas of Galicia were much more accessible and could be reached quicker than in other states, such as Russia. Therefore, it was much easier for organizations like Prosvita to establish networks of outreach organizations, and to coordinate meetings between various peasant groups. As the empire in a sense became smaller, it became easier for peasants who otherwise possessed very regional identities to establish wider-ranging connections with peasants from other villages or regions (especially with intelligentsia activists encouraging this process and introducing ideas of a national community).

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<sup>75</sup> There was also a sizeable minority of Ukrainians in Transcarpathia, but the geographic separation from Galicia and the oppressive policies of the local Hungarian government ensured that Ukrainian speakers were integrated into the Magyar-speaking majority, and had very little contact with the Ukrainian language at all (Yekelchuk, 51). These Transcarpathian Ukrainians will not be discussed at any further length for the sake of brevity, but the paradox of distinct "Ukrainian-ness" among peoples in Transcarpathia coupled with total assimilation into the Hungarian population further strengthens the notion that discussion of a "Ukrainian" inter-state community is problematic.

<sup>76</sup> István Deák, "The Habsburg Empire," in *After Empire: Multiethnic Societies and Nation-Building, The Soviet Union and the Russian, Ottoman, and Habsburg Empires*, eds. Karen Barkey and Mark von Hagen (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), 129.

While the liberal policies in Austria-Hungary allowed for the creation of a nationalist movement among Galician-Ukrainians, one should not assume to characterize this, as Paul Magocsi has, as “Ukraine’s Piedmont”: the site of an awakening of pan-Ukrainian identity across state borders. The movement in Galicia did not reflect the cultural and political experience of all ethnic Ukrainians, 85% of whom lived in the Russian Empire by the 19<sup>th</sup> century (as Magocsi, to his credit, points out).<sup>77</sup> Indeed, the experience of Ukrainians living in Russia was vastly different from that of Galicians living in Austria-Hungary. Rather than encourage the development of a Ukrainian identity alongside loyalty to the state, the Russian government banned all expressions of Ukrainian distinctness. In the eyes of the state, there was no difference between Ukrainians, Belorussians, and Russians, and Ukrainian was merely a vulgar dialect of Russian. As a result, from 1804 until the regime’s fall Ukrainian was banned from schools.<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, in 1876 the Russian government prohibited any printing of original or translated texts into Ukrainian.<sup>79</sup>

One of the major long-lasting effects of this policy was mass illiteracy among the Ukrainian peasants, since the mandatory three years of primary education, when they were even enforced, were done entirely in Russian. During a conference held in Poltava in 1905, various teachers bemoaned the problems of Russian-language education in Ukraine, arguing that the majority of it was incomprehensible to the students and that most students relapsed into illiteracy shortly after leaving school as a result.<sup>80</sup> To

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<sup>77</sup> Magocsi, 119.

<sup>78</sup> Bohdan Krawchenko, *Social Change and National Consciousness in Twentieth-Century Ukraine* (London: The MacMillan Press Ltd, 1985), 24.

<sup>79</sup> George Y. Shevelov, *The Ukrainian Language in the First Half of the Twentieth Century, 1900-1941: Its State and Status* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 5.

<sup>80</sup> Krawchenko, 24.

illustrate how endemic this problem was, even by 1920, with the empire having collapsed and educational work in the villages being possible on a broader scale, 70% of Ukrainian peasants were still illiterate.<sup>81</sup>

There were, however, attempts at creating a “Ukrainian” community. The Brotherhood of Saints Cyril and Methodius was established in 1845 and actively discussed abolishing serfdom and creating a pan-Slavic federation. Taras Shevchenko wrote poems by using a revamped version of the Ukrainian language that utilized peasant vernacular and more classical styles, and which depicted Ukraine as being wholly separate from Russian culture.<sup>82</sup> Various intellectuals such as these tried to create a cultural distinction between Ukraine as a cultural entity and the Russian state, but were in almost every case either imprisoned or otherwise suppressed. As a result, while the nationalism espoused by Shevchenko and others may have certainly had similarities to that held by intelligentsia in Galicia, the complete unwillingness of the state to consistently encourage national growth meant that peasants in Ukraine were not meaningfully or consistently exposed to these ideas.<sup>83</sup>

The Russian Empire’s approach to handling its multiethnic empire serves as an interesting counterpoint to the relative liberalism of the Habsburg state, and also speaks to the major role that states had on the moulding of peasant consciousness. In Russia’s

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<sup>81</sup> Ukrainian SSR, Tsentral’noe statisticheskoe upravlenie, *Statistika Ukrainy*, No. 28, *Naselenie Ukrainy po dannym perepisi 1920 goda (svodnye dannye po guberniiam i uezdam* (Kharkov: 1923), 24-31.

<sup>82</sup> Yekelchuk, 40-1.

<sup>83</sup> I use the word “consistently” because there was period in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century when the Tsarist government was somewhat flexible on the issue of Ukrainian nationalism. With fears of Polish uprisings in Ukraine during the 1860s, Ukrainophiles were encouraged by the state to espouse their views because they undermined the historical claims to southern regions of the empire made by Polish rebels. Ukrainian national sentiment was only allowed, however, when ultimately tied to a notion of imperial All-Russian unity, and by the 1870s there were strong fears within the tsarist government that Ukrainian nationalism represented a new force that threatened to undermine Tsarist authority, and was subsequently repressed (Faith Hillis, “Ukrainophile Activism and Imperial Governance in Russia’s Southwestern Borderlands,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 13, No. 2 (2012): 318).

case, political interests in St. Petersburg were a direct factor in the failure of nationalist sentiment to develop in the countryside. The absolutist structure of Russia's government meant that the legitimacy of its power was concentrated within the Tsar. Starting as a living symbol of united Christendom in the east, and eventually transforming into the embodiment of the modern state, in all incarnations the Tsar's legitimacy derived from an absolutist idea that the tsar, in many respects, was Russia personified.<sup>84</sup>

Therefore, as Ronald Suny has argued, in order to preserve the tsar's legitimacy, the only form of "Russian" identity that existed was a form of state patriotism that respected the Tsar as the cultural and political bulwark of the Russian empire.<sup>85</sup> As nations increasingly became the basis for state legitimacy in the nineteenth and twentieth century, the encouragement of distinct national identities that were not directly tied to the state ran the risk of undermining the legitimacy of the Russian state as the people's rightful ruler. In a country in which the symbolic representation of state was vested in one person, and any diverging politicization movements were immediately quashed, it is easy to see that the spreading of any national consciousness among peasants in Russian Ukraine was haphazard and inconsistent at best. As a result, the political consciousness of peasants in Russian Ukraine was vastly different from that of Galicians or Bukovinians, and so it is problematic to ascribe to them a similar political heritage as their neighbours.

Ukrainian peasants in the Russian Empire had more immediate concerns than their participation in an abstract political community. Following the emancipation of serfs in 1861, peasants were no longer legally bound to land, but they also did not have the

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<sup>84</sup> Richard Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy*, vol. 1, *From Peter the Great to the Death of Nicholas I* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 33 and 61.

<sup>85</sup> Ronald Grigor Suny, "The Empire Strikes Out: Imperial Russia, 'National' Identity, and Theories of Empire," in *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin*, eds. Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 56.

means to purchase anything beyond a negligible amount of land for themselves. The tiny allotments distributed among peasants were oftentimes the only lands these peasants would ever own, since the sudden explosion in demand caused land prices to rise way beyond the means of the average Ukrainian peasant. The major surplus in the peasant population forced many to try to find work in the cities, but the massive influx of inexperienced rural workers to the cities meant that most peasants were uncompetitive in the urban centres. The increased use of machinery on large landholdings following industrialization also meant that peasants could not earn nearly as much working as labourers on rich landlords' estates. The result of all of this was a massive shortage of land, with 57% of rural households by 1917 cultivating less than 3 *desiatiny* (one *desiatiny* equals approximately 1.1 hectares).<sup>86</sup> To put this into perspective, the Russian statistician Iulii Ianson surmised in 1881 that at least 5 *desiatiny* were needed in order to thrive.<sup>87</sup> When one takes into account that the 0.8% of the population which comprised the nobility and gentry owned around 30% of the land in Ukraine, it is easy to see how resentment in Ukraine was often directed toward landowners, and peasants' primary concern during times of major upheaval were largely related to the quick procurement of more land for themselves, rather than the consolidation of a national identity.<sup>88</sup> In 1905, the Tsarist government introduced an elected legislative body called the Duma to placate the general unrest that was appearing throughout the empire. The sizeable Ukrainian faction in the Duma was headed by members of the nationalist intelligentsia and consisted of over 30 peasant deputies, but was plagued by disunity. One of the major

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<sup>86</sup> Krawchenko, 21-2.

<sup>87</sup> Iu. Ianson, *Opyt statisticheskogo issledovaniia o krest'ianskikh nadelakh i platezhakh* (St. Petersburg: 1881), 66.

<sup>88</sup> *Pobeda sovetskoi vlasti na Ukraine* (Moscow: 1967), 47.

disagreements within the faction was over the peasant deputies' insistence on radical land reform. This was never fully resolved, and so many of the peasant deputies deserted. The nationalists' inability to attract support from the countryside without acquiescing to the socioeconomic demands of the peasantry indicate the general indifference of the countryside toward a national community that did not include acquiring land.<sup>89</sup>

Beyond merely the immediate economic benefits of acquiring land, George Bisharat, in his discussion of Palestinian refugees, has drawn attention to the role of space as a tool of empowerment and identity-formation:

If...identities are elaborated only in confrontations with some categorical other...it is but one step further to recognize that at least one context in which identities are spatialized is on contests between groups for the control of space.<sup>90</sup>

After emancipation, there was a possibility for peasants in Ukraine to own their own land, and essentially become their own masters. After generations of indentured servitude, the possibility of owning land provided a substantial means of self-empowerment, with peasants being able to at least partly take control of their own fates.

Land also served as a means for consolidating communities. In 1906, Piotr Stolypin's agrarian reforms were introduced, which allowed for peasants to buy and own private land that was not beholden to the ownership laws of peasant communes (the traditional form of peasant organization). The communal organization of farming lands meant that if any one peasant decided to buy a consolidated plot of land, it could mean necessary redistribution of the commune's farmlands among its members. Furthermore,

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<sup>89</sup> Steven Lan Guthier, "The Roots of Popular Ukrainian Nationalism: A Demographic, Social, and Political Study of the Ukrainian Nationality to 1917" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1990), 194.

<sup>90</sup> George E. Bisharat, "Exile to Compatriot: Transformations in the Social Identity of Palestinian Refugees in the West Bank," in *Culture, Power, Place: Explorations in Critical Anthropology*, eds. Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 205.

as peasants moved to cities or resettled, the land they once occupied either had to be bought by the village or be bought by outsiders. George Yaney has argued that these were driving factors for many peasant communes to petition for village consolidation, allowing the commune as a whole to retain control of its land. Yaney illustrates the formative potential of land by concluding that the Stolypin reforms “drove many peasants to join together in revolutionary, though peaceful, collective actions.”<sup>91</sup> This collective action solidified the ties of communal, local identity, rather than serving as an impetus for unity beyond regional borders.

The prevailing inequality in land ownership only increased resentment among the peasantry toward rich landholders, and the potential for freedom from economic duress only strengthened peasants’ resolve to acquire more land whenever possible. Indeed, once the 1917 revolution transpired, victory for competing factions in Ukraine was largely reliant on promising more land for the peasants. Nationalists even managed to mould this desire for land into the foundation for a peasant-based national movement: “those who are for land are also for autonomy, those who are against autonomy are against land.”<sup>92</sup>

However, various historians have mistakenly conflated this desire for land among the peasantry with nationalist aspirations, arguing that there was indeed broad support for a political notion of Ukrainian identity beyond the narrow scope of the village or region.<sup>93</sup> This argument points to the fact that after the collapse of the tsarist regime peasants began voting en masse for nationalist parties, who were advocating autonomy.

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<sup>91</sup> George Yaney, *The Urge to Mobilize: Agrarian Reform in Russia, 1861-1930* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 279-80.

<sup>92</sup> Dmytro Doroshenko, *Istoriia Ukrainy, 1917-23 rr.*, vol. 1 (New York: 1954), 83.

<sup>93</sup> For an example, see Guthrie, 260-1.

