



**MAJORITIES AND MINORITIES IN THE  
POST-SOVIET SPACE  
CONTINUITY AND CHANGE**

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# MAJORITIES AND MINORITIES IN POST-SOVIET SPACE. CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

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*The concepts of ‘majority’ and ‘minority’ are challenging terms to define in a clear and precise manner, especially in the unique environments of post-Soviet space. Linking the definitional complexities of ‘majority’ to the post-Soviet and postcolonial condition, this paper examines the majority-minority dynamics through the lenses of the fluidity of groups, the interaction of communities and the power differentials between communities. In doing so, the paper analyses cases from two post-Soviet countries. First, the case of Russia illustrates contentious identification of majority and minority communities, where an alternative vocabulary for definition of ‘minority’ and ‘majority’ emerged along with alternative understanding of related concepts. Second, the case of Tajikistan looks at the interplay of majority-minority concepts and discusses how the Russian community as a former ‘political majority’ adjusts to its new status of non-dominant group, while the Tajik community becomes the single subject of the nation-building policies.*

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## **1. Introduction**

While many have reflected upon the definition of ‘minority’, the concept of ‘majority’ can be less self-evident than one may expect. Specific complexities emerge in the post-Soviet space, as a region that is simultaneously post-Soviet/Communist *and* postcolonial. In this paper we explore the juxtaposition of the concepts of majority and minority, particularly stemming from processes of colonisation (with reference to colonisers and colonised).

After briefly examining the complexities surrounding the definition of ‘majority’, the paper outlines a number of factors that affect

the interaction of the notions of ‘majority’ and ‘minority’, linking them to the post-Soviet/postcolonial condition. Majority-minority and postcolonial dynamics are analysed from the point of view of: the fluidity of groups; the interaction of communities (the ‘fluidity of relations’); and power differentials between communities.

The paper subsequently looks at two case studies from the post-Soviet space. First, it considers the case of Russia, where the identification of majority and minority communities has been particularly contentious, with a blurring of the imaginary



contours around the two groups. Russians are the country's 'majority', although they constitute a numerical minority in some regions of the country. Russia has developed an alternative vocabulary to that of 'majority' and 'minorities', along with alternative understandings of related concepts; some are linked to Soviet legacies, having emerged against a background of Soviet nationalities policies.

Second, the paper analyses the interplay of majority-minority concepts in another post-Soviet state, Tajikistan. The country was chosen as one where colonising measures (and the effects of the Soviet 'institutionalisation' of nationhood<sup>1</sup>) have been particularly impactful, with much of its ethnic identity construction taking place during the Soviet period. Moreover, Tajikistan is a particularly salient case in light of the civil war that took place in the early post-Soviet period, with mass mobilisation along ethnic lines. As in other post-Soviet countries outside Russia, ethnic Russians in Tajikistan represent a numerical minority – but are also a former (*de facto*) 'political majority' as the Soviet Union's dominant group. Tajikistan's historical trajectory as a post-Soviet state adds to the complexity of the evolution of the concepts of 'majority' and 'minority', including though nation-building driven by an authoritarian leadership. In analysing the cases of Russia and Tajikistan, we take into account historical legacies, with considerations on imperial and Soviet periods.

Imagining 'communities' (and their interaction) is, clearly, a simplification: it tends to force our understanding of majorities

and minorities as bounded, and acting as 'entities', rather than as a set of independent individuals more or less associating themselves to the idea of a community. Malakhov and Osipov consider it problematic when social categories employed to 'describe reality' come to be perceived as 'real'.<sup>2</sup> The same authors warn against a widespread tendency towards 'cultural determinism', or the reification of ethnicity by conceptualising groups in essentialist terms. Similarly, Benhabib criticises the fact that 'whether in politics or in policy, in courts or in the media, one assumes that each human group "has" some kind of "culture" and that the boundaries between these groups and the contours of their cultures are specifiable and relatively easy to depict.'<sup>3</sup> She challenges the view that cultures may be reduced to 'clearly delineable wholes', arguing instead for a dynamic model of culture.<sup>4</sup> In light of this anti-essentialist argument, in this paper we refer to 'communities' and 'groups' with caution, while keeping their complexity in mind.<sup>5</sup>

### Defining a 'majority'?

The (so far) insurmountable difficulties in reaching a universally accepted definition of 'minority' are well-known.<sup>6</sup> The lack of a definition clearly has implications both on the right-holders and the duty-bearers, causing the rights of minority communities and the responsibilities of states to remain nebulous.<sup>7</sup> We leave the details of this discussion aside; suffice it to say that tentative definitions of 'minority' have led to particular perceptions of minority



communities (for example, as vulnerable groups<sup>8</sup>).

