

Against Culturism: Reconsidering Stalin on Nation and Class

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Abstract

This article argues that the key to Stalin's early theoretical work on the national question may be read as an attack on culturism – the propensity to identify an intangible 'culture' (often with religious factors) as the basis for collective identity. Although his criticism is directed at a number of social democratic organisations at the turn of the twentieth century, it also has pertinence for today due to the persistence of culturist assumptions. Two factors are important in his criticism. The first is to define 'nation' in order to sideline the culturist position, although his own definition is not without its problems. The second tackles the question of the structure of the state: does one begin with 'national culture' or with class? Stalin proposes that class is the determining factor, which then enables a very different approach to 'national culture'. The unexpected result is that the unity provided by a focus on the workers and peasants produces both new levels of cultural diversity and enables a stronger approach to ensuring such diversity. The approach undertaken in this article pays careful attention to Stalin's theoretical and philosophical arguments as they appear in his written texts.

Keywords

Stalin – Otto Bauer – Bund – national question – class – unity-diversity

The unexpected value of Stalin's early theoretical work on the national question relates to its sustained attack on culturism – a notably persistent tendency even in our own time. By culturism I mean the propensity to identify an intangible 'culture' as the basis for collective identity, to which may be attributed

certain traits, such as ways of thinking, behaviour and temperament. Often, such culturism includes religio-cultural factors, in which religious features have entered into a particular culture and thereby enable one to assert cultural distinction on the basis of those features. For Stalin, this approach is misguided, for it prioritises 'culture' and isolates it from the crucial factors of economics, history and, above all, the dialectical force of class.

Although Stalin's work on the national question spans more than three decades (from 1904¹), I focus on a number of his earlier pieces, especially 'Marxism and the National Question', which contains the most sustained criticism of culturist approaches.² The reason he criticises such culturism is that it was common among a number of social democratic organisations at the turn of the twentieth century: the Austrian Marxists, the Caucasian movements, the Southern Slavs, and above all the Bund (The General Jewish Workers' Union of Lithuania, Poland, and Russia).³ Two factors are important in his criticism. The first is to define 'nation'⁴ in order to sideline the culturist position, although his own definition is not without problems. The second tackles the question of the structure of the socialist state: does one begin with 'national culture' or with class? In contrast to the Austrian Marxists, the more nationally minded among the Bund and the Caucasian Marxists, Stalin proposes that class is the determining factor, which then enables a very different approach to 'national culture'.

1 I. V. Stalin, "The Social-Democratic View on the National Question," in *Works*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1904 [1954]); I. V. Stalin, "Kak ponimaet sotsial-demokratiia natsional'nyi vopros?" in *Sochineniia*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1904 [1946]).

2 It was originally published as 'The National Question and Social-Democracy' (Natsional'nyi vopros i sotsialdemokratiia) in the Bolshevik journal *Prosveshchenie*. Other dimensions of Stalin's thought on the national question that are beyond detailed analysis in this study include the affirmative action project of the USSR, the logical connection with anti-colonial struggles, the later redefinition of 'nation' and a 'pentecostal' approach to language.

3 For further arguments against the Caucasian position, see Stalin, "The Social-Democratic View on the National Question," 36–40; Stalin, "Kak ponimaet sotsial-demokratiia natsional'nyi vopros?" 37–41; I. V. Stalin, "On the Road to Nationalism (A Letter From the Caucasus)," in *Works*, 2 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1913 [1953]), 295–96; I. V. Stalin, "Na puti k natsionalizmu (Pis'mo s Kavkaza)," in *Sochineniia*, 2 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1913 [1946]), 285–86.

4 We need to be careful not to read back into these debates the assumptions of a nation-state as an 'imagined community' (Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 1991)). Thus, a 'nation' was not the political entity of a state, but rather the 'nationalities' within a state. These are now often called 'ethnic minorities', but this term is potentially misleading, since ethnicity was not necessarily a basic feature and the debates focused on majority and minority nationalities.

The unexpected result is that the unity provided by a focus on the workers and peasants produces both new levels of cultural diversity and enables a stronger approach to ensuring such diversity. As will become clear, my approach focuses on Stalin's theoretical and philosophical arguments. I deal with his written texts, seeking to draw out their insights, tensions and problems. This approach is surprisingly rare, with critics either dismissing Stalin as a theorist, or gliding over his texts, or being unaware of the dialectical Marxist tradition, or eschewing theoretical work on his texts for the sake of archives and policies.⁵ By contrast, I find the approach of detailed attention to Stalin's texts useful, not merely for the sake of understanding Stalin's own thought, but also because culturist approaches to national difference persist in our own day.

Defining 'Nation'

The first item in the struggle between the Austrian Marxists, the Bund, the Caucasian movement and Stalin's Bolshevik position concerns definition.

5 As a sample, see Robert Conquest, *Stalin: Breaker of Nations* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992); Stephen Blank, *The Sorcerer as Apprentice: Stalin as Commissar of Nationalities, 1917–1924* (Westport: Greenwood, 1994), 68–81; Richard Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union: Communism and Nationalism, 1917–1923* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997 [1964]); Jeremy Smith, *The Bolsheviks and the National Question, 1917–1923* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999); Jeremy Smith, "Stalin as Commissar for Nationality Affairs, 1918–1922," in *Stalin: A New History*, ed. Sarah Davies and James Harris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Yuri Slezkine, "The Soviet Union as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism," in *Stalinism: New Directions*, ed. Sheila Fitzpatrick (London: Routledge, 2000); Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001); Terry Martin and Ronald Grigor Suny (eds.), *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); David Crouch, "The Seeds of National Liberation," *International Socialism: A Quarterly Journal of Socialist Theory* 94, (2002); Serhy Yekelchuk, "Stalinist Patriotism as Imperial Discourse: Reconciling the Ukrainian and Russian 'Heroic Past', 1939–45," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 3, no. 1 (2002): 51–80; Jörg Baberowski, *Der Feind ist überall: Stalinismus im Kaukasus* (Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2003); Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005). Despite the promise of van Ree's engagement with Stalin's texts, he glides over the deeper theoretical matters and prefers to search for possible external sources for his thought: Erik van Ree, *The Political Thought of Joseph Stalin: A Study in Twentieth-Century Revolutionary Patriotism* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2002), 64–69; Erik Van Ree, "Stalin and the National Question," *Revolutionary Russia* 7, no. 2 (2003).

If one is seeking to develop a viable socialist position on the national question, then one needs a definition of 'nation'. I begin with the definitions of the Austrian Marxists, the Bund and the Caucasian Social-Democrats, before turning to Stalin's anti-culturist response.