However, this argument becomes problematic when one considers that after the Central Rada (the nationalist government established in Ukraine in 1917) failed to act upon the promises of agrarian reform, peasants largely withdrew their support. Yet these scholars have pointed to the increased parochialism and xenophobia towards all outsiders as indicators that a national consciousness grew out of a reaction towards the series of occupiers in the area during the civil war.<sup>94</sup>

The problem with this argument is that it presupposes a level of common identity held by various peasants in this time that could be strengthened in the first place. Indeed, the experience of the Russian Empire oftentimes ensured that peasants did not perceive of themselves as being particularly distinct, let alone in a community shared by all Ukrainians. Furthermore, the lack of effective education for the vast majority of the population meant that many were illiterate and did not have the proper education that would be required to articulate their shared problems and misfortunes in a political way. Ronald Suny has also pointed out that voting for a nationalist party does not mean that peasants agreed with all aspects of the platform. If a political party spoke in a language that they could understand, and were promising radical land reform, it is logical to assume that peasants would vote for them regardless of the other elements of their platform, since most political organizations did not even do these things.<sup>95</sup> Assuming that reaction against outside political forces equals nationalism also conceals the fundamentally empowering nature of having land. This is a process that is not necessarily determined by aspirations for a larger national community, and runs the risk of placing

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<sup>94</sup> George O. Liber, *Soviet Nationality Policy, Urban Growth, and Identity Change in the Ukrainian SSR 1923-1934* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 25 and Krawchenko, 58.

<sup>95</sup> Ronald Grigor Suny, "Nationalism and Class in the Russian Revolution: A Comparative Discussion," in *Revolution in Russia: Reassessments of 1917*, eds. Edith Rogovin Frankel, Jonathan Frankel, and Baruch Knei-Paz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 229.

peasant struggles in a narrative that is divorced from peasants' own understanding of the events around them.

One of the most important factors behind Ukrainian peasants' lack of a united national consciousness was the total absence of a unified Ukrainian language that was mutually intelligible among all the people that this political community (and its progenitors) hoped to include. Peasants in both Galicia and Russian Ukraine usually spoke dialects that were specific to their region. Without a basis for mutual intelligibility, it is very hard to effectively ascribe a national character to the various peasant communities in Ukraine. This lack of unity also illustrates the problem at the heart of the future Bolshevik nation-building project, since they saw language as being the root of all national identity.<sup>96</sup> The divergence in lingual development among Ukrainians can largely be attributed to the differing policies of the Austrian-Hungarian and Russian empires.

Due to the openness of the Austrian-Hungarian regime, Galician-Ukrainian was able to flourish and develop in schools, journals, and newspapers. There were also various efforts to try to standardize the language in Galicia. Smal'-Stots'ky's and Gartner's usage dictionary was an early attempt at language regulation that eventually was approved for use in schools by the Viennese government. The Shevchenko Scientific Society, a Ukrainian organization, also published the *Ruska pravopys' zi slovarcem* in 1904, which attempted to include elements of eastern Ukrainian dialects in order to create a compromise between the regional variances of the language.<sup>97</sup>

The main problem with these endeavours was that they were entirely based in Galicia before the total ban on Ukrainian language publications in Russia was lifted in

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<sup>96</sup> See chapters four and five.

<sup>97</sup> Shevelov, 24.

1905, and so tended to preserve peculiarities of Galician dialects that were deemed unacceptable by eastern Ukrainian speakers, such as a noticeable Polish and German influence on grammar and syntax. Furthermore, the various dialects of Ukrainian were predominantly spoken by rural peasants, and as a result the language was not omnifunctional. Ultimately, elite attempts to normalize the language oftentimes resulted in a new dialect that the peasants no longer understood.<sup>98</sup>

The implications of this problem were twofold. First, without any ability for consensus as to what “standard Ukrainian” could be, various scholars continued to publish different dictionaries and regulations in an attempt to reach some understanding of the fundamental nature of Ukrainian removed from regional variance. I. Ohiienko’s system of usage appeared as late as 1919, but his study, like every other attempt at standardizing, was met with the same problem of having to create a universal language where one had not existed before.<sup>99</sup> Any attempt to standardize the language inevitably prioritized certain regional variations, thus creating a false notion of primacy in the essential character of the Ukrainian nation’s language.

The second implication of the failure to successfully create a standard Ukrainian language was that, as George Shevelov has argued, “by 1914 the Ukrainian language could no longer claim that its *raison d’être* was understandability to the peasant.”<sup>100</sup> However, rather than pointing to the language’s new function as a preserver of a national tradition as Shevelov does, I would argue that the separation of “Ukrainian” from the peasantry indicates the inherently alien nature of that political project to the reality of

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<sup>98</sup> James Dingley, “Ukrainian and Belorussian – A Testing Ground,” in *Language Planning in the Soviet Union*, ed. Michael Kirkwood (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1990), 176.

<sup>99</sup> Dingley, 177.

<sup>100</sup> Shevelov, 66.

peasant life. The new variations of Ukrainian that were hailed by some contemporaries as “representative of national unity, a common link for all its own dialects, which combines them into an organic unity” were merely new dialects that had distinctly political overtones.<sup>101</sup> There was no real consensus on the functions or structure of Ukrainian that superseded differences between economic classes. Such divergence among Ukrainian speakers meant that Bolshevik attempts to consolidate the Ukrainian nation under its language were actually exercises in creating a new nation with a new “Ukrainian” language.

Coupled with the variation in political consciousness between peasants in the two empires, it is clear to see that once revolution broke out in the Russian Empire, the various political factions vying for control in the countryside were dealing with a peasantry that can hardly be called a people. There was no clear indication of participation and acceptance in a larger “Ukrainian” national movement that included all so-called Ukrainians, and there was no agreed-upon mutually intelligible language that all so-called Ukrainians shared.

Beyond the fact that peasants in Ukraine were not united as a modern national group, the events of the First World War and the civil war in Russia after that resulted in various conflicting parties attempting to mobilize the peasantry for their own benefit. However, at the rate that governments rose and fell over the few short years prior to its inculcation into the Soviet state, Ukraine’s peasantry was forced to constantly readjust

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<sup>101</sup> Ivan Franko, *Tvory v dvadtsiaty tomakh*, vol. 16 (Kiev: 1955), 338.

and change loyalties depending on who had recently taken over any given region, leaving little time for the internalization of a single Ukrainian identity before 1923.<sup>102</sup>

The collapse of the tsarist regime created a power vacuum in Ukraine, as well as a free space for the propagation of nationalist ideas among the masses. With the establishment of the provisional government in Petrograd, various Ukrainian nationalist groups formed the Central Rada in Kiev, which by the time of the Bolshevik takeover was the de facto Ukrainian government. Promising major land reform throughout the countryside, the various nationalist parties managed to accrue wide support among the peasantry early on.<sup>103</sup> However, faced with political pressure on all fronts, the Rada proved unable to move on agrarian reform as quickly as the peasantry desired. At the same time, the Bolsheviks in Russia had proven unwilling to cooperate with the Rada after it had called for Ukrainian autonomy. The Bolsheviks marched on Kiev and quickly took over, since without the peasantry the Rada had very little support outside of the cities.

However, the Bolshevik victory in February 1918 was short-lived, since three weeks later they were pushed out by a joint German and Austrian army. The Germans reinstated the Rada, but quickly grew tired of its inefficiency and unwillingness to expropriate massive amounts of grain from the peasantry.<sup>104</sup> This prompted them to reinstate the Hetmanate under Pavlo Skoropads'kyi in 1918. This was done with the

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<sup>102</sup> At this point the development of Galician nationalism and its importance to Bolshevik understanding of nations becomes minimal. After 1919, Galicia was occupied by the Poles and remained under Polish rule until the Second World War. Therefore, while the situation in Galicia was pertinent insofar as it enforced the problematic nature of a uniform Ukrainian national consciousness, how Bolsheviks understood the idea of nations and how they realized this in practice did not affect Galicians in any direct, meaningful way during the 1920s.

<sup>103</sup> Guthrie, 234.

<sup>104</sup> Mark von Hagen, *War in a European Borderland: Occupations and Occupation Plans in Galicia and Ukraine, 1914-1918* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007), 91.

understanding that Skoropads'kyi's regime would not form an army as long as the Germans remained, that all government offices would be purged of people the Germans did not want, and that all restrictions on private trade would be removed so as to better serve the needs of Germany and Austria in their grain appropriation.<sup>105</sup>

The Hetmanate was ultimately a puppet regime for the Germans. Skoropads'kyi was not interested in fomenting any type of national awakening, but rather creating a Ukraine that required merely civic loyalty from its citizens.<sup>106</sup> This was a political structure much more similar to the pre-revolutionary regime, and indeed many of the old elites came back into power. However, with the end of the First World War and the subsequent retreat of the Germans, the Hetmanate collapsed due to its lack of military support and the nationalists' discontent with its conservative model. The nationalists briefly took over again only to be ousted once more by the Bolsheviks in 1919.

The First World War was immediately followed by a civil war that was fought throughout the former Russian Empire. Much like during the First World War, the various regions in Ukraine were acquired and lost repeatedly by various political factions who had their own idea of how Ukraine should be built. Under all of these regimes the peasantry was subjected to identity-building projects that were extremely divergent from one another, and resulted in no one interpretation of Ukrainian identity lasting long enough to be properly internalized before the beginning of the Bolshevik nation-building project in 1923.

The Bolsheviks ultimately conquered and re-conquered the major urban centres of Ukraine a total of three times, and in all cases they were able to do so largely because

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<sup>105</sup> Von Hagen, 93.

<sup>106</sup> Hrytsak, *Narys istorii Ukrainy*, 129.

they attracted a large number of peasants to their cause with promises of radical agrarian reform. However this did not stop them from also introducing grain requisition, the Cheka, military and labour conscription, and collective farming wherever they managed to establish a foothold.<sup>107</sup> The massive disconnect between the message the Bolsheviks spread among the peasantry and the reality of Bolshevik rule in these early years even caused many peasants to believe that Bolsheviks and communists were actually two different parties. The communists were so hated for their policies in the villages that one communist functionary of the Land Commissariat said that it was dangerous for them to even appear in some villages.<sup>108</sup> Peasant resistance to Bolshevik policies was widespread at this time. In 1920 alone, the state only managed to expropriate 159 000 tons of grain from the Ukrainian countryside as opposed to the 2.6 million tons that was expected.<sup>109</sup> Such a massive discrepancy was directly connected to persistent uprisings around the countryside in reaction to Bolshevik rule, and indicated the Bolsheviks' inability to successfully politicize the peasants, which was a driving factor in their loss of territory to the Whites or partisan movements as the war continued.

Broadly speaking, the Whites' main prerogative in Ukraine was to stop the empire from completely falling apart, and re-establishing the old order. For White military leaders such as Anton Denikin, the highest priority was a "unitary, great, and undivided Russia," which would eventually require the re-integration of Ukraine into the Russian

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<sup>107</sup> Vladimir Brovkin, *Behind the Front Lines of the Civil War: Political Parties and Social Movements in Russia, 1918-1922* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1994), 327.

<sup>108</sup> N. Pliusnina, "Neskol'ko epizodov iz perioda Grazhdanskoi voiny na Ukraine," *Staryi Bol'shevik* 4, No. 7 (1933): 88.

<sup>109</sup> Jurij Borys, *The Sovietization of Ukraine 1917-1923: The Communist Doctrine and Practice of National Self-Determination* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 1980), 290.

state.<sup>110</sup> Thus when they managed to briefly occupy the region, they ordered that all land seized by the peasantry had to be returned to their “rightful” owners, and that one-third of the 1919 crop needed to be given to the new landlords.<sup>111</sup> The Whites also conducted massive amounts of terror, executing thousands of suspected Bolsheviks. Vladimir Brovkin has argued that unlike the Bolsheviks’ campaign, intended to totally reshape the social structure of Russia, the Whites’ actions against the peasantry were an “expression of revenge” in their mission to reinstate the old order.<sup>112</sup> Nevertheless, the Whites’ insistence on re-establishing the status quo proved to be their undoing in Ukraine, since the now that the strictures of imperial rule had been totally dismantled, it was much easier for peasants to act autonomously, either for or against the current occupier.