The most prominent working definition of ‘minority’ is by Francesco Capotorti, former UN Special Rapporteur on the Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities. It described a ‘minority’ as:

A group numerically inferior to the rest of the population of a State, in a *non-dominant* position, whose members - being nationals of the State - possess ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics differing from those of the rest of the population and show, if only implicitly, a sense of solidarity, directed towards preserving their culture, traditions, religion or language. (Capotorti 1979) [italics added]

The same qualifying attributes ‘ethnic’, ‘religious’ and ‘linguistic’ can be found in Article 27 of the 1966 UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which stipulates:

In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion, or to use their own language.

The same adjectives are also included, *inter alia*, in the title of the 1992 UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities. Packer has criticised the use of adjectives in the absence of a definition, noting that ‘emphasis on the adjectives becomes largely irrelevant since they too lose their meaning in the absence of the noun: to say that something is “green” is not very helpful if one has no idea to what it applies.’” These complexities have to be, to some extent, transcended, and decisions made as to whether a community should be recognised as a ‘minority’ by a state, for international law to be applied and language/minority policies formulated.

Conversely, the definition of a majority arguably has few, if any, practical implications: its members are not right-holders or duty-bearers under the international minority rights system. The state as an institution, rather than the ‘majority’, has legal responsibilities towards national minorities. In practice, state structures often comprise influential representatives of the majority community. On the other hand, affirmative action measures, often associated with the international minority rights regime, and processes of societal integration, mean that states can have (or aim to have) high levels of inclusiveness. Nevertheless, the concepts of minority and majority communities lead to specific forms of self-identification, which involve individuals positioning themselves not only within a community, but also in relation (and possibly antagonistically) to other communities within the social sphere.



The concept of ‘majority’ community seems, at first sight, straightforward. It is often the community from which the country takes the name, and, in most cases, the most populous group. Its numerical strength often tends to translate into a dominant position in state institutions, which may result in control on decision-making and resources. There are also some anomalous (and rare) situations, by which a numerical majority is in fact in a subaltern position vis-à-vis the dominant (but less populous) group (e.g. Black South Africans in apartheid South Africa). Some states may have more than one constituent nation (e.g. the cases of Switzerland and Belgium), and more than a language recognised as official at the state level. In some instances, a minority that is numerically smaller than the majority at the state level might have a larger population than the majority in particular regions, where minority representatives are concentrated. International law approaches the condition of ‘national minority’ in relation to a country in its entirety – yet numerical strength at the regional level can create varied interpretations as to the ‘dominant’ group for a particular territorial unit, especially in case of regional autonomy.<sup>10</sup>

## 2. What Types of Communities?

A number of factors are taken into consideration in examining the relational concepts of majority and minorities:

- a) the fluidity of communities;
- b) the interaction of majority and minority communities;
- c) power differentials.

### Fluidity

The concept of ‘minority’ (like that of ‘majority’) can be linked to a social category or to an individual’s identity.<sup>11</sup> In both cases, fluidity is the norm – despite the (above-mentioned) generalised tendency to reify ethnic identity and imagine groups as separate from each other. In reality, the identities of persons belonging to these communities are fluid, while the same persons also belong to other societal groups – linked to age, class, gender, sexual orientation, etc – leading to an overlap of ethnicity-based and other groups. ‘Boundaries’ between groups can be imagined as circles that are partially overlapping and sometimes concentric.