For Otto Bauer, the leading theorist among the Austrians, 'a nation is the totality of human beings bound together by a community of fate [*Schicksalsgemeinschaft*] into a community of character [*Charaktergemeinschaft*].'⁶ By community of 'character' he seeks to designate what makes one people distinct from another – the 'national character' that marks the Germans from the English, the Russians from the Ruthenians, and so on. But this character is neither causal in terms of individual behaviour nor a given. Thus, one cannot attribute certain individual characteristics (Germans are ordered, French are temperamental, Jews given to abstract thought) to national character. Instead, the identification of a national character is the beginning of analysis. Now community of 'fate' or 'destiny' comes into play: by this term Bauer means the long and complex historical process by which a community of character comes into being. He stresses that such a community is always relative, subject to change in light of historical developments.⁷ So he investigates how changes in this national character take place, particularly in terms of the interactions between historical and contemporary forces. Instead of an unchanging national spirit, each generation inherits a certain cultural framework that may be modified in light of experience and events.⁸ Thus 'national character' is not the explanation, but the reality that needs to be explained in historical terms.

Bauer clearly remains wedded to a very European notion of 'national character', according to which one may identify distinct differences in ways of thinking, behaviour and assumptions between one small state and another.⁹

6 Otto Bauer, *The Question of Nationalities and Social Democracy*, trans., Joseph O'Donnell (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000 [1907]), 117. On Bauer within the context of wider debates over the national question in Austro-Marxism, see Gábor Egrý, "Social Democracy and the Nationalities Question," in *Regimes and Transformations: Hungary in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Istvan Feitl and Balázs Sipos (Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó, 2005). Less useful is Michael Löwy, "Marxists and the National Question," *New Left Review* 1/96, (1976).

7 Bauer, 22.

8 These historical modifications produce both 'historical nations' and 'non-historical nations', determined by the presence of a ruling elite and high national culture: nations may pass from one to the other in light of changing conditions. 'Non-historical nations' (*geschichtslosen Völker*) is borrowed from Engels, concerning peoples that have never formed a state and seemed to be disappearing. Friedrich Engels, "The Magyar Struggle," in *Marx and Engels Collected Works*, 8 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1849 [1975]). See further Egrý, 98–99.

9 See especially Bauer, 119–25.

He does give this assumption a unique twist, arguing that it is not a cause of behaviour but a reality that needs to be historicised in a way that renders it contingent and changing. This is also the case with the different socialist movements, which are determined in the way they express socialism by their cultural and national traditions. Tellingly, he uses a religious analogy to make his point, deploying the common content-form distinction: in the same way that Roman Catholicism, even with its centralised leadership and doctrinal form, acquires national specificity in the different nations, so also 'in each nation inherited national characteristics are giving international socialist ideology a particular national form'.¹⁰

Alongside this analogy, Bauer (like Stalin) focuses a good deal on the Jews. Not only does he constantly use the Jews as examples for the various moments in his argument, but he also argues that the Jews are gradually ceasing to have the national status that they had during the middle ages. With the advent of capitalism, especially in Western Europe, they have become increasingly assimilated to the cultural communities of the nations in question, passing from historical nation to 'non-historical' nation to full assimilation. The persistence of national identity among Jews in Eastern Europe may be attributed to the fact that capitalism has not yet become as pervasive as in Western Europe. But Bauer argues that assimilation will happen there too, although it will be a gradual process.¹¹ As we will see, in 1913 Stalin agreed with Bauer, although for different reasons (the Jews do not meet all of the requirements of his definition of a nation). In this light, the Bund's endorsement and appropriation of the Austro-Marxist proposals concerning 'national character' and 'national-cultural autonomy' may initially seem curious. But they did so by dispensing with Bauer's argument concerning Jewish assimilation and disappearance as a 'nation'.

Perhaps more than any other social-democratic party, the Bund found itself constantly struggling over the national question.¹² Yet, there was surprisingly

10 Ibid., 18.

11 Ibid., 291–308, 343.

12 For detail on the following, see (with qualification) Jonathan Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism, and the Russian Jews, 1862–1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 171–257; Roni Gechtman, "National-Cultural Autonomy and 'Neutralism': Vladimir Medem's Marxist Analysis of the National Question, 1903–1920," *Socialist Studies/Études Socialistes*, Spring, (2007); Gertrud Pickan, "Kossovsky, Portnoy and Others: The Role of the Bund's Founding Generation in the Interwar Polish Bund," in *Jewish Politics in Eastern Europe: The Bund at 100*, ed. Jack Jacobs (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2001). See also Vladimir Kossovskii, "Vladimir Medem un di natsionale frage," in *Vladimir Medem: Tsum tsvantsikstn yortsayt* (New York: Der Amerikaner Repräsentants fun

little theoretical effort to move beyond the Austrian definition of the nation. On the one side were the internationalists, such as Leon Goldman and Dovid Kats, who argued strongly that the focus should be the international working class and not 'national cultural' interests, which they saw as a species of nationalism and thereby divisive and diversionary. On the other side were those – like John Mill, Yekutiel Portnoi and Vladimir Kossovskii (Nokhem Mendl Levinson) – who argued equally strongly for Jewish identity as a nation. These nationalists obviously needed a definition of nation, which they saw in terms of culture and language. Somewhere in the middle were the proposals of the some of the more creative theorists, such as Vladimir Medem. For Medem, 'national character' – a term borrowed from the Austrian Marxists – was nothing more than a cultural content common to all human beings, which took distinct forms due to historical reasons and the conjunctions of particular social forces. In that light, he argued that citizenship of what he called a 'state of nationalities' should be neutral in terms of national identification. Everyone was to be included, without identifying one's ethnicity. While Medem's approach may be seen as an effort to negate the divisive force of the national question in the Bund, it did not solve those struggles. Those in favour of a distinct focus on the Bund as the representative of Jewish workers were able to get the fourth congress (1901) to adopt the following resolution: 'The congress recognizes that the term "nationality" is applicable also to the Jews'.¹³ This principle – albeit without stipulating concrete guidelines as to how it would work in practice – was located within the context of continued oppression of not only one class by another, but also of one nationality by another. The sixth congress (1905) was even clearer, speaking of 'national-cultural autonomy', 'free cultural development' and the need for self-government to be transferred to the 'nation'.¹⁴ Yet, the internationalist forces within the Bund resisted being overwhelmed by such resolutions, ensuring that the statements of principle had no concrete program to ensure enactment. Indeed, the internationalists were able to persuade the majority to overcome the 1903 split with the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party and re-join that party in 1906.

The Caucasian Social-Democrats, or at least the dominant Menshevik section, had adopted the 'cultural-national autonomy' position already outlined

Algemeynem Yidishn Arbeter-Bund ('Bund') in Poyln, 1943 [1923]); Vladimir Medem, "Di sotsial-demokratie un di natsionale frage," in *Vladimir Medem: Tsum tsvantsikstn yortsayt* (New York: Der Amerikaner Repräsentants fun Algemeynem Yidishn Arbeter-Bund ('Bund') in Poyln, 1943 [1904]).