The agitation of peasant partisans like Nestor Makhno and Nykyfor Hryhor’iv was also a major factor in the inability of either the Whites or the Bolsheviks to enjoy total control in Ukraine for very long. Unlike those factions, who desired a reconstituted Ukrainian state of some form, Makhno in particular fought largely in reaction to the state-building efforts of others. While Makhno’s goal of freeing peasants from landlords and bureaucrats as often been characterized as “anarchist”, Michael Palij has explained that Makhno never meant to implement an anarchist society per se. For him and his followers, anarcho-communism largely meant free individual farms and decentralized self-government.<sup>113</sup> However, Makhno and Hryhor’iv themselves were hardly a united front. Makhno was willing to work with the Bolsheviks in order to get rid of the Whites, who

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<sup>110</sup> Anna Procyk, *Russian Nationalism and Ukraine: The Nationality Policy of the Volunteer Army During the Civil War* (Toronto: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 1995), 59.

<sup>111</sup> Georgii Pokrovskii, *Denikinshchina: God politiki i ekonomiki na Kubani (1918-1919)* (Berlin: Grzhebin, 1923), 171.

<sup>112</sup> Vladimir Brovkin, “Identity, Allegiance and Participation in the Russian Civil War,” *European History Quarterly* 22 (1992): 549.

<sup>113</sup> Michael Palij, *The Anarchism of Nestor Makhno, 1918-1921: An Aspect of the Ukrainian Revolution* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1976), 60.

he saw as the real enemy. Hryhor'iv, on the other hand, while largely fighting for the same ideals as Makhno, grew disillusioned with the Bolshevik movement and struck out on his own, fighting against any forces that threatened the autonomy of Southern Ukraine.<sup>114</sup> Furthermore, despite Makhno's reputation as being a Robin Hood figure fighting in the face of state oppression, many peasants actually hoped that the Whites would come so that they could push out the Bolsheviks.<sup>115</sup>

The constant conflict between such diverse political factions meant that none were able to establish a strong foothold in the countryside until the final Bolshevik victory in 1921. Throughout this convoluted ideological mess, no one side was able to successfully hold onto territory long enough to successfully implement its own interpretation of what Ukraine should be for any noteworthy length of time. One of the results of this was a total absence of effective political mobilization of the peasantry for any cause that did not have radical land reform as its primary goal.

The peasantry proved to be unreliable as a political ally because most peasants largely only cared about "survival, arable land, and looting."<sup>116</sup> Discrete rebellions sprung up all around Ukraine throughout the civil war period to fight against whatever the local authority was at the time. However, it is problematic to see the continuous rebellion as a manifestation of some distinctive "Ukrainian" character fighting against foreign oppression. These rebellions were not coordinated, even if they often shared similarities and goals with each other. The complete disparity of the political projects in Ukraine during the war, and the peasants' willingness to ally themselves with or fight against

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<sup>114</sup> Palij, 164-9.

<sup>115</sup> Brovkin, *Behind the Front Lines*, 111.

<sup>116</sup> Yekelchuk, *Ukraine*, 81.

them based solely on their desire for land, demonstrates that peasants in Ukraine were largely still largely non-nationalized even up until the end of the civil war.

So when the Bolsheviks finally secured their victory, and the creation of the Ukrainian SSR, they found themselves ruling a territory that was largely populated by a peasantry that lacked coherent and consistent notion of national consciousness. The legacy of the Habsburg and Romanov empires was that Ukrainian national projects did indeed start, but were separate from each other and had varying success in actually being introduced to the peasantry, rendering problematic the notion of a single “Ukrainian” nationalism. Furthermore, the various dialects in Galicia and eastern Ukraine, while ostensibly related, were virtually mutually unintelligible. Elite efforts to create “standardized” versions of the language only resulted in new dialects that were not comprehensible to the vast majority of so-called Ukrainian speakers. Any discussion of Ukrainians in Galicia and eastern Ukraine is thus hampered by the fact that it entails discussing a people that did not identify itself as such, or disagreed on what Ukrainian meant, and possessed no universal language that these peoples could communicate in. It is therefore very difficult to imagine any form of community in the Ukrainian countryside that expanded beyond local loyalties.

Lastly, with the disintegration of both empires and the onset of civil war in the former Russian Empire, competing political factions throughout Ukraine tried to win over the peasantry. However, they were often not in control long enough to effectively and permanently politicize them in favour of their version of Ukraine, and most peasants’ loyalty was usually connected to the promise of land, not national representation. While this seeming lack of political consciousness led many Bolsheviks in particular to view the

peasantry as backward, Ronald Suny has pointed out that it is more useful to see peasants as having “their own localistic agenda in the chaos of the civil war, one that did not mesh neatly either with that of urban intellectuals, nationalist, or Bolshevik, or with that of workers, many of whom despised those living in the village.”<sup>117</sup> It is not useful to try to shape peasant attitudes to fit into the national framework, since this misrepresents how peasant consciousness developed. Furthermore, understanding how peasants understood themselves allows us to better investigate the discursive and political implications of Bolshevik ideas about nations, once it became the Bolsheviks’ goal to encourage, or create, national growth among a peasantry they saw as being part of the Ukrainian national community.

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<sup>117</sup> Suny, “Nationalism and Class,” 229.

## **Chapter 4: The Nation in Bolshevik Discourse**

Establishing the non-national character of the majority of peasants in Ukraine makes the question of how Bolsheviks' conceptualized nations even more important. If the peasantry by and large did not identify with nationalist political communities, why was the national question so central to the Bolsheviks' deliberations on mobilization techniques in the countryside? Besides the fact that most party members clearly had little contact with peasants before the communists took over, and so therefore did not necessarily relate to them with ideas that resonated with the peasantry, the centrality of nations to Bolshevik strategy had major implications for the future development of peasant political identity. It is therefore necessary to analyze Bolshevik writings on the problem of nationality, as well as those of non-party scholars who were also part of the nation-building process.

This chapter will argue that the Bolsheviks' understood nations to be a convenient political category to relate to the peasantry in order to mobilize them for the cause of socialism. Bolshevik doctrines such as the right to self-determination were utilized in an effort to ultimately deconstruct national differences so as to create a socialist, internationalist state. However, through a combination of conflating nation with class, and a generally non-rigorous understanding of what nations actually were, "nation" remained a vague social category that was never very effectively defined. This would have major implications for the peasantry, since the social categories used by the state to define them were not even developed into a coherent conceptual framework.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the direct interaction between Bolsheviks and the peasantry, see chapter 5.

Since the Bolsheviks were never able to create a consistent definition of nation, but still intended to organize the state into nationally-defined administrative units (such as the Ukrainian SSR), some form of criteria needed to be developed in order to determine the borders of these new national territories. In this way the work of non-Bolshevik ethnographers and linguists became important to the Soviet project, and many of these scholars were contracted to work out the standard for national differentiation. Their emphasis on the primacy of language in delineating national cultures provided the Bolsheviks with an effective and malleable means of conceptualizing nations as a vehicle for future socialism. If language was what defined a nation, then Bolshevik ideology presented in native languages essentially displaced any problematic bourgeois elements in national culture which the Soviets did not want. It was a perfect means by which to realize the famous Soviet adage “national in form, socialist in content.”

This chapter will primarily utilize the writings of Bolsheviks who were leading thinkers on the national question, such as Vladimir Lenin and Iosif Stalin. It will furthermore place emphasis on the writings of notable ethnographers and linguists like Nikolai Marr and Gustav Shpet, whose ideas were extremely influential in the conceptualization of national delineation during the Soviet nation-building project. This chapter will not be an exhaustive account of all Bolshevik ideas on nation, but merely an attempt to provide some general themes throughout Bolshevik discourse. Obviously, the Bolsheviks were not in total agreement, and there were many notable dissenters from Lenin’s and Stalin’s positions on the national question (such as Nikolai Bukharin). Nevertheless, Stalin’s position as Commissar of Nationalities in the early 1920s and Lenin’s general influence within the party ensured that some variation of their positions

was often implemented. Therefore, in order to understand the general philosophical underpinnings of Bolshevik nationality policy, an examination of Lenin's writings and those of his ideological successors will be adequate.

The right to self-determination was central to Lenin's conceptualization of the national question. For Lenin, national aspirations had to be accommodated in the Bolshevik program by promoting the right to "political separation of...nations from alien national bodies."<sup>119</sup> National movements needed to be supported by the Bolshevik party, because the recognition of self-determination was the first step in the full democratization of society, and the consequent elimination of oppression. However, there are several things about Lenin's stance that need to be kept in mind. First of all, Lenin did not assume that this meant that all national movements would necessarily coalesce into autonomous nation-states. Rather, Lenin emphasized the *right* to secede, and in fact assumed that many nations would remain part of larger states out of economic self-interest.<sup>120</sup> In other words, promoting the right to secede did not imply that Lenin supported secession itself.

Given the fact that the Bolsheviks generally regarded nationalism and nations as products of capitalism, it would seem strange that Lenin so vehemently supported the right for nations to secede, thus perpetuating the very bourgeois elements that socialism was meant to eradicate. Indeed, many Bolsheviks did not agree with such a policy, and shortly after the revolution several vocal communists expressed their reservations on the grounds that promoting national organization could obscure the real mission of the

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<sup>119</sup> V.I. Lenin, "The Right of Nations to Self-Determination," in *Questions of National Policy and Proletarian Internationalism* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970), 47.

<sup>120</sup> V.I. Lenin, "Socialism and War: Attitude of the RSDLP Towards the War," *Works*, vol. 18, 206.

Bolshevik party: to create an internationalist state defined along class lines.<sup>121</sup> Some historians, such as Stephen Blank, have attributed this seemingly contradictory position to Lenin's essentially pragmatic nature. The Bolsheviks needed to garner support among non-socialist elements during the civil war in order to be victorious, so nationalist factions were appealed to when they were necessary for Bolshevik success.<sup>122</sup> Lenin's call for national self-determination was ultimately a cynical ploy, and the hollowness of this pronouncement was finally realized when the Soviet state reverted back to a pro-Russian policy in the 1930s at the expense of national minorities.

However, while Lenin's slogan was certainly self-serving in a way, writing off this element of Bolshevik thought on nationality as mere pragmatism conceals its philosophical significance, as well as its ability to reveal key elements of Bolshevik thinking on nationality. We can begin to see how the call for the right to self-determination is significant ideologically by examining how Lenin and his successors articulated and understood the nation's role in society. Lenin argued that nationalism was a capitalist construction that was meant to divide the international proletariat along national lines, which in turn helped perpetuate domination by the bourgeoisie. Perceived national inequalities merely hid the real social contradictions that were at the root of society: that is, the struggle of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie. In accordance with his Marxist background, Lenin's solution was typically dialectical:

[b]y transforming capitalism into socialism the proletariat creates the *possibility* of abolishing national oppression; the possibility becomes *reality* 'only' ...with the establishment of full democracy in all spheres, including the delineation of state frontiers in accordance with the

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<sup>121</sup> A. P. Nenarokov, *K edinstvu ravnykh: Kul'turnye faktory ob'edinitel'nogo dvizheniia sovetskikh narodov, 1917-1924* (Moscow: Nauka, 1991), 91-3.

<sup>122</sup> Stephen Blank, *The Sorcerer as Apprentice: Stalin as Commissar of Nationalities, 1917-1924* (London: Greenwood Press, 1994), 7.

‘sympathies’ of the population, including complete freedom to secede. And this, in turn, will serve as a basis for developing the *practical* elimination of even the slightest national friction and the least national mistrust, for an accelerated drawing together and fusion of nations...<sup>123</sup>

For Lenin the primary function of nations was to create antagonism and difference where there need not be any. Therefore, a nationality policy that accommodated all national aspirations, and created a political space where all nations were equal, would undo the fundamental antagonism of nations, and make national difference obsolete. Lenin’s conceptualization of nationality policy is profound in that it primarily existed outside of the nation-matrix. Lenin even argued that there is not necessarily a need for a unifying, state-wide language, citing Switzerland as an example of a modern state that functions without one.<sup>124</sup> A single state language would merely be another manifestation of nation-centric thinking, and in a socialist society this was unnecessary. For Lenin, nation-building was never meant to be an end in itself, but rather an indirect way by which all the peoples living in the Soviet Union would eventually be integrated into socialism as Soviet citizens first and foremost.