Thus, communities are far from being immutable and bounded: they are fluid and historically contingent. The sense of mutability is stressed in Brubaker’s view that:

[a] national minority is not simply a “group” that is given by the facts of ethnic demography. It is a *dynamic* political stance, or, more precisely, a family of related yet mutually competing stances, not a static ethnodemographic condition. [italics added]<sup>12</sup>

Not only are social categories constructed, but also a person’s perception of oneself as an individual. This social constructivist position highlights the role of social processes in shaping identities that are often perceived by individuals as ‘deeply personal’.<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile, a community can be





experienced differently by its various members.<sup>14</sup>

The debate around the definition of ‘minority’ has focused on the concept of minority as a social category (e.g. Capotorti’s definition), although the individual aspect is also crucial under international law given that self-identification as member of a minority is a voluntary act.<sup>15</sup> In this sense, minorities and majorities are made up of individuals who share a self-image.

### **Interaction and Positionality**

It is not just the group (and its members) that is not static, but also relations between groups. A majority and minorities are in a dialectical relationship to each other. The notion of identity and minority – whether as a social category or as personal identity – necessitates an awareness of the ‘other’, in addition to the ‘self’. Indeed, identity is not only about what one is, but what one is *not*: self-definition occurs by placing oneself in opposition to the ‘other’. This implies ‘a tension between the subjective and the objective’,<sup>16</sup> which often mirrors a dichotomous view of society. Through social narratives, particularly those carried in the media, one becomes aware of how persons of other communities perceive one’s own, and what characteristics are ascribed to the group. Thus, Jackson Preece notes, ‘[s]elf-identification is always in significant measure a response to prevailing identification by others (us versus them)’,<sup>17</sup> which leads to a mutual awareness (‘self-identification’ and ‘other-identification’); she concludes that: ‘[B]oth minority (and

majority) identity is better understood as *intersubjective*, that is at once part shared and part idiosyncratic.’<sup>18</sup> When we take a bidirectional perspective, the majority and minorities appear to have a mutually-constituted relationship (though co-construction), even though narratives created and disseminated by the (members of) the dominant group tend to have greater societal resonance. ‘Self-identification’ and ‘other-identification’ are sometimes expressed through antagonism and hostility.

Boundaries between (majority and minority) communities are often partially blurred by the complex and dynamic processes of interaction over long periods of time. The intersection of communities’ historical paths leads to differing interpretations of inter-group interaction. Moreover, relationships between (members of) communities alter over time: in some cases, communities might move from a situation of ‘national minority’ to that of ‘majority’ or vice versa, through events such as secession and annexation of territories, thereby reversing traditional roles.

### **Power and Disempowerment**

The Capotorti definition, cited above, attests to the fact that the notion of ‘minority’ tends to be associated with disempowerment. In light of this, Malloy has suggested referring to ethno-linguistic or ethno-cultural communities residing within a state as ‘co-nations’. This notion refers to communities that share the same polity but are not placed on a hierarchy within it, or perceived as dominant or non-dominant.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, Nimni argues that if minorities were



autonomous and self-sufficient in managing their own cultural matters (though a form of cultural autonomy) they would be freed from the condition of ‘minority’; he posits that ‘[t]he status of national minorities is a by-product of a national state that has a sovereign national majority’.<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile, the intersubjectivity referred to above is linked by Jackson Preece to power differentials:

Identity per se is taken to be or ought to be, a source of individual esteem and collective action. Yet the predicament of minorities is construed as precisely the reverse, a situation of individual *disesteem* and collective *inaction*. [...] Whereas majorities are imagined as powerful (the quintessential insiders), minorities are imagined as powerless (the quintessential outsiders). [italics in original]<sup>21</sup>

Indeed, minorities tend to be seen as needing to overcome a condition of disadvantage.<sup>22</sup> Recognition as a minority can lead to empowerment by bestowing a set of rights upon persons belonging to the relevant community. At the same time, being described as a ‘minority’ may automatically trigger feelings of vulnerability, particularly through patronising attitudes when the state embarks upon managing minority issues ‘from above’. In any case, the existence of social categories in all likelihood affects an individual’s sense of self-worth, with reference to one’s position within a societal hierarchy.

In this context, a power asymmetry manifests itself in a tension between the interests of minorities and those of the majority. The condition of ‘dominance’ is evidenced by the fact that the majority is often equated to the wider society: that of the majority is a ‘default’ status, while being part of a minority can be often be treated as anomalous.