13 Frankel, 220.

14 Ibid., 195, 247.

in detail by Renner and Bauer, which then became part of the lively debates in the Bund. So little theoretical elaboration is to be found, except for one point. The Caucasian movement developed perhaps the most extreme culturist position. In light of the complex history of the Caucasus and the dispersal of peoples,¹⁵ especially the Armenians, they argued for the predominance of cultural factors over history and economics. Such factors were signalled by a common language and religion. Georgians may be united wherever they might be by language and culture, while for the Armenians identification with the church was paramount for national-cultural identity.¹⁶

In response, Stalin's definition is more comprehensive, seeking to restore categories that had been excised by the Austrians, the more nationally minded among the Bund and the Caucasians. He writes: 'A nation is 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'.¹⁷ Of these items, only history and 'psychological make-up', or better, 'psychological storehouse', featured in the position of Bauer and the Bund. Indeed, they ultimately favoured the final category in what may be called a revised culturist position.¹⁸ Given its importance for the debates, let me begin by focusing on 'national culture'. Van Ree argues that its inclusion marks a distinct shift from Stalin's earlier criticisms of the very idea of a 'national spirit' (*natsional'nyi dukh*),¹⁹ so much so that Stalin ends up with an 'organicist' position.²⁰ It is indeed a shift, with Stalin coming closer to Bauer in the conjunction of the apparent intangibility of such a culture and its temporal contingency: the 'peculiarities of national culture' change both over time

15 See especially Suny's excellent overview of the complexity of the Caucasian situation. Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 38–43, 58–64, 72–76. For a focus on political and military matters, see also Alex Marshall, *The Caucasus Under Soviet Rule* (London: Routledge, 2010), 10–50.

16 Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question," 361–62; Stalin, "Marksizm i natsional'nyi vopros," 348.

17 Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question," 307; Stalin, "Marksizm i natsional'nyi vopros," 296.

18 Bauer had already sought to refute most of the items listed in Stalin's definition: Bauer, 113–16. For Stalin's response, see Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question," 308–13; Stalin, "Marksizm i natsional'nyi vopros," 297–303.

19 Stalin, "The Social-Democratic View on the National Question," 52; Stalin, "Kak ponimaet sotsial-demokratiia natsional'nyi vopros?" 53.

20 Van Ree, "Stalin and the National Question," 218, 222–23; *Political Thought*, 62.

and due to the specific conditions of existence.²¹ Yet, van Ree is mistaken in assuming that 'national culture' becomes the core of Stalin's position, for the following reasons. First, it is one of a number of items required for defining a nation. Thus, the Austro-Marxist and Bundist focus on 'national character' at the expense of all but history is inadequate for defining a nation. Second, Stalin places the item last on his list, thereby indicating its relative unimportance. In this respect he continues in the anti-culturist direction of his earlier work.²² Third, Stalin makes it clear that he understands the idea of 'national culture' differently from Bauer and the Bund. His choice of terminology is significant, describing this culture as 'psychological storehouse' (*psikhicheskogo sklada*) in the summary definition (quoted above) and elsewhere as a 'specific spiritual complexion' (*osobennosti dukhovnogo oblika*), which indicates the religio-cultural dimensions of this category. But his use of this phrase is in this case a two-edged sword: on the one hand, spiritual or indeed religious factors are important; on the other, they cannot be isolated as the key. In both respects, he sought a way to counter the arguments of the Austrians and the Bund.

Stalin knew full well that such a focus would be met by efforts of the Austrians and the Bund to distance themselves from religious considerations. Bauer, for one, had attacked an approach to the nation in terms of what he called 'national spiritualism': the attribution of distinct national characteristics to 'a mysterious "spirit of the people" [*Volksggeist*] or "soul of the people" [*Volkseele*].²³ Such an approach sees 'national character' as a transcendent and eternal reality, as a 'metaphysical presence' if not a 'ghost'.²⁴ Bauer's response to this 'mystical' approach was to locate 'national character' in historical terms. Yet Stalin's criticism is that Bauer was still too close to such a mystical and indeed spiritualist approach, precisely because of his adherence to 'national character', no matter how historicised. Such a nation, determined by a 'national spirit', is an 'invisible, self-contained force', something 'intangible and supernatural'.²⁵ This is precisely what happens when one isolates 'national

21 Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question," 306–7; Stalin, "Marksizm i natsional'nyi vopros," 296.

22 These theoretical tensions may be seen as manifestations of a personal struggle with deeply ingrained culturist assumptions. On his ambivalent personal opinions, see (with qualification) Erik Van Ree, "Heroes and Merchants: Stalin's Understanding of National Character," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 8, no. 1 (2007).

23 Bauer, 23.

24 *Ibid.*, 24.

25 Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question," 311–12; Stalin, "Marksizm i natsional'nyi vopros," 301. Earlier he had spoken of the 'fog' and 'mystery' that envelops ideas on the

culture' as the determining feature of the nation. Instead, argues Stalin, it finds its proper place only with the other features.

A similar criticism applies to the Bund. They were keen to argue that their sense of 'national culture' was not explicitly religious.²⁶ As non-believers, they distinguished between Jewish religion and 'Jewish culture', seeking to foster the latter among the workers of the Bund, so much so that the Jewish community might become secular. Yet the distinction is somewhat artificial, for the line between culture and religion – as Stalin is quick to point out – is difficult to define and highly porous. Stalin's criticisms are directed at the more nationally minded among the Bund, who had been able to steer through the resolutions at the fourth and sixth congresses and then increasingly assert its position in the seventh through to ninth congresses. His response may be seen as an attack on such a group and an implicit appeal to the internationalists.²⁷ So he argues that the Jews may have a national character or a spiritual complexion; they may have taken a stand for Yiddish (the language of Jewish workers) as a recognised language; they may have argued for education and the promotion of Jewish national culture and arts; and they may even have proposed recognition of the Sabbath as a rest day and Jewish hospitals;²⁸ but Stalin argues both that this risks preserving what is reactionary and objectionable and that it is still insufficient for the status of 'nation', for they have no common territory, language or economic structure.²⁹ 'If there is anything common to them left', he writes, 'it is their religion, their common origin and certain relics of the national character'. But this is hardly enough: 'petrified religious rites and fading psychological relics'³⁰ fostered by pockets of the 'clerical-reactionary Jewish community'³¹ have little hope in resisting the

national question. Stalin, "The Social-Democratic View on the National Question," 41; Stalin, "Kak ponimaet sotsial-demokratiia natsional'nyi vopros?" 42.

26 Indeed, a worker joining a socialist party such as the Bund found that it entailed a rupture with religious commitment and practice. See Frankel, 179; Semën Ivanovich Kanatchikov, *A Radical Worker in Tsarist Russia: The Autobiography of Semën Ivanovich Kanatchikov*, trans., Reginald E. Zelnik (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986 [1932]), 27–36, 147–48, 172–73.