Lenin recognized that removing national antagonism was not going to be easy, however. While the Bolsheviks needed to undertake policies so as to allow national movements to develop, they also needed to combat nationalist tendencies within their own ranks. This was a particularly delicate matter for the Bolsheviks, a predominantly ethnic Russian party, in an area that had been traditionally ruled by a Russian imperial regime. Lenin identified the tendency among Bolsheviks to combat national “chauvinism” among national minorities under the guise of socialism, but doing so in a

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<sup>123</sup> V.I. Lenin, “The Discussion of Self-Determination Summed Up,” in *Questions of National Policy and Proletarian Internationalism* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970), 130.

<sup>124</sup> V.I. Lenin, *Works*, vol. 23, 317.

distinctly “Russian” way.<sup>125</sup> Such practices perpetuated national inequality, since “to brush aside the mass national movements once they have arisen and to refuse to support what is progressive in them means in practice to give way to nationalistic prejudices, that is to identify ‘one’s own nation as the model nation.’”<sup>126</sup> The persistence of such chauvinism within the party can partly be attributed to the fact that there were certainly many Bolsheviks who were not as ardently internationalist as Lenin.

However, it can also be partly credited to the manner in which the justification of nationality policy was articulated by Iosif Stalin, the Commissar of Nationalities in the early 1920s and one of the leading Bolshevik “experts” on the national question. At the tenth party congress, Stalin argued that the Russian people were much more advanced, and therefore readied for socialism, than many of the other ethnic groups in the former Russian empire. It was therefore the task of the Bolsheviks to “eliminate the backwardness (economic, political and cultural) that the nationalities have inherited from the past, to allow the backward peoples to catch up with central Russia.”<sup>127</sup> By endowing ethnic groups with distinct class features, it is not surprising that Stalin was also accused by Lenin of exhibiting chauvinism to some degree.<sup>128</sup> It is important to remember, however, that despite his conflation of national and class identity, Stalin was also opposed to chauvinism. Chauvinism risked alienating the outlying peoples of the Soviet Union, thus reducing the authority of the dictatorship of the proletariat.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Robert S. Sullivant, *Soviet Politics and the Ukraine 1917-1957* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), 89.

<sup>126</sup> Lenin, *Works*, vol. 20, 407.

<sup>127</sup> *Desiatyi s'ezd Rossiskoi Kommunisticheskoi partii: Stenograficheskii otchet* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1921), 101.

<sup>128</sup> Alfred D. Low, *Lenin on the Question of Nationality* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1958), 135.

<sup>129</sup> Sullivant, 95.

It is important to recognize the centrality of chauvinism in Bolshevik thought because it illustrates the essentially non-national nature of Bolshevik policy. At least in the 1920s, the central leadership was very careful to try to reduce any explicitly Russian dominance in the party and state structure. This was not only out of a fear of recreating imperial power structures, but also because any form of “one nation leading another” was unacceptable, since it perpetuating national antagonisms that were meant to be removed through the policy of national equality. Ultimately, the Bolsheviks intended to use national categories as means of transitioning peoples into socialism, and the only way to do that was to remove any need for national consciousness by making all nationalities equal. Chauvinism was counterproductive to this end.

The Bolshevik notion of giving nations the right to self-determination, and the desire to remove any chauvinism from the state structure, ultimately resulted in the policy of *korenizatsiia* (indigenization) once the Soviet Union was officially formed. This process was intended to integrate various nations into the Soviet state-building project more tightly. However, the question arises as to what a nation actually was for the Bolsheviks. Lenin, for example, never actually discussed what a nation was, and only focused on how the Bolsheviks should deal with nations in their programme.<sup>130</sup> There are two reasons why this could have been. First, Lenin worked from the assumption that nations did not really exist in the first place, and were basically reified forms of bourgeois-manufactured antagonism. Therefore, since nations did not relate to any empirically-verifiable unit, there was no need to actually define them. Secondly, the Bolsheviks’ *raison d’être* before 1917 as a party of revolutionaries meant that their emphasis was on direct change in the current order. Lenin’s programme was not

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<sup>130</sup> Low, 29.

particularly concerned with why things had come about, but rather how the party was going to deal with them.

In fact, one of the only truly systematic Bolshevnik analyses of the essence of nations was written by Stalin in 1913 (and was largely the reason for his reputation as an expert on the topic). The fact that elements of his analysis continued to be used in party resolutions even after 1917, and the fact that no other such work was widely circulated, indicates that Stalin's work was at least accepted as more or less ideologically correct throughout the early years of the Soviet Union.<sup>131</sup> For Stalin, a nation was a "historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture."<sup>132</sup> In order to constitute a nation, a community needed to possess all of these elements. Therefore, for example, Stalin argued that Jews were not a cohesive nation because they lacked a unifying language and did not occupy a single territory.<sup>133</sup>

While at first glance Stalin's definition seems adequate enough for the Bolshevniks' purpose, there are major theoretical flaws that would have a major impact on the assumptions that Bolshevnik policies were based upon. Stalin identifies "national character" as being a distinct requirement for nationhood, but this element is merely defined as something that manifests in a common culture, is unobservable, and constantly changes.<sup>134</sup> There is no real way to identify what this is, and so seems to serve as a catch-

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<sup>131</sup> Jeremy Smith, *The Bolshevniks and the National Question, 1917-23* (New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1999), 18.

<sup>132</sup> I.V. Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question," *Works*, vol. 2 (Moscow: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1953), 307.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> Stalin. 306-7.

all term to describe a notion of group-ness among peoples that do not fit within the rest of Stalin's definition.

What Stalin means by nation also seems to fluctuate depending upon the context within which he is speaking. He describes the American, English, and Irish nations as if they are all structurally identical, even though this was certainly not the case.

Furthermore, while arguing that Georgians were not a nation due to their lack of economic cohesiveness, he still uses essential national categories to describe them (he describes them as "Georgians").<sup>135</sup> He does this while also acknowledging the inherently bourgeois nature of nations, thus implying their essentially temporary and therefore constructed nature. There is a constant tension in Stalin's writings between abstractly identifying nations' inherently false nature, and subconsciously still perpetuating those very constructions by not using alternative ways to identify these peoples' political consciousness. This is compounded by the fact that Stalin's simplistic representation of the world breaks up human populations into seemingly homogenous social groups with essential identities (such as Americans and Georgians), and does not leave room for the possibility of self-identification that does not subscribe to a national narrative.

Stalin's vague formulation of nationhood, and his later conflation of class and nation at the tenth party congress, meant that the Bolsheviks never rigorously analyzed the concept of nation, and thus never got a strong grasp on the nature of indigenous identities. Were nations fundamentally real or were they bourgeois constructions? Were nations merely another way of describing essential class relations, or did they have distinct qualities of their own? Is nationhood acquired or is it an intrinsic quality? These were particularly difficult questions in Ukraine, where the vast majority of the rural

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<sup>135</sup> Stalin, 304-5.

population spoke some dialect of Ukrainian, while Russian was largely relegated to the cities. Bolsheviks' simultaneous understanding of human populations along national lines (for lack of a more rigorous alternative vocabulary), and their belief that human activity was in reality defined by class, meant that there was no definite understanding of what a nation was throughout the 1920s.

One Bolshevik described the “exposure” of national characteristics (*vyiavlenie*) among national minorities, which implied that these characteristics were intrinsically tied to those people, whether they were aware of it or not.<sup>136</sup> Another Soviet report indicated that the only way to really differentiate between the Ukrainians and minority groups like Poles and Moldovans was through their respective level of agricultural development, being otherwise virtually indistinguishable.<sup>137</sup> Such a definition of ethnic identity along class lines confused the essential category with the constructed, and meant that Bolsheviks were often using only a vaguely defined notion of nationality in their formulation of national policy.

The lack of rigorous analysis regarding the nature of nations meant that Bolshevik politicians knew what they wanted to do in order to make nations redundant, but had no real way of determining where nations and ethnic groups ended and where class affiliation began. In order for the Bolsheviks to begin strengthening nations so as to dismantle them, they needed to develop some sort of criteria for the delineation of borders into “national” republics.

In order to accomplish this, Lenin agreed to establish a working relationship with the Academy of Science in Petrograd, which had established the Commission for the

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<sup>136</sup> A. Butsenko, *Sovetskoe stroitel'stvo i natsmen'shinstvo na ukraine* (Kharkov: 1926), 15.

<sup>137</sup> *Itogi raboty sredi natsional'nykh men'shinstv* (Kharkov: 1927), 13.

Study of the Tribal Composition of the Population of the Borderlands of Russia (KIPS) during the tenure of the Provisional Government in 1917.<sup>138</sup> KIPS' ethnographic resources provided the Bolsheviks with maps and other tools necessary for the delineation of borders and the creation of nation-centric republics, as well as the methodological rigour required for such a task. KIPS' and other linguists' central role in the creation of the Soviet Union's national republics means that despite the fact that they themselves were not Bolsheviks, their ideas on the nature of nationality were important, since they established the foundations upon which policies such as *korenizatsiia* were built. It is also important to point out that this was by no means an uneasy relationship in many cases. While not Bolsheviks themselves, many ethnographers had been imprisoned under the Tsarist regime for revolutionary activities, and even if they did not agree with the regime on all counts, still had some sympathy for the revolutionary project that the Soviets undertook.<sup>139</sup>

One such sympathizer was Gustav Shpet, a scholar who had studied under Edmund Husserl and who taught philosophy at Moscow State University from 1918 to 1923.<sup>140</sup> While not an ethnographer himself, Shpet developed a theory of language that was extremely influential in academic circles during the 1920s in the Soviet Union. For Shpet, language was the “generative organ of thought.”<sup>141</sup> By extension, language was also the basis for communication among individuals, and therefore the foundation of any notion of group-ness. Groups may be defined by any common identity, but these were all

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<sup>138</sup> Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 59.

<sup>139</sup> Kerstin Eidlitz Kuoljok, *The Revolution in the North: Soviet Ethnography and Nationality Policy* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1985), 6.

<sup>140</sup> Michael G. Smith, *Language and Power in the Creation of the USSR, 1917-1953* (New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1998), 61.

<sup>141</sup> G.G. Shpet, *Vnutrenniaia forma slova* (Moscow: GAKhN, 1927), 12.

predicated on the ability of language to serve as an intermediary between individuals. It was therefore possible, Shpet argued, for people to move from group to group, and for groups to be defined not only by nationality, but any perceived commonality among individuals.<sup>142</sup>

Shpet's ideas were extremely popular throughout the 1920s, leading many linguists to even adopt the term "Shpetian" to define their own views.<sup>143</sup> Shpet's influence can even be seen in the writings of Bolsheviks like Aleksander Bogdanov, who argued that language was the "first instrument of organization."<sup>144</sup> It is easy to see why Shpet's ideas would have seemed so appealing. If language was the primary means by which cultural groups developed, then the Soviet state needed only to disperse their message of socialism in indigenous languages, thus shaping those cultural groups along Soviet lines. The Bolsheviks could simultaneously encourage national growth while also shaping how those nations grew.

Yet there was perhaps no clearer intersection between ethnolinguistics and Bolshevism than the work of Nikolai Iakovlevich Marr, a Georgian-born ethnographer who at the time of the revolution was a member of KIPS. In 1908, Marr had published his argument that Caucasian languages were all part of a new "Japhetic branch" which was closely linked to Semitic languages.<sup>145</sup> Marr pursued his Japhetic theory beyond this initial discovery, first concluding that Japhetic languages were the oldest Mediterranean language, and by 1924 arguing that all languages were ultimately rooted in Japhetic

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<sup>142</sup> G.G. Shpet, *Sochineniia*, ed. E.V. Pasternak (Moscow: Pravda, 1989), 574.

<sup>143</sup> Smith, 62.

<sup>144</sup> "Gruppa Iazykfront," *Revoliutsiia i iazyk*, No. 1 (1930): 77.

<sup>145</sup> N. Ia. Marr, "Predvaritel'noe soobshchenie o rodstve gruzinskogo iazyka s semiticheskimi," *Izbrannye raboty*, vol. 1 (Leningrad: GAIMK, 1933), 26.

semantics.<sup>146</sup> The conclusion that Marr drew from this was that since all languages, and thus cultures, were linked through their relation to Japhetic language, there was no “ethnicity” as such.