### 3. The Post-Soviet/Postcolonial Condition

Interactions between representatives of majority and minority groups, power differentials and identity politics are made all the more intricate by colonial and postcolonial dynamics. These considerations apply to the former Soviet Union, which is both post-Socialist(/Communist) and postcolonial(/imperial). Russia’s situation is particularly complex: while it colonised other regions, it also underwent a form of ‘internal colonisation’.<sup>23</sup> Etkind considers the Russian Empire as having colonised ‘itself’ (in addition to annexing new lands) by populating areas with low population density through resettlement, and exercising measures typical of colonial regimes – coercion and the ‘exoticizing’ of the population.<sup>24</sup> In fact, Etkind argues that the Russian empire, at the time of the Russian revolution, was *already* postcolonial.<sup>25</sup> Colonial relationships shape empires, whose dominant nations accustom themselves to a multicultural identity.<sup>26</sup>

The Soviet Union started as an anti-imperialist effort: Lenin treated imperialism as the ‘highest stage of capitalism’ through





the concentration of capital in the hands of fewer and fewer ‘advanced’ countries.<sup>27</sup> Yet, despite initial ideological underpinnings, the Soviet Union’s policies developed to resemble forms of colonialism. Thus, features of post-communist countries, to some extent, converge with those of postcolonial countries, with the implication that postcolonial theory may be applicable to the post-Soviet sphere and – it has been suggested – post-communist Eastern Europe more broadly,<sup>28</sup> as well as some third world countries.<sup>29</sup> Scholars have referred to the Soviet Union as an ‘empire’,<sup>30</sup> and Chari and Verdery have linked it to imperialism through its ‘accumulation by dispossession’, due to the imposition of collectivisation upon the peoples of the Soviet Union.<sup>31</sup> At the same time, the Soviet Union differed from Western European colonial powers: it aimed not so much to accumulate capital but rather to control production,<sup>32</sup> while also enabling the primacy of the Communist Party. The Soviet Union was a ‘redistributive power’, rather than envisaging the concentration of wealth and resources in Moscow.<sup>33</sup> Among other things, these processes provided the foundations for a form of cultural imperialism, as well as introducing radical socio-political changes in the regions annexed to the Soviet Union. The intersection of *postcolonial* and *post-socialist* approaches highlights dynamics that reinforced (or even engineered) particular forms of ethnic consciousness.<sup>34</sup> Such dynamics are linked by Chari and Verdery to a colonial situation, with the exploitation of particular group identities and traditional authorities, in a way that contributed to shaping forms of (postcolonial) nationalisms.<sup>35</sup>

The two ‘posts’ reflect both a sudden rupture with the previous period and a reconfiguration of a country/nation’s place within a broader, international order. In this context, Morozov suggests treating Russia as simultaneously a coloniser and a subaltern actor, engaging in a form of ‘subaltern imperialism’:

[Russia] is almost completely dependent on the West in both economic and normative terms, and it is increasingly trying to justify its foreign policy conduct by accusing the West of neocolonialism. At the same time, Moscow continues to engage in imperial pursuits in its “near abroad,” explicitly relying on the Soviet legacy to secure and expand its “spheres of influence.” Contemporary Russia’s identity critically depends on its (post)imperial self-image as a great power, where “greatness” is still defined by referring to the Soviet past. [...] Thus, the term “subaltern empire,” used by a number of writers to describe Russia’s ambiguous position between the West and its own non-European colonies,<sup>36</sup> seems very appropriate for the study of its contemporary foreign policy and its domestic repercussions.<sup>37</sup>

Thus, Russia can be said to have colonised other regions (and itself), as well as being in a subaltern position vis-à-vis the West. In light of this complexity (and interlinkages between conditions of former colony/coloniser) Morozov argues in favour



of abandoning a view ‘of the world as neatly divided between (former) empires and colonized nations’; rather, he stresses the ‘hybrid identity’ of the coloniser and colonised, resulting in their being ‘co-constitutive in relation to each other’.<sup>38</sup> It is not only the coloniser, but also the colonised, that participate in shaping events, including in the sense that subaltern elites are incorporated into power structures through co-optation, despite claiming to speak *for* the oppressed populations. This implies difficulties in determining whether the voices of the (colonised) elites indeed represent those of the oppressed population as a whole, and its various interest groups.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, ‘the colonized subject is often able to mimic the discourse of the colonizer, thus subverting it and making colonial domination a profoundly ambiguous phenomenon.’<sup>40</sup>