27 See Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question," 355; Stalin, "Marksizm i natsional'nyi vopros," 343.

28 *Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question," 302, 352–53; Stalin, "Marksizm i natsional'nyi vopros," 292, 340–41. See also Frankel, 202.

29 Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question," 352, 354; Stalin, "Marksizm i natsional'nyi vopros," 340, 342.

30 Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question," 310; Stalin, "Marksizm i natsional'nyi vopros," 300.

31 Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question," 374–75; Stalin, "Marksizm i natsional'nyi vopros," 361.

social, economic and cultural forces of the nations amongst whom they live. By itself, this is simply not enough.

How do the other items in Stalin's definition fare, which he sought to enlist against what he saw as a culturist position? On closer analysis, his argument contains not a few problems. In respect to stable community, Stalin stresses the need for long historical development, concomitant with a distinct territory and language. This emphasis on a lengthy history will soon clash with his argument concerning the development of nations only under capitalism.³² With the question of territory the ever present religio-cultural dimension of the topic is once again at the forefront. Here, one of the arguments of the Austrian Marxists, the Bund and the Caucasian Social-Democrats is his target, for they argued – as we saw above – that an ethnic group should be regarded as a nation no matter how dispersed it might be. For Bauer, a nation is 'a community of individuals without ensuring it exclusive control within a particular region'.³³ The Bund and the Caucasians agreed. Obviously, the situation of the dispersed multi-ethnicity of Austria, the reality of the Jewish Diaspora and the spread of Armenians – without a territory from which they had been dispersed – provided the reality to which they sought to respond.

Against this argument of the Bund, Stalin makes two points. First, he agrees with the Austrian social-democrats that the Jews do not have a common territory, which has forced them to take a 'cultural-national autonomy' position. Second, they have little connection with the soil, which would provide a stable basis to unite them as a nation, enabling a framework for social and economic life.³⁴ Instead, Jews – like the five to six million Russian Jews – tend to engage in trade, industry and 'liberal' professions, being largely town dwellers who adapt themselves to the prevailing social, economic and linguistic conditions. This suggestion is clearly Eurasian-centric, assuming that the specific conditions under which socio-economic life operates in Eurasia is universal – tilling the soil and thereby claiming territory as one's 'own' on that basis. This assumption had already played havoc with peoples subjugated by European colonialism, where the colonisers assumed that anyone who did not till the

32 It also returns in a rather different context more than three decades later in his essay on linguistics. I. V. Stalin, "Marxism and the Problems of Linguistics," in *Works*, 16 (London: Red Star Press, 1950 [1986]); I. V. Stalin, "Marksizm i voprosy iazykoznaniiia," in *Sochineniia*, 16 (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "Pisatel", 1950 [1997]).

33 Bauer, 222. Similarly, Renner speaks of a 'community of individuals' without any connection to 'a particular territory'. Karl Renner, "State and Nation," in *National Cultural Autonomy and its Contemporary Critics*, ed. Ephraim Nimri (London: Routledge, 2005 [1899]), 21.

34 Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question," 345–46; Stalin, "Marksizm i natsional'nyi vopros," 333–35.

soil had no claim to the land being appropriated – the doctrine of ‘terra nullius’ in the colonisation of Australia is perhaps the most telling example.³⁵ At this point in his argument, Stalin risks assuming a common position at the time (shared, for example, with Bauer whom he quotes): the situation he describes can lead to nothing less than the assimilation of the Jews. Indeed, he goes so far as to observe that the future of the Jews as a distinct people is uncertain and that its existence is still to be proved.³⁶ Later, he will realise that the Jews do exist as a nation with a distinct future, but for that we will need to wait a little.

Language is the final item that is supposed to show the age-old character of a nation.³⁷ Here Stalin encounters the most significant difficulty thus far. As for the Bund, he is in two minds: at times, he criticises the Bund’s position that Yiddish should be the clearly recognised language of Jews workers;³⁸ at others, he questions whether they have a single language at all, for they inhabit ‘different territories, speak different languages’.³⁹ This inability to decide on the singularity or multiplicity of language among the Jews is but a microcosm of the problems with his position on the connections between language and nation. His problems begin with a curious distinction that he soon undermines: a nation cannot be the same as a state. Why? A nation has a common language, while a state has multiple languages. Thus, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States are nations, for they have a common language, but Austria or Russia (or, I would add, Canada or Switzerland or Belgium or many other multilingual states) are designated ‘state communities’. To be sure, the latter are stable communities, but not ‘national communities’. But what does he mean by multiplicity of languages? ‘We are referring, of course, to the

35 The connection between tilling and private property in land was also crucial for the development of the early myths of capitalism, especially in the work of Hugo Grotius and John Locke. See further, Roland Boer and Christina Petterson, *Idols of Nations: Biblical Myth at the Origins of Capitalism* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014).

36 Stalin, “Marxism and the National Question,” 345–46, 352; Stalin, “Marksizm i natsional’nyi vopros,” 334, 340. He acknowledges that this was a common position at the time: Stalin, “Marxism and the National Question,” 344–45; Stalin, “Marksizm i natsional’nyi vopros,” 333.

37 Michael Smith suggest that language is the key to Stalin’s definition (like Kautsky), but misses its role in relation to the other items. Michael Smith, *Language and Power in the Creation of the USSR, 1917–1953* (Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 1998), 3–4.

38 Stalin, “Marxism and the National Question,” 352–53; Stalin, “Marksizm i natsional’nyi vopros,” 340–41.

39 Stalin, “Marxism and the National Question,” 307, 309–10, 312; Stalin, “Marksizm i natsional’nyi vopros,” 297, 299, 301.

spoken languages of the people and not to the official governmental languages'.⁴⁰ He has Russia in mind, with its official Russian of the tsarist autocracy and the multitude of languages spoken in its many regions. The problem is that the same applies to his examples of 'nations' with one common language: in Germany too, as in the United Kingdom and United States and indeed Australia, many languages were and are spoken on a daily basis. It seems as though 'nations' are few and far between, while 'state communities' are the norm. It may well be argued that 'nations' according to Stalin's definition barely exist at all, for it is difficult indeed to find a people where only one language is spoken.

Stalin's difficulties are not at an end, for a deeper tension runs through his argument, between a longer history that focuses on historically constituted stable communities (discussed above) and an account that attributes the rise of nations to the more recent spread of capitalism.⁴¹ Indeed, the category 'economic life' in his definition signals the second narrative. Initially, he suggests that a common territory is the basis for identifiable and stable economic life. Yet, 'economic life' gains a whole new sense in the second narrative concerning the growth of nations: now capitalism looms large, challenging the idea of a historically constituted stable community.⁴² Instead of a community that has arisen over a long and slow process, the rise and spread of capitalism becomes the trigger for nationalism, if not 'nations' themselves: 'The process of elimination of feudalism and development of capitalism is at the same time a process

40 Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question," 304; Stalin, "Marksizm i natsional'nyĭ vopros," 293.