It was then not a drastic step to look for other reasons for social inequality, since ethnicity no longer existed. Ultimately, Marr concluded that notions of tribe were socio-economic at their core, and that language development occurred along class lines: “same-class languages from different countries- given identical social structure- are more similar typologically than the languages of different classes within the same country, the same nation.”<sup>147</sup> For Marr, nation and class became virtually synonymous, and much like the Soviet state, he envisioned a dialectical process by which linguistic (and thus, class) differences would eventually becoming redundant, resulting in a “new unified language based on the final accomplishments of both manual and sound languages – a language wherein supreme beauty will merge with the highest development of the mind.”<sup>148</sup>

Marrism’s idealism and its use of Marxist ideas made it particularly palatable to the Bolsheviks, whose favour was noteworthy given the vast number of high-ranking academic positions Marr held during the 1920s.<sup>149</sup> While many of Marr’s more radical theories were by no means shared by all ethnographers in the 1920s, his assertion that objective ethnicity and cultural difference did not exist outside of language was shared by many in his field, including many of his peers in KIPS.

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<sup>146</sup> Yuri Slezkine, “N. Ia. Marr and the National Origins of Soviet Ethnogenesis,” in *Intellectuals and the Articulation of the Nation*, eds. Ronald Grigor Suny and Michael D. Kennedy (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 224.

<sup>147</sup> N. Ia. Marr, “Pochemu tak trudno stat’ lingvistom-teoretikom,” *Izbrannye raboty*, vol. 2, 415.

<sup>148</sup> N. Ia. Marr, “Iazyk i myshlenie,” *Izbrannye raboty*, vol. 3, 111-2.

<sup>149</sup> For a complete list, see Smith, 84.

The primacy of language in ethnography for determining nationality largely explains why nations were such an ideal tool for the Bolsheviks to mobilize the countryside. Beyond language as a defining feature, the Bolsheviks never fully articulated a theory of what nations were, which meant that there was no national “content” that the Bolsheviks needed to integrate into their socialist message to make it more palatable to the average peasant. In order to nationalize their message, the Bolsheviks merely needed to put it into local languages. However, despite this absence of national “content,” the very manner in which the Bolsheviks formulated their nationality policy ultimately became self-fulfilling. Due to their vague conceptualization of what nationalities and nations actually were, the Bolsheviks assumed a certain intrinsic national character to the peasantry, even when no such political community existed as such. This would have major implications for the political consciousness of peasants in Ukraine as the Soviet nation-building project went underway during the 1920s.

## **Chapter 5: Bolshevik Interaction with Peasants, 1923-1928**

While writings on the national question provide a clear picture of how Bolsheviks understood the concept of nation on paper, the actual implementation of this understanding as policy in the Ukrainian SSR reveals arguably the most important element of Soviet mobilization. Bolshevik national policy serves as the intersection between two distinct threads in this study thus far: the political consciousness of peasants in Ukraine, and the ideological assumptions and prejudices of the revolutionary state apparatus that was established there in the early 1920s. This chapter will argue that the Bolsheviks largely followed through on how they thought about nations with the way in which they implemented nation-centric policy in Ukraine. Ukrainization, educational reform, census-taking, and the establishment of small nationally-defined administrative bodies were all manifestations of the well-known Bolshevik slogan “national in form, socialist in content.” In other words, all of these things were done in order to ensure that the Bolsheviks’ socialist agenda could more easily reach the people who were the foundation for the future Soviet project.

However, it is not entirely accurate to describe the Bolsheviks’ willingness to allow indigenous cultural development as a form of “affirmative action,” as scholars like Terry Martin and Robert Kaiser have done.<sup>150</sup> Such terminology suggests a conscious effort to realize total national equality as an end in itself. On the contrary, while the Bolsheviks allowed non-Soviet cultural elements like religion to persist under their rule in order to maintain stability, they were extremely wary of these things as possible

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<sup>150</sup> Robert J. Kaiser, *The Geography of Nationalism in Russia and the USSR* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 124, and Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 1.

manifestations of a national identity outside of the Soviet purview. Soviet attempts to introduce atheism and other anti-religious sentiments were intended to slowly oust non-socialist elements from peasant life, and non-Bolshevik nationalists were closely monitored by the GPU so as to ensure that nationalist cultural growth did not get too out of hand. Thus, while many aspects of the Bolshevik national policy would indicate a willingness to allow nations to thrive, it was all done under the assumption that the Soviet state would have an active hand in the trajectory of their development, since their ultimate purpose was to pave the way for eventual creation of a functioning socialist state that no need for any national categories at all.

For Ukrainian peasants, this proved to be an extremely formative period. Bolshevik assumptions that national identities existed for peasants meant that the systematic categorization of the state along national lines imposed new social categories onto peasant populations. Peasants who had previously not subscribed to national political communities were now assigned a national identity, complete with a prescribed national language, which did not necessarily reflect their own self-perception. The correlation between nationality and civic participation created new distinct political and cultural borders where they had not existed before. The creation of difference through borders, coupled with the reaction against Soviet policies that attempted to undermine traditional peasant values, resulted in the solidification of a distinct national cultural identity amongst many Ukrainian peasants in a very short period of time that was Soviet in origin but which took on a distinct form all its own.

The groundwork for the formation of a Ukrainian identity was largely established by the Bolsheviks in the early 1920s with their policy of *korenizatsiia* (or, indigenization).

In short, this was a state-wide policy that was an attempt to allow indigenous people to attain high positions within Soviet administration. Part of this process was enforcing the use of local languages in government, both as a means of reducing the Soviet Union's reputation as a successor to Russian imperialism, and as a way to make the Bolsheviks' socialist message more accessible to local peasants who only spoke local dialects.

In Ukraine, *korenizatsiia* was carried out under the banner of Ukrainization. In August 1923, the Central Committee of the Soviet Ukrainian government published the first Ukrainization decree, reaffirming the government's commitment to allowing citizens to interact with the state in their own language, recognizing Ukrainian as the dominant language, and asserting that all government employees must be bilingual in Russian and Ukrainian within a year or face termination.<sup>151</sup> While this resolution seemed promising on paper, it would be years before Ukrainization would actually be put into practice. By 1924, the Ukrainian communist party's first secretary Emanuel Kviring was more concerned with the struggle against Trotskyism within the party, so Ukrainization was not pursued beyond the publishing of more resolutions and decrees calling for further indigenization.<sup>152</sup>

This trend changed when Lazar Kaganovich took over Kviring's position in 1925. Appointed partly in response to critiques of the party's ineffectiveness in carrying out Ukrainization, Kaganovich implemented a much more hard-line Ukrainization policy that made noticeable inroads in the social structure of Ukraine. Kaganovich posited that there was still a massive void between the Russian proletariat, who inhabited the cities in

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<sup>151</sup> *Kulturne budivnytstvo v Ukrainskii RSR: Vazhlyvishi rishennia Komunistychnoi partii i Radianskoho uriadu, 1917-1959* (Kiev: Derzhpolityvdav Ukrainy, 1959), 242-7.

<sup>152</sup> James E. Mace, *Communism and the Dilemmas of National Liberation: National Communism in Soviet Ukraine, 1918-1933* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 89.

Ukraine, and the Ukrainian peasants. In order to close this void, the Russian-speaking urban centres needed to adopt Ukrainian as their primary language so that peasants could more easily be integrated into proletarian society. Russian would still serve as the intermediary language between Moscow and Ukraine, but everything in Ukraine would be in Ukrainian. With this goal in mind, the Ukrainian government set about making all public announcements, signs, and even movie subtitles exclusively in Ukrainian. Similarly, most journals and newspapers were written in Ukrainian.<sup>153</sup> At the same time, the Soviet government undertook a Union-wide effort to reduce illiteracy, particularly in the countryside. The “Down with Illiteracy” Society (ODN) was one example of the state’s attempt to improve the dire situation in the countryside. While its success was debatable, ODN did bring much-needed publicity to the issue of widespread illiteracy, and conducted reading lessons in villages.<sup>154</sup> Lastly, Ukrainization also meant the promotion of Ukrainian culture, such as the works of writer Shevchenko, for the “revolutionary education of the masses.”<sup>155</sup>

The idea of using a pre-Soviet nationalist writer for the purposes of “revolutionary education” is telling of how the Bolsheviks envisioned the role of Ukrainization, both in society at large and in the party itself. In a speech defending Ukrainization, Vlas Chubar, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Chairman of the Council of People’s Commissars of the Ukrainian SSR, argued that

[t]hus far we have failed to give sufficient attention to the matter of our Party gaining mastery of all those processes which are growing and developing in Ukrainian life on the basis of national tendencies...[T]he ideological influence of the Ukrainian intelligentsia which, of course, fosters

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<sup>153</sup> Martin, 88.

<sup>154</sup> Peter Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917-1929* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 156.

<sup>155</sup> “Rokovyna smerti T.H. Shevchenka,” *Visti VUTsIK* (March 11, 1925): 1.

nationalistic deviations among the masses and particularly among the peasantry, is constantly becoming more widespread, and an immediate danger of the possible alienation of the broad peasant masses and of certain segments of the proletariat from our Party will exist as long as the Party fails to follow [Ukrainization].<sup>156</sup>

For Chubar, Ukrainization was necessary for two reasons. First, with the apparent growth of Ukrainian national sentiment among the masses, the only way that the Soviets could maintain legitimacy was if they themselves became Ukrainian. If the Ukrainian government did not have a notable Ukrainian representation in it, and if the Ukrainian language was not used extensively enough by the government, then it would only be a matter of time before the tenuous hold the Bolsheviks had would fall apart due to nationalist resentment.

Secondly, Chubar recognized the influence that nationalists working outside of the Soviet sphere could have in the future. If Soviet governance was perceived as contrary to the interests of the Ukrainian nation, then the ideology espoused by the nationalists could act as a catalyst for revolt. By recognizing Ukrainian culture, and including it in the state-building process already underway, the Bolsheviks would be able to recreate the Ukrainian nation-building process as part of the Soviet state-building process. By leading cultural Ukrainization, the Bolsheviks could define the shape of Ukrainian culture on their own terms. Indeed, the return of Ukrainian nationalist émigrés like Mykhailo Hrushevs'kyi and Iurii Tiutiunnyk by this time had largely been due to the Bolsheviks' liberal policies toward Ukrainian culture.<sup>157</sup> If nothing else, the Bolsheviks could take a more active hand in the message that such nationalists publicly explicated, now that they were once more in Ukraine.

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<sup>156</sup> V. Chubar, "Pro ukrainizatsiiu partii," *Visti VUTsIK* (April 17, 1925): 1.

<sup>157</sup> Mace, 92.

Ukrainization was therefore an effort to realize nationality the way that the Bolsheviks understood it. Using the Ukrainian language in government and the public sphere was an attempt to make the Soviet message more palatable to peasants, with the hope being that they would eventually be integrated into the proletarian culture that was already burgeoning in the cities. Furthermore, the encouraging of cultural formulations was done so that the Soviet government could take an active hand in how it developed. Perhaps there was no other area where the Bolsheviks were able to make as big of an impact in the political and cultural growth of Ukrainian peasants as in the Ukrainized education system.

In 1919, the Soviet government held an All-Russian Congress on Pre-school education, which concluded that “an international spirit is not achieved by lumping together children who cannot understand each other, but rather by introducing in the native tongue the spirit of world-wide revolution.”<sup>158</sup> For the Bolsheviks, education in the local language was imperative if they hoped to integrate peasants into Soviet society. Indeed, it is hard to discount the major successes that the Soviet government enjoyed in this regard. From having virtually no teachers who taught in Ukrainian in 1917, by 1923 there were approximately 45 000 Ukrainian-speaking teachers.<sup>159</sup> By 1927, this process had resulted in 93.9% of Ukrainian students being taught exclusively in Ukrainian.<sup>160</sup>

The curriculum in schools, particularly in the countryside, varied. Sheila Fitzpatrick has pointed out that until 1927, there was no compulsory curriculum in the

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<sup>158</sup> *Zhizn' natsional'nostei*, No. 28, June 1, 1919, 2.

<sup>159</sup> Jeremy Smith, “The Education of National Minorities: The Early Soviet Experience,” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 75, No. 2 (1997): 300.

<sup>160</sup> S. M. Dimanshtein, ed., *Natsional'naia politika VKP(b) v tsifrah* (Moscow: 1930), 278-9.