Another issue directly stems from postcolonial situations: the prestige of languages of colonisers (when an ‘imported’ language becomes the language of the *intelligentsia* and the administration) versus ‘local’ languages. It leads to questions of ‘linguistic justice’,<sup>41</sup> and controversies over linguistic policies. For example, official languages in the Baltic states have been referred to as ‘majorized minority languages’, or majority languages that necessitate the protection normally reserved to vulnerable, minority languages. In turn, Russian in post-Soviet states outside Russia has been seen as possessing the attributes of a ‘majorized minority language’ – the language of a numerical linguistic minority but with the prestige of a dominant

language.<sup>42</sup> This classification is, clearly, also linked to power relations.

Besides postcolonial attributes, the post-Soviet region is, predictably, affected by a number of Soviet legacies. A highly significant aspect of such legacies has been what Brubaker calls the ‘institutionalization of nationhood’ during the Soviet era.<sup>43</sup> While institutions are not permanent – they have a degree of malleability despite being inherited<sup>44</sup> – ethnic institutions<sup>45</sup> played a vital role in shaping ethnic consciousness in the region.<sup>46</sup> They consolidated a perception of fixity of ethnicity, including by prescribing that ethnicity be recorded in passports and other documents. Belonging to a (titular or non-titular) ethnic group was effectively inherited from parents and perceived as permanent and exclusionary. This has meant a tendency to essentialise ethnic groups. These approaches were not dissimilar from the cultural determinism referred to above – what Malakhov and Osipov describe as a ‘static comprehension of culture’, by which ‘culture is perceived in a folkloristic perspective, as a composition of culture and norms established by an historical tradition’ – resulting in ‘culture’ being equated with ‘ethnic culture’.<sup>47</sup> Soviet social sciences treated *natsional’nost* as ‘ethnic entities of high consistency and political potential’, though which ‘ethnic particularity’ was treated as ‘socially real’.<sup>48</sup> Between the 1960s and 1980s Soviet scholars analysed ethnicity ‘as the production of self-reproducing collectivities based on self-identification and a distinct culture’.<sup>49</sup>

Essentialist tendencies are by no means exclusively a feature of the (post-)Soviet



space.<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, they have certainly been a durable and significant aspect of the organisation of the social and political space.<sup>51</sup> Folkloristic events, still very common in the post-Soviet context, display an idea of ethnicity frozen in the past, repeatedly offering the same type of outward expression, in the shape of traditional costumes and music. Folklore and ethnic festivals seem to represent a symbolic continuity between ‘then’ and ‘now’, by reproducing a group ‘essence’ treated as virtually immutable.<sup>52</sup>

The approach to ethnic groups developed during the Soviet period also included a particular terminology and social hierarchies. Expressions commonly used derive from ‘nation’ (*natsiya* and *natsional’nost’*; the latter (or ‘nationality’) is close to the English meaning of ‘ethnic group’<sup>53</sup>). Another expression (of Slavic, rather than Latin, origin) is *narod* (a people), along with a cluster of other expressions, such as ‘ethnic community’ (*etnicheskaya obshchnost’*), or simply *ethnos*.

Another consequence of the institutionalisation of nationhood, which still has an impact today, has been its incorporation into the Soviet federal structure (the ‘territorialisation’ of ethnicity). This implied the creation of an ethnic form of federalism, by which the main ethnic groups were ‘assigned’ particular territories (which came to be viewed, or were reconfirmed, as ‘homelands’). The link between ethnicity and territory is also evident in Stalin’s definition of a nation, as a ‘historically evolved, stable community based on a common language, *territory*, economic life and psychological

make-up manifested in a community of culture’ [*italics added*].<sup>54</sup> In ethnic regions, Soviet nationalities policy employed a form of affirmative action, for persons belonging to the titular nation to be represented in regional administrative bodies (a phenomenon known as *korenizatsiya*, or indigenisation). This further contributed to linking territory to ethnicity, with particular territorial units coming to be considered the ‘possession’ of specific ethnic groups.