41 Martin sees the tension, but mistakenly identifies the second as the core of Stalin's position in the article and the first as typical of turn in the mid-1930s to 'Great-Russian' nationalism. Terry Martin, "Modernization or Neo-Traditionalism? Ascribed Nationality and Soviet Primordialism," in *Stalinism: New Directions*, ed. Sheila Fitzpatrick (London: Routledge, 2000), 348–49.

42 The historical production (or construction) of nations and nationalism is common to all of the positions in the debate (with modification), foreshadowing the later proposals of Deutsch, Gellner, Anderson and Suny. As Brudny puts it, a nation is a 'modern political form of group solidarity based on jointly held beliefs that the group's origins, territory, language, history, culture, and political or religious creed make it distinct from any other social group. These beliefs are not immutable. They change over time and often are subject to manipulation'. Yitzhak Brudny, *Reinventing Russia: Russian Nationalism and the Soviet State 1953–1991* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 5. See also Karl W. Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communication*, 2d ed. (Cambridge: MIT 1966); Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983); Anderson, *Imagined Communities*; Suny, 1–19.

of the constitution of people into nations'.⁴³ This narrative is at least dialectically nuanced, for capitalism has both centripetal and centrifugal tendencies. Thus, the divisions generated under capitalism – in terms of labour and then classes – actually serve to knit people together within an economic system. Yet, in its 'higher stages' capitalism actually disperses people, through the exacerbation of class struggle, the shifting needs of labour and imperialist colonialism.⁴⁴ Further, this focus on capitalism also undermines his earlier narrative in terms of the distinction between nations and states. There, Stalin argued problematically that a nation has one common language, while a 'state community' has multiple languages. But now he argues that 'national states' are indeed possible, especially in Western Europe where capitalism established itself earlier.⁴⁵

Thus far, Stalin has not really proposed a convincing definition of 'nation'. He may have sought to challenge the culturist definitions – with their amorphous 'national culture' – of the Austrians and the Bund, but his own proposal has too many problems to be viable. On each of the points in relation to 'stable community' he is in trouble: history, territory and language. Only when comes to economic conditions, with the contrasting focus on nations in relation to the development of capitalism, does he begin to gain some traction.

Class and/or Nation

Stalin is on a better footing when he moves from the question of definition to the question of class and nation. On this matter, the extended and often polemical debate over the national question was not undertaken merely for the sake of theory, for it had an urgent practical dimension. All of the participants sought a socialist solution to the same problem: how to provide space and protection for the many nationalities living in the same state. However, their disagreements turned on two contrasts. The first was class and nation: does one begin with 'national culture' as the basis of the national question, or

43 Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question," 313; Stalin, "Marksizm i natsional'nyi vopros," 303.

44 Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question," 339; Stalin, "Marksizm i natsional'nyi vopros," 327. See also I. V. Stalin, "National Factors in Party and State Affairs: Thesis for the Twelfth Congress of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks), Approved by the Central Committee of the Party," in *Works*, 5 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1923 [1953]), 184–86.

45 Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question," 314; Stalin, "Marksizm i natsional'nyi vopros," 303–4.

is class coterminous with nation, as some of the Caucasian socialists argued, or is class the determining factor? If one begins with the first position, as the Austrians, Bund and some of the Caucasians did, then one develops culturist federalism, seeking to develop a federated state that accounts for such differences. If one melds the categories of class and nationalism, as others in the Caucasus did, then national struggles are also class struggles. By contrast, for Stalin the core category is class, from which one then deals with the issue of national culture. The second and related issue concerned diversity and unity: if one begins with 'national cultural diversity' or even with the melding of class and nation, then one struggles to find unity within a federated state; but if one begins with class, then unity follows. However, this emphasis on unity through class produces a somewhat unexpected dialectical outcome. Unity through class resulted not in assimilation under a uniform culture, but in a diversity that fostered national differences. In this light, Stalin sought both explicit recognition of territorial claims of nationalities and stiff protections for minorities without territory.

In unpacking this brief statement of the main issues, I begin with the position of the Bund, especially Vladimir Medem's argument for federation. The key here is that the starting point is diversity, with individual national groups, and attempts to locate them within a 'state of nationalities', in which minorities would be protected through limited jurisdiction over cultural matters.⁴⁶ Like the Austro-Marxists, he used the terminology of 'national-cultural autonomy' but understood it in terms of governing bodies with jurisdiction over cultural matters – and thereby not political, economic or territorial autonomy. So also, the Bund argued for federation, for both the party structure, in which the Bund represented Jewish workers, and in the proposals for a federalist state. Thus, the resolutions at the fourth congress (1901) stated that in Russia, with its 'many different nationalities', a socialist state 'must in the future develop into a federation of nationalities in which every nationality enjoys full national autonomy, regardless of the territory which it occupies'.⁴⁷ And the sixth congress (1905) explicitly used the term 'national-cultural autonomy', understood in terms of 'governmental-juridical institutions which would permit each nation its free cultural development'. The focus was clearly culturist, in which 'cultural questions', such as public education, should be removed from the state and be 'transferred to the nation'.⁴⁸ The underlying assumption was that

46 He saw his proposal as avoiding the 'bourgeois' extremes of nationalism (ending up with Zionism) and assimilation (which he saw as the policy of the Russian social-democrats).

47 Frankel, 220.

48 Ibid., 241.

true working class internationalism should seek ways to reconcile the aspirations of the various nationalities.

As for Otto Bauer, not only was religion a constant point of reference in his effort to trace the development of distinct 'national cultures',⁴⁹ but he also uses a religious analogy, borrowed from Karl Renner, in his proposal for a multinational state: in the same way that religious groups may live within a city or a state, so also may national groups do so in a state, having their own institutions and organisations but without claiming territorial sovereignty.⁵⁰ Both Bauer and Renner agreed that ethnic communities should exist as autonomous units without claiming territory in multi-national states. However, both argued that affiliation to religious groups is no longer as strong as the hold of the national cultural communities, so the latter require widespread democratisation and autonomous self-administration as the guarantee of their distinctness.