RSFSR, and that teachers often did not even hold Marxist views.<sup>161</sup> Given the perpetual shortage of teachers in Ukraine, and the Soviet regime's acute awareness of its tenuous hold of the countryside, this was most likely true in Ukraine as well. However up until 1927, under the guidance of the Ukrainian Narkomos, teachers in rural areas were encouraged to emphasize practical education that would be immediately useful to the students' "physical and social environment." This included learning about the construction of windmills and shops, and how to properly grow vegetables.<sup>162</sup> Oftentimes, however, this resulted in neglecting the general requirements for basic literacy. This was eventually rectified by 1927, when a new general outline for curricular requirements was provided for teachers that included not only practical study but also subjects such as mathematics, social studies, language instruction in Russian and Ukrainian, and literature.<sup>163</sup>

While the Bolsheviks were very careful not to antagonize the parents of students by teaching about concepts such as atheism in school, schools still provided an effective avenue for introducing young people to various topics through the Bolshevik lens, thus inculcating the Soviet perspective in the younger generation. An example of this was how literature was approached. Many saw the value of literature as a formative tool for students, and so various school programmes were devised by Marxist intellectuals that studied literature. However, the programmes were often laden with very class-centric terminology, so as to place any understanding of the text within the Bolshevik discursive narrative. One such example was a study titled "The literary style of the Russian petty

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<sup>161</sup> Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Education and Social Mobility in the Soviet Union 1921-1934* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 18.

<sup>162</sup> Zenon Victor Wasyliv, "Soviet Culture in the Ukrainian Village: The Transformation of Everyday Life and Values, 1921-1928," (PhD diss., State University of New York, 1992), 183.

<sup>163</sup> "Navchalnyi plan ta prohramy ShSM," *Shliakh osvity*, No. 1 (1927): 214.

bourgeoisie in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century,” which was primarily concerned with Fyodor Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*.<sup>164</sup> Thus while the Ukrainized educational system was indeed increasing literacy among peasants and making education much more accessible, it was also using these nationalized schools as a means of further internalizing Bolshevik concepts with the eventual goal of creating a post-national Soviet society.

The Bolsheviks did not only direct their efforts toward the younger generation, however. Ever since the relative success of organizations like Prosvita, Bolsheviks and non-Bolsheviks alike had attempted to reach out to peasant communities in an effort to fight illiteracy. In 1922 the writer’s association Pluh (“Plow”) was formed with approval of the Soviet government, with the goal of publishing literature in Ukrainian for peasants to read. Formed in response to the massive dearth in Ukrainian-language reading material available to peasants, Pluh committed itself to providing literature that was targeted towards the masses, as well as an outlet for aspiring writers who would otherwise be unable to publish.<sup>165</sup>

Reading rooms were also established throughout the Soviet Union. At least half of peasant villages in the Soviet Union did not have a single party member living there, but reading rooms provided a way for Bolsheviks to politically educate the masses despite the lack of communist activists. Reading rooms provided a space where peasants could read journals and participate in study circles which read and discussed subjects that were of interest to the participants. These rooms essentially became the centre of Soviet cultural output in the villages, with the reading room coordinator (or *izbach*) making sure to organize campaigns and celebrations for Soviet anniversaries (such as Lenin’s death),

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<sup>164</sup> F. F. Korolev, T. D. Korneichik, and Z. I. Ravkin, *Ocherki po istorii sovetskoi shkoly i pedagogiki 1921-1931* (Moscow: 1961), 92.

<sup>165</sup> S. Pylypenko, “Pro ‘chytabelnu’ knyzhku,” *Kultura i robut* (1925): 1.

and setting up “wall newspapers”, which included news about important current events, the Party, the work of the local Soviet, and so on.<sup>166</sup>

Overall, the results of the campaigns against illiteracy both in children’s education and beyond are astounding. According to the 1926 census, 63.6% of the population in Ukraine was literate, which was more than double since the last full census, taken in 1897.<sup>167</sup> Realistically, given the attitudes of the Tsarist government before it, the Soviet regime can mostly be credited for this massive increase in literacy. At the same time, the Bolsheviks were able to use education as the frontlines for shaping a new Ukrainian cultural identity on Soviet terms. While people had access to classic national literature, young people especially were initially introduced to them through the Bolshevik lens, thus ensuring that any Ukrainian identity was inextricably tied to participation in the Bolshevik state-project.

The implications of Ukrainization and educational reform on the identity-formation process among peasants becomes clear, however, when one observes the state of the Ukrainian language during the period when Ukrainization finally commenced. As was discussed in a previous chapter, the language that most peasants spoke in Ukraine prior to the Soviet takeover was more of a series of dialects that were sometimes not even mutually comprehensible. Attempts to standardize the language often resulted in the creation of a new dialect that was really only useful to the intelligentsia, and was usually unintelligible to the average peasant. Keeping this in mind, one must ask the question of what version of Ukrainian was being used throughout the period of Ukrainization during

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<sup>166</sup> Kenez, *Propaganda State*, 138-9.

<sup>167</sup> *Itogi vsesoiuznoi perepisi naseleniia 1959 g. SSSR* (Moscow: 1962), 88f.

the early- to mid-1920s, and how this affected the peasantry. Unfortunately, in this regard my research proved to be inconclusive.

However, several factors can provide a preliminary conclusion that hopefully sheds some light onto this matter. First, the literary Ukrainian language that was used extensively by the intelligentsia before the revolution was heavily influenced by the development of Galician Ukrainian.<sup>168</sup> Many of these intellectuals, such as Hrushevs'kyi, also took an active role in the short-lived nationalist governments before the Bolshevik victory. While in power, the nationalist government published journals and newspapers, and even established a commission that attempted to standardize the language.<sup>169</sup>

Therefore, when the Bolsheviks finally did takeover, and embarked on their Ukrainization policy, it is logical that they would have taken their cue from the previous Ukrainian government who had made noticeable headway in developing a Ukrainian dialect that was more widely applicable for the running of a fully-functioning state than the average peasant dialect. While in my research I was not able to find any indication of the success the nationalist government had in introducing this new dialect to the peasantry, the persistently high illiteracy rate into the early 1920s seems to indicate that it probably did not have a big impact on how most peasants spoke in everyday life.

Furthermore, as late as 1925 the linguist Vsevolod Hantsov bemoaned the fact that every Ukrainian writer often used their own regional dialect and local forms of spelling.<sup>170</sup> This

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<sup>168</sup> George Y. Shevelov, "Evolution of the Ukrainian Literary Language," in *Rethinking Ukrainian History*, ed. Ivan L. Rudnytsky and John-Paul Himka (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 1981), 225.

<sup>169</sup> George Y. Shevelov, *The Ukrainian Language in the First Half of the Twentieth Century (1900-1941): Its State and Status* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 80-4.

<sup>170</sup> Vsevolod Hantsov, "Problemy rozvytku literaturnoi movy," *Zhyttia i revoliutsiia*, No. 10 (1925): 61-2.

would seem to indicate that even among educated Ukrainians there was no real consensus on the proper form of Ukrainian to adopt.

While literacy was certainly on the rise throughout the 1920s, there was still a massive shortage of teachers and schools throughout the countryside. It is safe to say that the 40% in the aforementioned census statistic cited who were still illiterate in 1926 were predominantly rural inhabitants. Secondly, the emphasis on practical education in rural schools up until 1927 was intended to educate rural children on “aspects of agricultural activity and the fulfillment of social responsibilities towards the community.”<sup>171</sup> As poor, rural peasants, learning about agriculture and getting much more practical education would simply make more sense, rather than spending inordinate amounts of time learning a new dialect, especially if the Soviet state had virtually no presence there.

However, in areas where the Bolsheviks had established a noticeable foothold, the use of exclusively Ukrainian-language signs and public announcements would have forced peasants to adopt a new dialect so as to interact with the state. Peasants would have had contact with this new dialect only insofar as they interacted with the state, thus their understanding of the language would be largely limited to how the Bolsheviks themselves used it, and what terms they employed. George Shevelov points out the Ukrainian absorbed many “Sovietisms” at this time, such as the Russian *kombed* (abbreviation for “committee of poor peasants) becoming *komnezam* in Ukrainian.<sup>172</sup> Modern Ukrainian, in other words, would have developed a very distinct Soviet nature. The impact this linguistic policy had on the peasantry was doubly true for people who, on the 1926 census, had marked themselves as ethnically Ukrainian, but whose native

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<sup>171</sup> Wasyliw, 184.

<sup>172</sup> Shevelov, 107.

language was Russian. In an effort to “de-russify” these people, Mykola Skrypnyk argued that these people actually spoke a “mixed and broken language,” and that their speech is fundamentally rooted in Ukrainian anyways, so sending them to Ukrainian language schools was actually better for them.<sup>173</sup> Speaking a state-sanctioned dialect of Ukrainian was a requirement for participating in the civic space created by the Bolshevik regime. To borrow Stephen Kotkin’s phrase, peasants in Ukraine had to learn to speak Bolshevik, albeit in Ukrainian.

Instances of the state deciding which was the correct language for peasants to speak was not limited to Ukrainians either. Many Jews living in Ukraine, for example, wanted their children to learn Russian, since Yiddish was seen as old-fashioned. Speaking Russian was seen as a means of cultural modernization. As a result, census data showed a significant decrease of Jews whose native language was Yiddish between 1897 and 1926. However, many children were forced to go to Yiddish schools if it was determined that they understood it, even if neither the parents nor the children desired this. The drive to increase Yiddish education among Soviet Jews was a means by which the Yiddish socialist intelligentsia attempted to “create a secular Soviet Jew through the framework of Yiddish rather than through linguistic and cultural assimilation.”<sup>174</sup> Nationalist intellectuals of numerous ethnicities who were also socialist saw the Bolsheviks’ policy of nation-building as a means to simultaneously develop socialism while also building modern national identities, in some cases despite what the target population’s preference was.

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<sup>173</sup> Mykola Skrypnyk, “Perebudovnymy shliakhamy,” *Bil'shovyk Ukrainy*, nos. 13-14 (1931): 32-4.

<sup>174</sup> David Shneer, *Yiddish and the Creation of Soviet Jewish Culture, 1918-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 18-9.

While the status of “Ukrainian” in the villages for most of the 1920s is slightly ambiguous, this is not the case after 1927. A special commission was appointed in that year to finally attempt to undertake the task of resolving problems of orthography, morphology, and punctuation in the Ukrainian language.<sup>175</sup> While the state had sponsored similar efforts before in the form of the Society to Aid the Development and Diffusion of the Ukrainian Scientific Language (established in 1924) and the State Orthography Commission (established in 1925), the results of this special commission proved to be the most successful and wide-ranging effort to standardize Ukrainian. After a draft proposal for standardization was submitted for scrutiny by professionals, in 1928 the finalized linguistic rules were put into law by Skrypnyk. In 1929, these rules became compulsory for teaching in all schools in Ukraine.<sup>176</sup> Certainly by this time there would still be regional variance in dialects, but the final realization of a consistent and wide-ranging standardization effort meant that from then on it was much less problematic to describe a “Ukrainian” language, since this was the language that all students (of which there was a steadily growing number by the late 1920s) learned in schools. Thus, while the Bolsheviks saw Ukrainization as a means of establishing the state’s affinity with the national character of the peasantry, Ukrainization actually resulted in creating Ukrainians where there had been none before.

The 1926 All-Union census was another tool that the Bolsheviks used in an effort to properly account for the peoples they ruled, but which was actually a major contributing factor in the very creation of national identities. In preparation for undertaking the census, there was much debate among the Commission for the Study of

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<sup>175</sup> Oleksa Syniavs’kyi, “Korotka istoriia Ukrain’s’koho pravopysu,” in *Kultura ukrains’koho slova*, vol. 1 (Kharkiv and Kiev: 1931), 94.

<sup>176</sup> Shevelov, 132.

the Tribal Composition of the Borderlands of the USSR and Contiguous Countries (KIPS) over how to record the nationality of census participants. While some ethnographers assumed that the majority of participants could speak for themselves as to what nationality they were, other scholars, such as Vasilii Chernyshev, argued that the difference between a Great Russian, a Ukrainian, or a Belorussian was not a distinction that most peasants could accurately make.<sup>177</sup> It was finally decided that participants would be asked to provide their own nationality and native language, but this was done with important caveats.<sup>178</sup> While participants were supposed to answer themselves, census takers were then required to consult a predetermined “List of Nationalities of the USSR” which had approximately 200 different nationalities complete with various synonyms, subgroups, and local names.<sup>179</sup> If a participant’s answer did not correlate with one of the officially sanctioned nationalities, these participants’ answers were to be categorized under a different nationality by the census-taker.