Integrating post-socialism with postcolonialism in the study of the former Soviet space highlights the manner in which Soviet colonisation led to particular social constructs – as well as norms, beliefs and narratives – being superimposed to existing ones. At the same time, it is important to emphasise that such constructs were not just passively accepted but also renegotiated by the local populations.<sup>55</sup> For example, while Soviet identity was constructed as *areligious*, religiosity – to some extent – penetrated the Soviet sphere, with the Russian Orthodox Church developing a *modus vivendi* that was continuously negotiated with state structures.<sup>56</sup> Similarly, pagan and traditional rites survived through the Soviet period, and its exponents partially managed to reconcile them with Soviet secular practices.<sup>57</sup> And in the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic, regional-based solidarity networks lingered throughout Soviet processes of societal transformation. Not only Soviet citizens renegotiated identity/ies through bottom-up processes, but instances of cultural cross-fertilisation also predated the Soviet period. With reference to the Tatars, Bowring notes that: ‘If Muscovy conquered the Tatars, the



Tatars thoroughly penetrated their conquerors. The Tatar-Turkic heritage is found throughout the Russian language and Russia's cultural heritage.<sup>58</sup>

#### 4. The Russian Federation

It has already been noted how Russia's historical legacies are relevant to this paper. With reference to its imperial (and colonising) past, the Russian empire developed as a highly diverse one – as multi-ethnic and multi-confessional, and seemingly boundary-less. The Russians have imagined themselves as a nation at the centre of a multi-ethnic mosaic of communities, and the principal constituent nation in an empire (and Soviet Union). It has been argued that post-Soviet Russia is still affected by an imperial mentality.<sup>59</sup> Postcolonial (and majority-minority) dynamics are rendered more complex by the fact that, as noted, Russia has colonised not only new, annexed lands, but also 'itself'.

Meanwhile, the Soviets' institutionalisation of nationhood continues to have an impact on ethnic consciousness. While (following international practice) minority status in Russia is now linked to self-identification rather than one's ethnic background,<sup>60</sup> a tendency to essentialise ethnicity persists. Ethnicity continues to be often perceived as an 'anthropological constant'<sup>61</sup>: it is at the basis of the construction of categories employed to define social and political space,<sup>62</sup> and may also be used as a social resource.<sup>63</sup>

Post-Soviet Russia incorporates both an essentialist approach to ethnicity and a

language of multi-ethnicity. On the one hand, ethnicity has become less salient than during the Soviet Union; its levels of institutionalisation have decreased (for example, it is no longer included in documents). On the other, the focus has primarily been placed on the idea of multi-ethnicity: an individual's self-identification takes place in the context of a social reality that tends to be presented as multiple ethnic communities interacting with one another.<sup>64</sup> This has led to inter-ethnic issues being perceived primarily from the point of view of 'groups' rather than individuals,<sup>65</sup> along with the notion of an order regulating (and maintaining a balance between) various groups. According to Osipov, this is the reason why instances of ethnic discrimination are for the most part excluded from the public discourse, while societal narratives are imbued with notions of 'ethnic development' and the promotion of harmonious inter-ethnic relations.<sup>66</sup> Perceptions at least partially deriving from Soviet legacies lead to particular political outlooks, as well as providing a frame for public discussion.

#### Terminology: 'Nationality' and 'Minority'

Ethnic groups in Russia do not tend to be referred to as 'minorities'; rather – as in the Soviet period – the expressions 'nation', 'nationality' (*nastionalnost*) and *narod* tend to be used, often interchangeably. For example, the federal agency responsible for inter-ethnic relations is the Federal Agency on Nationalities' Affairs (*Federal'noe agentstvo po delam nastionalnostei*), with 'Nationalities' Affairs' understood as matters





relating to all ethnic communities present in Russia. Policies for the management of ethnic diversity have been referred to as nationalities policy (*natsional'naya politika*).<sup>67</sup> *Narod* is used, for example, in the title of the Law on Languages of the Peoples [*narod*] of the Russian Federation (*zakon 'O yazykakh narodov RF'*).

Other expressions that frequently emerge from the legislation and official discourses are 'ethnic development' and 'inter-ethnic relations'. For example, the 1996 Federal Law on National Cultural Autonomy (NCA Law)<sup>68</sup> refers to 'national-cultural development' (preamble), 'development of national [ethnic] culture' (Articles 13-14), and the 'development of national (native) languages and national culture' (Articles 5, 7, among others). The idea of a community's 'development' (or that of its language and culture) highlights the group-oriented dimension of inter-ethnic relations.