Stalin's attack on this culturist federalism uses a number of arguments, such as the danger of applying a position developed in Austria (or even the United States) to the very different situation in Russia, or the point that the Bund's position would work very well within a bourgeois democracy such as France or Switzerland, or indeed that it is a subtle form of nationalism.⁵¹ However, the key to Stalin's argument concerns class as the basis for dealing with the national question,⁵² an emphasis that leads him to argue for the priority of unity over diversity. Whence comes this connection between class and unity? Theoretically it comes from Marxist analysis, in which class is the core category that unites workers across varying nationalities. Practically it derives from his direct experiences in the Caucasus where the Bolsheviks were a distinct minority in comparison with the Mensheviks. As Suny deftly shows, the complex political and national history of the Caucasus had produced a situation where national aspirations were often seen as one with class. He writes of a 'unique ethnoclass structure',⁵³ in which Georgians were largely a peasant people with a nobility both hankering after the glories of the Georgian past and now integrated with the tsarist Russian administration, the dispersed Armenians formed the bulk of the new bourgeoisie in control of commerce and Baku oil, and the

49 Bauer, 65–69, 167–74.

50 Renner, 17–18, 25, 30; Bauer, 281–89.

51 Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question," 325–31, 347–50; Stalin, "Marksizm i natsional'nyĭ vopros," 314–20, 335–39.

52 Characteristically for one not attentive to Marxist categories, Martin misses the core issue of class in the opposition to federalism. Martin, "An Affirmative Action Empire: The Soviet Union as the Highest Form of Imperialism," 75.

53 Suny, *Revenge of the Past*, 38–43, 58–64, 72–76.

Azerbaijani (and immigrant Persian) Muslims made up the lower workers, with less wages and skills, in the oil fields. The results were distinct forms of class and nationalist formations: the Georgian nobles came to espouse a 'feudal-monarchist' nationalism tied in closely with their Orthodox faith; the dispersed Armenians pursued a 'bourgeois' non-territorial nationalism in competition with the large Russian and European bourgeoisies; the younger and more radical Georgian intelligentsia, among whom Stalin found himself, managed to develop a mass political movement that welded together Georgian peasants and both Georgian and not a few Azerbaijani workers. For them, the enemies were the tsarist autocracy (and therefore Georgian nobles) and the bourgeoisie (largely Armenian). In this way, class and nation were interwoven, although the problem for Stalin was that such an interweaving led to disunity rather than unity.

In this light, we can understand Stalin's criticisms, in the early 'The Social-Democratic View on the National Question', of 'feudal-monarchist nationalism' with a 'clerical form' and bourgeois nationalism.⁵⁴ As for the former, he uses the example of the old Georgian nobles, who, aided by significant parts of the church, sought independence from Russia (after Georgia came under Russian control in 1801). For Stalin, their agenda was obvious: they sought to dominate their subjects unmolested by powerful neighbours. By contrast, the bourgeois nationalists, in a situation of rising nationalist movements engendered by the spread of capitalism, sought to harness such movements for the sake of maximising profits. The forms of such nationalism may differ, emphasising variously agrarian issues, language, civil equality, religious freedom or self-government. But underlying such forms is the same struggle: the bourgeoisie of the oppressed 'nation' struggles with the bourgeoisie of the dominant (in this case Russian) state. In reply, the dominant nation bourgeoisie represses the local bourgeoisie in both economic and political forms – restriction of movement, franchise, language, education and religion. In their turn, the relatively weak local bourgeoisie actively courts proletarians and peasants. They claim that their own nationalism is actually in the interests of all, rallying common people around the banners of 'fatherland', 'national pride' and the 'native folk'. All need to band together in a common front for the greater good – national independence.⁵⁵

54 Stalin, "The Social-Democratic View on the National Question;" Stalin, "Kak ponimaet sotsial-demokratiia natsional'nyi vopros?"

55 However, in 'Abolition of National Disabilities' ("Ob otmene natsional'nykh ogranichenii"), he argues for a limited value in the bourgeois drive to emancipation and equal rights – including religion – for minorities. It is, of course, inadequate and needs to be completed with a socialist revolution.

In reply, Stalin initially undertakes some conventional Marxist ground-clearing, arguing that the national question from the perspective of the proletariat requires the demolition of the barriers between workers of different nationalities. His next step is far more interesting. He could have argued that the proletariat and peasants offer the only true leadership of the nationalist movement – assuming a position where class and nation are coterminous. Or rather, he does argue such a position, but not in the way that might have been expected. In light of the Caucasian situation, the expectation would have been that true national independence can be achieved through none other than the socialist movement. Instead, Stalin takes a different line, for such a focus would lead to disunity rather than unity. Yes, the proletariat should lead the nationalist movement, but in a way that redefines how such nationalism should be understood. That is, only through a focus on class as an international category can national aspirations be reconfigured. Already in this article we find the initial contours of the argument that class unity fosters national diversity. These contours appear in his defence of some of the positions of the Russian Social-Democratic platform: civil equality, freedom of language and self-government.⁵⁶ He may argue explicitly that a Marxist focus on class offers a far better response to the national question, but implicit here is the dialectical point that class unity fosters national diversity.

The implicitness of that point appears in his attack on federalism, which already appears in this early piece. Here his opponents are the Armenian Social-Democrats, who had a distinct interest in a federalist national-cultural approach due to the dispersed nature of Armenians in the Caucasus. Since the more sustained criticism of federalism appears in ‘Marxism and the National Question’, I focus on this criticism here. However, a close examination of Stalin’s argument reveals an intriguing twist: he may have begun by sharply opposing the position of the Austrians, some Caucasian Social-Democrats and especially the Bund, but he then draws nearer to them in some respects, nearer than he might have anticipated.⁵⁷ Initially, Stalin argues for a stark difference

56 Stalin, “The Social-Democratic View on the National Question,” 42–46; Stalin, “Kak ponimaet sotsial-demokratiia natsional’nyi vopros?” 43–47. See Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, “The Programme of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party,” in *Marxism in Russia: Key Documents 1879–1906*, ed. Neil Harding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903 [1983]), 288–93.

57 The following is a careful exegesis, seeking to draw out the philosophical implications, of the final pages of Stalin, “Marxism and the National Question,” 374–81; Stalin, “Marksizm i natsional’nyi vopros,” 360–67. See also I. V. Stalin, “The Seventh (April) Conference of the R. S. D. L. P. (Bolsheviks), April 24–29, 1917,” in *Works*, 3 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1917 [1953]), 56–57; I. V. Stalin, “Vystupleniia na VII (aprel’skoi) konferentsii

between the Bolshevik position and that his opponents. The latter sought, as we have seen, a primary recognition of cultural-national difference in both party structures and the future socialist state. Thus, the starting point was multiplicity, which would then form a federation. For Stalin, they began at the wrong point, with cultural-national autonomy rather than international class solidarity. A federalist approach 'substitutes for the socialist principle of the *class struggle* the bourgeois "*principle of nationality*."⁵⁸ Typically, Stalin seeks to sharpen the opposition in terms of a clear either-or: the first principle is either the unity of class or the multiplicity of autonomy. One's starting point determines a very different path, leading to distinct outcomes. Thus, the Bund's approach leads to separatism, while the Bolshevik approach produces unity. The Bund may have sought unity through federalism, but since it began with multiplicity, its search for unity would always be of a superficial form, masking a persistent multiplicity that would eventually lead to separatism.⁵⁹ For Stalin, this was analogous to bourgeois movements of national autonomy, albeit 'skillfully masked by socialist phrases'.⁶⁰