This is indicative of the top-down nature of the Soviet nation-building project. While the ethnographers who had compiled the list had received and used input from local leaders to devise the list, the process of census taking still meant imposing new social categories onto peoples who did not necessarily perceive themselves as part of a nation. The regime’s insistence on categorizing the population along national lines meant that new identities were created for peoples, or their identities were subsumed into others.

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<sup>177</sup> Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 111.

<sup>178</sup> For a sample of the demographic census form, see Tsentral’noe statisticheskoe upravlenie, *Sbornik proektov programm vsesoiuznoi perepisi 1926 g, vypusk 1-i: formuliary dlia proizvodstva perepisi* (USSR: 1926), 9.

<sup>179</sup> Francine Hirsch, “Towards a Soviet Order of Things: The 1926 Census and the Making of the Soviet Union,” in *Categories and Contexts: Anthropological and Historical Studies in Critical Demography*, eds. Simon Szreter, Hania Sholkamy, and A. Dharmalingam (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 136.

This was not merely a discursive distinction for peasants but had real political implications. Members of a recognized nationality received added benefits that were tailored to their own cultural identity, such as state-sanctioned literature and newspapers in their own language. Members of unrecognized communities either had to integrate into new categories or be denied the ability to actively participate in the functioning of the political culture of which they were a part.

In Ukraine, the formal categorization of most peasants as Ukrainian contributed to continued Ukrainization and subsequent integration into Soviet citizenship. However, there were also many minority groups in Ukraine who did not speak any dialect of Ukrainian as a native language. While some, such as Jews and Germans (particularly Mennonites), already had very ethnically homogenous communities throughout Ukraine, there were also many “whose development of national consciousness [was] not yet very high.” Peoples such as Poles and Belorussians, according to Soviet officials, lived in very mixed communities, and in some cases were almost unrecognizable from the Ukrainian majority.<sup>180</sup> Despite their seeming lack of cohesiveness, by being formally recognized and categorized as nationalities through processes such as census-taking, these peoples became the building blocks for the Bolsheviks’ project of creating a state where all peoples could easily be introduced to and integrated into the socialist project.

One of the most systematic ways in which the Soviets realized this goal among national minorities in Ukraine was with the creation of autonomous village soviets. Starting in 1924, villages, towns, and regions where there was deemed to be a non-Ukrainian majority were given special status as national soviets.<sup>181</sup> These did not even

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<sup>180</sup> *Itogi raboty sredi natsional'nykh men'shinstv* (Kharkov: 1927), 13-5.

<sup>181</sup> M.V., “Itogi nizovogo raionirovaniia Ukrainy,” *Sovietskoe stroitel'stvo*, no. 12 (1929): 61.

have to be particularly large communities, as the All-Ukrainian Central Executive Committee decided in 1925 that the required population of a rural soviet needed only to be 500 people.<sup>182</sup> These soviets were intended to allow national minorities to live in administrative units that used their own language for all intents and purposes. This was meant to serve a double purpose. First, it meant that any given nationality could enjoy majority status somewhere, since these soviets were autonomous and therefore waylaid fears of national oppression. Secondly, it allowed the Soviet government to effectively categorize and organize the very mixed population and Ukraine in such a way that enabled them to disseminate their message as widely as possible.

By first categorizing the various peoples in Ukraine as specific nationalities, regardless of whether they truthfully coincided with these people's self-perception, and then organizing the rural Soviet administration along these lines, the Bolsheviks succeeded in creating new national identities that were defined by their relation to the larger Soviet project. On one hand, the Bolsheviks assumed that many peasants possessed some form of national consciousness, and so they attempted to shape their policies in order to make the Soviet project more palatable to the peoples they governed. On the other hand, the Bolsheviks also saw nationality as a convenient means to an end, and so while the Bolsheviks were inadvertently creating new national identities for previously non-nationalized peoples, they were doing so within a Soviet framework with the hopes of eventually making these national distinctions unnecessary.

It would be incorrect to argue, however, that the Bolsheviks' accommodation of various national groups in Ukraine at this time is indicative of a desire to allow indigenous cultures to flourish unchecked. There are several indicators that the

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<sup>182</sup> *Itogi*, 19.

Bolsheviks' policy of broad tolerance toward national aspirations outside of the Soviet purview was due to pragmatic necessity and not ideology. Certainly, at any given time during the 1920s the Bolsheviks ideally wanted national communities, particularly the burgeoning Ukrainian nation, to develop along the prescribed Soviet trajectory, ultimately culminating in full integration with the Soviet state. When non-Soviet national projects emerged, the Bolsheviks were aware that a severe crackdown could result in loss of control in the countryside, and so they tried to undermine such projects during the 1920s in a way that would not incur mass revolt.

The best example of the Bolshevik struggle against non-Soviet nationalism was in the development of the Ukrainian church. Much as in other cultural spheres following the revolution, nationally-minded members of the Orthodox church attempted to establish a distinctly Ukrainian place of worship for peasants who up until then often did not understand the language used in church. This ultimately culminated with the founding of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (henceforth UAOC) in 1921, which replaced Church Slavonic and Russian in church services with Ukrainian, and aimed to use the peasants' own language and to "bring the Church into the mainstream of the Ukrainian revolution as a legitimizing, integrating, and nation-building force."<sup>183</sup> The UAOC promoted a doctrine of "conciliar self-determination" (*sobornopravnist*), emphasizing a new decentralized and egalitarian form of church governance that was meant to reflect the democratic practices of the Ukrainian church before being absorbed into Russian Orthodoxy.<sup>184</sup> Metropolitan Vasyl' Lypkivs'kyi envisioned the church as a

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<sup>183</sup> Bohdan R. Bociurkiw, "The Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church, 1920-1930: A Case Study in Religious Modernization," in *Religion and Modernization in the Soviet Union*, ed. Dennis J. Dunn (Boulder: Westview Press, 1977), 312.

<sup>184</sup> Bociurkiw, 328.

form of nation-building, saying that it “leaves its peculiar imprint over the whole village, elevates it and unites it, gives it its aim – an idea to live for...”<sup>185</sup> Indeed, while at first peasants did not know what the UAOC was, it quickly became popular due to partaking in the same Orthodox practices as before, but in a language that peasants could understand. As Zenon Wasyliw has pointed out, the inclusion of prayers for Ukraine and other similar nation-oriented practices helped foment a feeling among peasants that they were not only Orthodox Christians, but also Ukrainian.<sup>186</sup> The UAOC’s doctrine was a means of asserting autonomy both in the religious and national realm.

The parallels between the dominance of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Soviet state would certainly not have gone unnoticed, either by Ukrainian nationalists or by the Bolsheviks. The UAOC was therefore problematic for the Soviets on two fronts, since religion was seen as a bourgeois construction, and the UAOC represented a distinctly non-Soviet form of national identity formation. However, the experience in Ukraine under war communism not even ten years ago made the Bolsheviks wary of initiating any repressive methods to reduce religiosity in the countryside, and so resorted to a much more passive approach.

The Soviets did initiate an anti-religion campaign under the supervision of the organization *Bezvirnyk* (“Faithless”). *Bezvirnyk* published cartoons, brief periodicals, and accounts of clerical feuds that were intended to be easy to read and understand for peasants. Humorous anecdotes about clerical misconduct were also distributed in order to promulgate a “wry view of organized religion.”<sup>187</sup> The hope was that these negative

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<sup>185</sup> Vasyl’ Lypkivs’kyi, *Istoriia Ukrainskoi pravoslavoi tserkvy. Rozdil VII: Vidrozhennia Ukrainskoi tserkvy* (Winnipeg: 1961), 101.

<sup>186</sup> Wasyliw, 34.

<sup>187</sup> Wasyliw, “Soviet Culture,” 36.

views of religion would eventually be internalized, and more people would join local chapters of atheist organizations like *Bezvirnyk*, thus undermining the authority of the local priests who were still major contenders for leadership in many Ukrainian villages.

The Bolsheviks also attempted to replace traditional holidays and celebrations with new Soviet ceremonies in an effort to instill communist ideology into everyday rural life. Rather than traditional baptism of newborns, communist activists encouraged simply registering a child, giving children “socialist” names (like Iskra or Vladlen (from Vladimir Lenin)) or undertaking a “red christening,” which replaced the religious symbolism of baptism with communist content. One example of a recorded red christening had the father denounce “priestly shenanigans” and express hope that his son would grow up under communism. The child was then given to the local party official and attending Komsomol members before finally being given to the mother to hold.<sup>188</sup> While these practices never became particularly popular outside of local party members’ families, they show the Soviet government’s desire to undermine non-Soviet practices by injecting Soviet content into traditional practices. In a sense, these were attempts to give socialist content to national forms.

Furthermore, Yuri Shapoval has argued that the GPU was hostile to the process of Ukrainization because Ukrainian nationalists had been able to shift “their efforts to the ‘cultural front’, exploiting legally sanctioned means of resisting Bolshevik power... Ukrainization was ‘being used to rally supporters of nationalist ideas in all vital parts of the state organism.’”<sup>189</sup> The denunciation of Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev for his nationalist

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<sup>188</sup> “Zamist khrestyny – zvizdyny,” *Bil’shovyk*, No. 149 (July 3, 1924): 4.

<sup>189</sup> Yuri Shapoval, “The GPU-NKVD as an Instrument of Counter-Ukrainization in the 1920s and 1930s,” in *Culture, Nation and Identity: The Ukrainian-Russian Encounter, 1600-1945*, eds. Andreas

brand of communism in 1923 made it clear to the Soviet secret police that Stalin understood indigenization policies as being strictly de-Russification, and nothing more. As a result, the GPU closely monitored various known nationalists or Bolsheviks who had formerly been associated with nationalist parties. This included Hrushevs'kyi upon his return and Oleksander Shums'kyi, who was appointed as commissar of education in Ukraine in 1924, and was labelled by the GPU as the leader of the “nationally-inclined” cadres.<sup>190</sup>

Shapoval's research clearly indicates that even when the Bolsheviks allowed non-Soviet forms of nation-building, they did so largely out of an inability to do much differently. Throughout the 1920s, the Bolsheviks envisioned Ukrainization and other decentralizing processes as means of helping various peoples who spoke different languages progress towards a fully-functioning socialist society. For the Bolsheviks, nations were social categories that they intended to utilize for socialist ends, and they were always conscious of competing nation-building projects that existed outside of their socialist ideology.

The Bolsheviks' eventual crackdown on problematic elements in the nation-building project throughout the late 1920s did coincide with other events going on within the Party in Moscow, and this should not be ignored. Stalin's letter to Kaganovich in 1926 encouraging the denunciation of Shums'kyi as an extreme nationalist (which sparked the active campaign against him in 1927) coincided with the formation of the United Opposition against Stalin in the Politburo. James Mace has surmised that sacrificing Shums'kyi to elements in the Ukrainian SSR who opposed Ukrainization

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Kappeler, Zenon E. Kohut, Frank E. Sysyn, and Mark von Hagen (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 2003), 330.

<sup>190</sup> Shapoval, 327.

could only strengthen Stalin's position within the Party as the struggle for Soviet leadership intensified.<sup>191</sup> This would also help explain the sudden arrest of Lypkivs'kyi, all bishops, and many priests of the UAOC.<sup>192</sup> However, while political machinations in the late 1920s certainly explain the sudden intensification of Bolshevik practices, these policies were nevertheless philosophically consistent with the nation-building that the Bolsheviks had been undertaking throughout the 1920s. Ukrainization had been a means of ensuring that the socialist message would be understandable to Ukrainian peasants. Non-Soviet nationalist elements were counterproductive to this goal.

While the goal of Bolshevik nation-building policies in Ukraine had been to prepare the Ukrainian population for initiation into Soviet citizenship, in many ways the result among the peasantry was quite different. The Bolsheviks had assumed that notions such as "Ukrainian" were social labels that peasants had already understood and internalized, and so the Bolsheviks tried to accommodate this national identity with a policy of "national in form, socialist in content." However, as Walker Connor has argued, this was a fundamental misunderstanding of the notion of "form," and it is difficult to differentiate between form and content. Ultimately, Connor argues, by utilizing a notion of national "form" in their policies, the Soviets were simply perpetuating ideas of "groupness" that socialism was meant to undo.<sup>193</sup> In the case of Ukraine, they went even farther by actually creating groupness where there had not been any before.