As during the Soviet period, the principal attribute employed for the most basic classification of nationalities is their status as titular (*titul'nye natsii*) or non-titular. Titular nationalities continue to be associated to 'ethnic regions', generally named after them. Such groups had a number of advantages during the Soviet period: (some) autonomy, *korenizatsiya*, and the sense of a 'homeland' (often viewed as an 'embryonic state'). In post-Soviet Russia, titular nationalities, through their ethnic republics, still benefit from a range of rights, such as the right to have their regional constitutions and official languages.<sup>69</sup> Communities are also divided between 'native' (autochthonous – *korennye*) and 'non-native', with a commonly accepted

idea of a hierarchy,<sup>70</sup> resulting in a perception of 'superiority' of titular and autochthonous groups over other communities. The link between ethnicity and territory is a reason why titularity (and being regarded as an autochthonous community in a particular region) is still considered of paramount importance. The notion of an ethnic republic as a titular group's 'own' territory further derives from the fact that Russia's titular groups have no kin state (and no place that can otherwise be identified as a homeland) outside Russia.

At the same time, the rights formally given to the republics have brought limited practical benefits: the stronger republics (with bargaining power vis-à-vis the federal centre) have been those with populous titular groups, and with resources, such as Tatarstan and Bashkortostan. And, even in these cases, regional autonomy is restricted. For example, in Tatarstan the Russian culture and language dominate the public sphere.<sup>71</sup> Moreover, the autonomy of the regions has been reduced as President Putin's centralisation has intensified. Organisations with representatives from titular groups, and the leadership of some republics, have raised concerns on the possible loss of the constitutional rights deriving from titularity due to advancing Russification. Only in a small number of cases is the population of titular nationalities within 'their' ethnic republics greater than the segment of the population identifying as Russians.<sup>72</sup> This situation can lead to a conceptual confusion as to the 'majority' or 'minority' in relation to a region versus the country as a whole. Meanwhile, the fact that titular nationalities



treat (or are perceived as treating) these regions as ‘their own’ (home)land has at times alienated ethnic Russian residents.<sup>73</sup>

Besides titular and non-titular nationalities, a supplementary category is that of the ‘small-in-number’ indigenous peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East.<sup>74</sup> A total of 46 indigenous peoples have been designated as such,<sup>75</sup> and are afforded a set of special rights under Russian legislation, particularly with regard to the use of land and natural resources.<sup>76</sup> Indigenous peoples are small and dispersed communities, often in a vulnerable position.

### The Russian ‘Majority’

While ethnic Russians in Russia are generally not referred to as the ‘majority’, state narratives have afforded them a special role within Russia’s society. For example, the 2012 presidential Decree ‘On the Strategy of State Nationality Policy of the Russian Federation until 2025’,<sup>77</sup> states that the Russian people (*ruskii narod*) historically represent the ‘backbone’ of the union of peoples (ethnic communities) within the Russian state. Similarly, Putin has argued that ‘For centuries, Russia developed as a multi-ethnic nation [...], a civilisation-state bonded by the Russian people [*ruskii narod*], Russian language and Russian [*ruskii*] culture’.<sup>78</sup> Despite this, Russia did not develop into a ‘nation-state’, as the Soviet Union aimed primarily at creating a supra-national *Soviet* identity.<sup>79</sup>

In the post-Soviet period, the focus has remained on multi-ethnicity,<sup>80</sup> although Russia has been increasingly perceived as a