However, if we consider this argument more closely, the difference is not so sharp. Stalin argues that the path followed by the Bund begins with autonomy, moves to federalism, which can lead only to separatism and splits among the workers rather than union. By contrast, Stalin proposes class unity first, which may then lead to a different type of autonomy and a federalism that avoids separatism. In short, we may formulate their disagreement as autonomy-federalism-separatism versus class-autonomy-federalism-unity. When put in this way, the difference is less one of stark opposition and more of degree, or correction. Thus, the Bund's approach is incomplete without class as the primary, unifying category. To be sure, for Stalin the reinsertion of class, thereby correcting the Bund's argument, has significant consequences. As the first step on the path, class has a unifying function which affects the remainder of the sequence. Thus, when we move through autonomy and federalism, we arrive not at separatism, but at unity. But this is clearly a correction of the Bund's

RSDRP (bol'shevikov), 24–29 aprilia 1917 g," in *Sochineniia*, 3 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1917 [1946]), 53–54.

58 Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question," 342; Stalin, "Marksizm i natsional'nyi vopros," 330–31. Note pp. 379/365–66.

59 Elsewhere, Stalin uses the analogy of the anatomist, who must have knowledge of the whole body in order to understand its parts. Stalin, "The Social-Democratic View on the National Question," 46–47; Stalin, "Kak ponimaet sotsial-demokratiia natsional'nyi vopros?" 47–48.

60 Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question," 342; Stalin, "Marksizm i natsional'nyi vopros," 331.

argument, via the reinsertion of class, rather than two utterly different arguments.

This partial rapprochement with the Bund at a theoretical level sets the scene for the argument of a piece from four years later (1917) called 'Against Federalism'.⁶¹ The initial impression of this article is that Stalin blatantly contradicts himself. He still attacks federalism, but he does so from a very different and historical perspective. Federalism, he argues, may be appropriate in parts of the world that sought unity from multiplicity. The United States, Switzerland and Canada are his examples, where distinct colonies or states entered into federal relations.⁶² However, federalism is but a transitional stage, applicable in some situations, as a mechanism for unity.⁶³ The contrast with his earlier argument against the Bund should already be clear, for now he recognises that unity may result from federalism. Aware that he may have endorsed the Bund's position in this article from 1917, he now uses a very different argument against federalism: in the Russian situation, such an approach is useless. The reason is that Russia is already a unity (even if it is an imperial unity), so one cannot deploy a federalist approach unless one breaks Russia into multiple states and then begins a process of passing to federalism on the way to unity. In making this historical argument, he tries to hold onto a primary unity, but it is reduced to a historical argument relating to Russian conditions. Yet, even this effort fades away in a fascinating endnote to the article, written after the October Revolution. In this endnote, Stalin acknowledges that changing conditions after the revolution have led the Bolsheviks to adopt a federalist approach.⁶⁴ The reason given is that Russia had actually disintegrated and fragmented during the period of the revolution and the 'civil' war, so much so that it had become a country of multiple states, which had seceded and become isolated from one another. In these conditions, federalism was needed to generate unity.⁶⁵ Once again, class

61 Stalin, "Against Federalism.;" Stalin, "Protiv federalizma."

62 See also I. V. Stalin, "Organisation of a Russian Federal Republic: Pravda Interview," in *Works*, 4 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1918 [1953]), 68–70; I. V. Stalin, "Organizatsiia Rossiiskoi Federativnoi Respubliki: Beseda s sotrudnikom gazety "Pravda"," in *Sochineniia*, 4 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1918 [1947]), 66–68.

63 See also Stalin, "Organisation of a Russian Federal Republic: Pravda Interview," 74–75; Stalin, "Organizatsiia Rossiiskoi Federativnoi Respubliki: Beseda s sotrudnikom gazety "Pravda"," 72–73.

64 A temporary federalist approach was adopted by the Central Committee in 1918 and at the eighth congress of 1919. Stalin, "Against Federalism," 32; Stalin, "Protiv federalizma," 30.

65 One of the achievements of the Bolsheviks was to re-establish a strong state, albeit quite different from the tsarist autocracy, and thereby prevent Russia from becoming a

is crucial, for federalism is designed to bring together the various national working class groups, who found themselves isolated and out of contact with one another.

Has Stalin backtracked completely, adopting a federalist approach that was similar to that of the Bund, the Austrian Marxists and the Armenian Social-Democrats? Initially, this may seem to be the case, especially with his argument in 'Against Federalism'. However, we need to see this argument within his overall position. First, the overriding emphasis remains on unity. Initially, his insertion of class as the primary category sought a final unity from autonomy and federalism. Later, in the context of a fragmented Russia after the October Revolution, the adoption of a temporary federalism was predicated on the desire for class unity. One may argue that the Bund, Austrians and Armenians also sought some form of unity in a federated state, but now the second reason comes into play: Stalin resolutely insisted on class as the primary category rather than 'national-cultural autonomy'. Any form of federation should be understood from this perspective, and it is the strongest argument against the culturist position. Third, one may wonder what has happened to diversity, especially the national-cultural diversity so dear to the Bund and the Austrians. Has it been thoroughly assimilated under the unitary category of class? Now we come Stalin's unwitting dialectical discovery, already implicit in his earliest reflections: a totalising unity produces hitherto unexpected levels of diversity.⁶⁶ Let me give a couple of examples: the plethora of languages produced by the new Soviet state after the revolution and what has been called the 'affirmative action' program of that state.

On the matter of language, Stalin observed in 1925: 'Until now what has happened has been that the socialist revolution has not diminished but rather increased the number of languages; for, by stirring up the lowest sections of

collapsed state. Domenico Losurdo, *Stalin: Storia e critica di una leggenda nera*, trans., Marie-Ange Patrizio (Rome: Carocci editore, 2008).