The creation of national soviets in Ukraine are a perfect example of how national identity crystallized very quickly, giving an ethnically-defined character to peasants'

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<sup>191</sup> Mace, *National Communism*, 98.

<sup>192</sup> Shevelov, *Ukrainian Language*, 126.

<sup>193</sup> Walker Connor, *The National Question in Marxist-Leninist Theory and Strategy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 495.

interactions with others. Prior to the national soviets, farmland had been distributed based on class, meaning that poorer (predominantly Russian- or Ukrainian-speaking) peasants got more land and richer peasants (usually Germans and Poles) got less. When the countryside was re-organized on the basis of nationality, these peasants who were now classified as Ukrainian had very little land again, and the nation-centric organization of the countryside meant that their frustration was defined along national lines by the state's administrative organization.<sup>194</sup> Karl Eric Knutsson has drawn the connection between cross-cultural interaction and the formation of identity:

...any concept of ethnic group defined on the basis of 'cultural content' will not suffice as a tool for the analysis of ethnicity in its various interactional contexts. Only when ethnic distinction, stratification, or dichotomization are part of the individual's or group's strategies for preserving or increasing control of resources, social status, or other values is a meaningful interpretation feasible.<sup>195</sup>

Cultural groups do not exist in vacuums, and so the interaction between various groups is actually a formative process, as it defines the boundaries of contact. The Bolsheviks sped up this process by artificially constructing culturo-administrative groups, which took on a character of their own. Furthermore, the eventual standardization of the Ukrainian language helped create a space for mutual understanding and communication among many of these poorer peasants, thus solidifying a notion of community and sameness in contrast to other groups among Ukrainians.

The fomentation of national sentiment among peasants was also a by-product of Bolshevik attempts to undermine traditional peasant norms. Soviet efforts to persuade peasants to join Soviet-sanctioned organizations like *Bezvirnyk* often only resulted in

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<sup>194</sup> Martin, *Affirmative Action*, 42.

<sup>195</sup> Karl Eric Knutsson, "Dichotomization and Integration: Aspects of Inter-ethnic Relations in Southern Ethiopia," in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Difference*, ed. Fredrik Barth (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1969), 99.

driving them towards organizations like the UAOC, who may have espoused a national sentiment that was unfamiliar to peasants, but who were not nearly as radical in their attempts to redefine peasant consciousness (since they were still essentially an Orthodox Christian church).<sup>196</sup> In the education realm, the required fees for enrolling students into higher educational institutions often disallowed peasants from enrolling their own children, creating rural resentment of urban centres.<sup>197</sup> Since the vast majority of Ukrainian-speakers, even by the late 1920s, were still predominantly rural, it is not difficult to suppose that this resentment could have adopted a nationalist tone.

Unfortunately, by its very nature it is difficult to quantify exactly how nationally conscious Ukrainian peasants were. This was a major limitation in my work given the sources I had available. However, the increasing popularity of organizations like the UAOC in the countryside, as well as the eventual standardization of Ukrainian in schools, can give us a sense of how peasants' self-perception was changing. Prior to the collapse of the Tsarist Empire, most peasants had very little contact with those outside of their immediate locales. With the onset of Ukrainization and the loosening of cultural restrictions, peasants began coming into contact with new ideas about their relationship to those around them. While it would be hyperbolic to describe the 1920s as the time when a Ukrainian identity was firmly planted in all peasants' consciousnesses, it did mark the first instance of widespread contact with notions of national identity.

Yet even before peasants started developing a national consciousness, the Bolsheviks assumed that peasants already understood themselves as Ukrainians, and thus constructed nation-centric policies that they thought would accommodate the peasantry's

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<sup>196</sup> Wasyliv, 71.

<sup>197</sup> Fitzpatrick, *Education*, 59.

national character in the Soviet state-building project. The countryside was systematically divided into national units through Ukrainization, the census, and the development of individual national administrative units with the hope of disseminating Bolshevik ideology in the most efficient way possible. While a by-product of this was the simultaneous rise of alternative nation-building projects, the Soviets' desire to utilize nations as a means to an end meant that they actively tried to undermine these national projects, which envisioned their goals of a Ukrainian nation as the end in and of itself.

The irony of this process was that by framing the Soviet state-building project within a national trajectory, the Bolsheviks inadvertently ended up creating a Ukrainian nation where there had not been one before. Thus, while Bolsheviks understood nations to be merely a tool for mobilization towards a fully-functioning post-national Soviet state, the intersection of Bolshevik assumptions and peasant political consciousness actually created new social identities that would eventually outlive their direct association with Soviet state-building.

**Conclusion:**  
**Toward an Eventful Analysis of Soviet Nation-Building in Ukraine**

The sheer speed by which a loose conglomeration of peasant communities became a tangible national community begs the question of whether this period should be seen as an event. According to William Sewell Jr., events are “that relatively rare subclass of happenings that significantly transform structures.”<sup>198</sup> In other words, events are instances where social and cultural norms are radically restructured. While they are contingent on established social constructions, events represent a recognition that no element of social life is immune to change, and serve as a refutation of “sociology’s epic quest for social laws” that are immutable.<sup>199</sup> Indeed, in a matter of years many Ukrainian peasants’ political consciousness was radically altered through systematic categorization and reactionary impulse, and so by the end of the decade it was much less problematic to speak of a Ukrainian nation that encompassed more than a small group of urban intellectuals. This was not a drawn-out process where the tropes of national culture were slowly combined into a form of national unity over centuries, but the rapid standardization of language and articulation of a new political identity over a very short period of time. It is thus useful to understand the peasants’ experience during the 1920s as an eventful form of nationhood.

Understanding Soviet Ukrainian nation-building as an event renders traditional accounts of nation-building in Ukraine that use nation-centric vocabulary problematic, because it reveals that these accounts misrepresent the socio-cultural significance of the Soviet nation-building project itself. Typically, works that have discussed the

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<sup>198</sup> William H. Sewell Jr., “Three Temporalities: Toward an Eventful Sociology,” in *The Historic Turn in the Human Sciences*, ed. Terrence J. McDonald (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 262.

<sup>199</sup> Sewell, 272.

development of Ukrainian identity speak of the peasantry as a sort of proto-Ukrainian population, who have yet to be awoken to their national identity. By acknowledging the Eventful nature of Ukrainian national identity formation, it is easier to accurately conceptualize the countryside prior to Bolshevik rule outside of the nation-matrix. The Soviet experiment in Ukraine is significant for the exact reason that peasant consciousness was broadly restructured, with a new set of norms established in less than a decade that were distinctly different from the pre-revolution period. Peasants were provided the means to see themselves as part of a larger community with shared concerns and culture, and thus as an active political force with a distinct national character.

The eventful nature of Ukrainian identity means we can only really speak of a mass-based Ukrainian identity with the start of Ukrainization and the Soviet nation-building policy in Ukraine. However, this should not be construed as the beginning of a continuous Ukrainian national narrative that persists to this day. On the contrary, the development of the Ukrainian nation continued in fits and starts. Karel Berkhoff has argued that even during the Second World War many Ukrainians did not identify themselves as such, and were still more beholden to local loyalties.<sup>200</sup> This would seem to indicate that despite, or possibly because of, the swift nature of Ukrainian nation-building in the 1920s, these social categories were not entirely internalized even in the following decades. Nevertheless, the Bolshevik experience in the 1920s was the first systematic implementation of the means for national consolidation in the region.

The state's role in the formation of Ukrainian identity also reveals how conflicting national narratives can develop almost dialectically, coexisting despite their antipodal

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<sup>200</sup> Karel C. Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair: Life and Death in Ukraine Under Nazi Rule* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 210.

natures and resulting in a broader form of “nation.” While the nation-building project was undertaken and monitored by the Bolshevik regime for the express purpose of eventually undoing it, the discursive space that was created served as a forum for the autonomous development of other “Ukrainian” elements. Its Soviet origins are obviously inextricably tied to the shape that it took (such as the state of the Ukrainian language), but the Ukrainian nation as a discursive concept ultimately took on a life of its own.

While the case of Ukraine presents interesting insight into the eventful nature of Soviet nation-building, as well as political factors in the development of national consciousness there, there is still a lot of work that needs to be done on this topic that the scope of this study did not allow. First of all, more rigorous research needs to be done on the state of schools in rural Ukraine in the 1920s. As was discussed earlier, the Ukrainian language was only effectively standardized in the late 1920s. While this study provided some preliminary conclusions about these schools, more work needs to be done on their curricula. Was the “Ukrainian” language that these schools taught in a proto-standardized form adopted by the state, or did it vary from region to region? Furthermore, was the Ukrainian taught in schools different from what students learned at home? These questions have distinct implications for how peasants participated in the civic space, as to whether they adopted new forms of Ukrainian to interact with the government or not. While this study attempted to provide a sense of what the situation in the countryside was in this regard, it was far from exhaustive.

Secondly, while this study has used the case of Ukraine as means of identifying more universal principles on how Bolsheviks understood nations, more work needs to be done on the interaction between the Soviet state and the peasantry in other republics to

ascertain the particularities of regional variance while also working toward the development of a more general formulation of Bolshevik conceptualizations of nation. How did Bolsheviks' ideas change based on region? What were the levels of national consciousness among other peasant groups, and how did this affect the state's approach? The methods by which the Bolsheviks realized their nation-building policy in Ukraine quickly became the example that other republics were expected to follow.<sup>201</sup> This illustrates the importance of discussing Ukraine as a basis for a broader comparative analysis. Ukraine's diverse population and the presence of a distinct nationalist culture since the 19<sup>th</sup> century explained the Bolsheviks' need to somehow accommodate national sentiment among Ukrainians (even if Bolsheviks' perception of this sentiment was more informed by their own bias). The particularities of Ukraine served as the foundation for a template that the Bolsheviks would apply to both areas that were relatively similar to Ukraine (such as Belorussia) and radically different (such as Uzbekistan).

Scholars such as Terry Martin have examined the implementation of the Ukrainian model in vastly different contexts, but more work needs to be done on the intersection between indigenous peasant consciousness and Bolshevik conceptions of nationality. Overviews of this process on a macro scale (such as Martin's) focus on the political angle: for example, the creation of national administrative units such as the village soviets. Meanwhile, the manner in which Bolshevik policies affected peasants is discussed minimally. More work needs to be done that uses the peasant's experience as the point of departure for analysis of the effects of Bolshevik state-building on local populations.

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<sup>201</sup> Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 48.

Lastly, more work needs to be done on the long-term effects of eventful nation-building in Ukraine. Given its extremely short period of crystallization, the question arises as to whether the new nationalism of peasants lasted long after the Bolsheviks stopped actively promoting it, or whether it was merely an example of peasant adaptability in a period of constant flux. If the latter, the question becomes when exactly it is acceptable to speak of a popular Ukrainian nation, and the open-endedness of this question illustrates that my research is far from the final word on this topic. Berkhoff's work indicates that the eventful nature of Bolshevik policies in the 1920s was far from the final catalyst for popular internalization of national categories. The question then becomes whether there were other similarly eventful moments of rapid nationalization in Ukraine, and if so how they interacted with each other to result in the modern Ukrainian nation.

In any case, the purpose of this study has been to reveal the political and philosophical significance of Bolshevik nation-building in the Ukrainian SSR during the 1920s. In understanding how Bolsheviks and peasants understood the idea of nations, it becomes clear that nation-centric narratives are no longer practical for conceptualizing the political development of Ukraine, and perhaps other areas under Bolshevik rule as well. By conceptualizing nation-building outside of the nation-matrix, it is now possible to reverse the process that Rogers Brubaker has described as the "nullification of complex identities by the terrible categorical simplicity of ascribed nationality."<sup>202</sup> In other words, understanding the eventful roots of the Ukrainian nation allows us to identify narratives of identity formation (such as the legacy of imperialism and the impact

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<sup>202</sup> Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 20.

of borders on self-conception) that better reflect the multi-faceted experience of peasants living through the process of Bolshevik state-building.

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