66 Many simply miss the dialectical nature of this position. George C. Guins, *Soviet Law and Soviet Society* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1954), 213–25; Richard Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union: Communism and Nationalism, 1917–1923*; Benjamin Pinkus, *The Jews of the Soviet Union: a History of a National Minority* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 50–51; Martin, "Modernization or Neo-Traditionalism? Ascribed Nationality and Soviet Primordialism;" Martin, "An Affirmative Action Empire: The Soviet Union as the Highest Form of Imperialism;" Van Ree, *Political Thought*, 64, 77–78; Theodore R. Weeks, "Stalinism and Nationality," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 6, no. 3 (2005): 567–68. A notable exception, albeit focused on practical policy issues rather than Stalin's thought, is Teresa Rakowska-Harmstone, "The Dialectics of Nationalism in the USSR," *Problems of Communism* 23, no. 3 (1974).

humanity and pushing them on to the political arena, it awakens to new life a number of hitherto unknown or little-known nationalities'. Indeed, the October Revolution has brought 'a number of forgotten peoples and nationalities on to the scene' and given them 'new life and a new development'.⁶⁷ Stalin is not being fanciful here, for the massive project of 'language construction' (*iazykovoie stroitel'stvo*, interchangeably used with 'language policy', *iazykovaia politika*), which may be understood as the deliberate intervention by society into the process of language development, did indeed lead to new languages where none existed before,⁶⁸ so much so that the new Russian state had no compulsory official language.⁶⁹

The second example is really the framework for the previous discussion of the languages policy, namely, the nature of the 'affirmative action' program of the Soviet Union.⁷⁰ This was quite explicitly a program in which territories of identifiable nationalities were established, with their own languages and forms of education, the fostering of literature and cultural expression, and local forms of governance. As for dispersed minorities, even within such regions, they were provided with a stiff framework of protections, including strong penalties for any form of racial denigration and abuse. Already in 1913 he had prefigured such an approach, specifying among others 'the Jews in Poland, the Letts in Lithuania, the Russians in the Caucasus, the Poles in the Ukraine, and so on'.⁷¹ They too – in a program of indigenization

67 I. V. Stalin, "The Political Tasks of the University of the Peoples of the East: Speech Delivered at a Meeting of Students of the Communist University of the Toilers of the East, May 18, 1925," in *Works*, 7 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1925 [1954]), 141; I. V. Stalin, "O politicheskikh zadachakh universiteta narodov Vostoka Rech' na sobranii studentov KUTV 18 maia 1925 g," in *Sochineniia*, 7 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1925 [1952]), 139.

68 Michael Smith, *Language and Power*, 4; Vladislava Reznik, "Soviet Language Reform: Practical Polemics Against Idealist Linguistics," *Slovo* 15, no. 1 (2003): 34; Yuri Slezkine, "The Soviet Union as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism," in *Stalinism: New Directions*, ed. Sheila Fitzpatrick (London: Routledge, 2000), 323–24; Martin, "An Affirmative Action Empire: The Soviet Union as the Highest Form of Imperialism," 67.

69 Stalin, "Organisation of a Russian Federal Republic: Pravda Interview," 72; Stalin, "Organizatsiia Rossiiskoi Federativnoi Respubliki: Beseda s sotrudnikom gazety "Pravda"," 70.

70 Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939*; Martin, "An Affirmative Action Empire: The Soviet Union as the Highest Form of Imperialism."

71 Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question," 375–76; Stalin, "Marksizm i natsional'nyi vopros," 362.

(*korenizatsiia*)⁷² – should be able to use their own languages, operate their own schools, law-courts and soviets, and have freedom of conscience in matters relating to religion. Indeed, by the mid-1930s the Jews too were identified as a ‘nation’ with territory, having a ‘Soviet Zion, the Jewish Autonomous Oblast in Birobidzhan, on the border of Heilongjiang Province of China.’⁷³ Across the Soviet Union, such programs cost millions and billions of roubles, leading to the wholesale creation and recreation of cultures (as well as leading to a whole new range of problems not experienced thus far).⁷⁴ However, such a program could never have happened without a strong central state.⁷⁵

Conclusion

The somewhat surprising conclusion is that Stalin’s theoretical position, in contrast to those of the Bund, Austrian and Caucasian Marxists, is – despite its initial problems – the stronger. The Bundist (and Caucasian) proposal was the weakest, for it offered a limited program focused on guarantees for cultural differences, while Bauer and Renner sought a little more in terms of control over institutions for the protection of minorities. But the strength of Stalin’s position

72 *Korenizatsiia*, a term coined by the Bolsheviks, is ‘derived directly not from the stem *koren-* (“root”—with the meaning “rooting”) but from its adjectival form *korennoi* as used in the phrase *korennoi narod* (indigenous people): The term was coined by the government, although Stalin consistently used *natsionalizatsiia*. Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*, 11–12; “Affirmative Action Empire,” 74.

73 I. V. Stalin, “Constitution (Fundamental Law) of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, With amendments adopted by the First, Second, Third, Sixth, Seventh and Eighth Sessions of the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R., Kremlin, Moscow, December 5, 1936,” in *Works*, 14 (London: Red Star Press, 1936 [1978]), article 22; I. V. Stalin, “Konstitutsiia (osnovnoi zakon) soiuza sovetskikh sotsialisticheskikh respublik (utverzhdena postanovleniem chrezvychainogo VIII s’ezda sovetov soiuza sovetskikh sotsialisticheskikh respublik ot 5 dekabria 1936 g.),” (Moscow: Garant, 1936 [2015]), stat’ia 22. This importance of this move (part of Crimea had also been proposed) is rarely recognised, for it was the first move to Jewish territory on the modern era. A small Jewish community exists today. For some detail, see Pinkus, 71–76.

74 Slezkine, 322–23.

75 For a study of the immense scholarly effort entailed in the new project of defining and determining such ‘nationalities’, see Francine Hirsch, “The Soviet Union as a Work-in-Progress: Ethnographers and the Category Nationality in the 1926, 1937, and 1939 Censuses,” *Slavic Review* 56, no. 2 (1997); *Empire of Nations*. On the need for a strong state, see van Ree, *Political Thought*, 136–54. Suny (*Revenge of the Past*, 97–98) notes this feature, but attributes it to subsequent theorists and not to Stalin.

arises from his emphasis on class and unity in dealing with the national question, leading to the production of regional autonomy and recognition of dispersed minorities. Thus, it was not so much a question of either class or nation, as Stalin himself tended to frame the problem, but of class *and* nation. This was not a compromise by a Marxist internationalist in light of the persistence of nationalism, but a different way of dealing with the national question generated out of a Marxist approach and Stalin's direct experience in the Caucasus. But why surprising? Stalin's initial definition of the nation did not provide much hope of a stronger position, precisely because of its problems. However, in his efforts to tackle the culturist position of the Austrians, Bund and Caucasians, he developed his emphasis on class and unity, thereby leading to a dialectic of which he was perhaps only half aware, a dialectic in which totalising unity produced an even greater diversity of 'national cultures'.

Stalin's unexpected dialectical breakthrough has a number of ramifications, on which I can only touch here. Dealing with nationalities via class became the model for other socialist states in Eastern Europe, most notably with the diverse peoples of Yugoslavia. And it is the basis of Chinese minorities policies today, modified and developed in a different context for fostering the more than fifty minorities. Further, Stalin's theoretical argument challenges the persistence of culturist approaches in our time, in which the amorphous 'culture' becomes a catch-all category for characterising behaviour, beliefs, temperament and indeed clashes (as with post-communist Eastern Europe). The core of that challenge lies not so much in questions of territory or language, but in the issue of economic history and above all in the dynamics of class.

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