homeland.<sup>81</sup> The condition of the Russians as a nation that has been denied a form of nation-stateness sometimes leads to a longing for such power and status. The notion of the Russians as a ‘majority-in-waiting’ is apparent by the popularity of slogans such as ‘Russia for the Russians’ and ‘Stop Feeding the Caucasus’.<sup>82</sup> In this context, *power differentials* can be perceived as not sufficiently elevating the dominant group to ‘satisfactory levels’ of dominance. This feeling is exacerbated by the fact that ethnic Russians in the Soviet Union were simultaneously ‘rulers and victims’.<sup>83</sup> In particular, ethnic institutions specifically for ethnic Russians were not established: while ethnic regions were carved out for the main nationalities, the Russians were left with – as argued by Slezkine – an ‘amorphous’ space that was ‘unclaimed’ by others.<sup>84</sup> Narratives have consequently emerged around the notion of the Russians’ sacrifices, the lack of ‘gratitude’ from (former Soviet) nationalities (allegedly helped by the Russians onto the road to modernisation), and the Russians’ disadvantages during the Soviet period. These views have been partially addressed under Putin by state-building macro-discourses that place an emphasis on Russian patriotism (disseminated widely given the state’s control over the domestic sphere, including the media). An accompanying notion is that of Russia as a ‘great power’, both within the international arena and through influence in the post-Soviet region. The notion of Russia as a great power addresses the loss of status following the break-up of the Soviet Union, which also shattered the idea of a boundary-less Russia/Soviet Union that the Russians could





effectively treat at ‘their own’ space. Imaginary boundaries for the Russian nation treat it as overflowing the Russian Federation’s existing administrative borders, and encompassing compatriots scattered throughout the post-Soviet region.<sup>85</sup>

### Russia’s Minorities

Given that the Soviet Union developed its own terminology and classifications linked to ethnicity,<sup>86</sup> the expression ‘minority’ has not had a very significant place in the post-Soviet context. The expression ‘national minority’ was mostly excluded from Soviet discourses, resurfacing only in the 1970s and 80s.<sup>87</sup> Some references in the legislation of the Russian Federation are made to ‘national minorities’,<sup>88</sup> yet the conditions of minority is not defined, nor is there a *lex specialis* on ‘national minorities’.<sup>89</sup> Draft definitions of ‘minority’ (for minority-related legislation that was never adopted) have referred to a ‘stable ethnic character’ and ‘primordial culture’.<sup>90</sup>

The term ‘minority’ has been mostly linked in Russia to non-titular groups; thus, a community may be regarded as a ‘minority’ when its members are located outside its ethnic regions (e.g. Tatars outside Tatarstan), or when it does not have ‘its own’ territory within the Russian federation (groups with a kin-state outside Russia, such as Tajiks, or no kin-state at all, such as Roma).<sup>91</sup> In drafts of the Law on National Cultural Autonomy (NCA)<sup>92</sup> the expression ‘minority’ was included and was subsequently dropped, so that the provisions of the adopted Law ultimately applied to all citizens.<sup>93</sup> This

changed in 2003,<sup>94</sup> when the Law was amended to state that national cultural autonomies can be formed by groups ‘in a situation of *national minority* in a particular territory’ [italics added] (Art. 1). However, the NCA Law has no definition of ‘minority’, or what is meant by the expression ‘in a situation of national minority’. In practice, it has (in most cases) been interpreted in the sense described above (non-titular groups, or sub-communities of titular nationalities outside ‘their own’ territories). The initial exclusion of ‘minority’ from the Law, and its subsequent inclusion, seems to indicate a difficulty in coming to terms with the notion. Overall, titular nationalities have not been regarded as ‘minorities’, but effectively placed at an intermediary stage between the Russian majority and ‘regular’ (non-titular) minorities. Migrants are at an even lower level of the imaginary social ranking – going from titular/native, to non-titular/native, to non-titular/non-native (but with a traditional presence), to migrants (recent arrivals)).

The link between minority and territory means that a-territoriality is effectively associated with lower status. Moreover, territoriality engenders the assumption that persons belonging to a titular group should ‘ideally’ be in the regions ‘assigned’ to them: for example, the representative of a titular group from the North Caucasus (e.g. an Ingush in Moscow) will tend to be regarded as a ‘migrant’ despite holding Russian citizenship. This approach highlights an expectation that the existing hierarchy (and attendant power differentials) are to be maintained, through an overlap of ethnic categories and the structure of the



Federation.<sup>95</sup> Similarly, there is a tendency to refer to persons originating from Central Asia as ‘aliens’, even for those individuals who are naturalised Russians and have a long history of presence in the country. It results in a conflation of the understandings of ‘migrants’ and ‘minorities’.<sup>96</sup> Persons belonging to ethnic groups with high levels of migration to Russia such as Tajiks are routinely labelled exclusively as migrants.<sup>97</sup>

Ethnicity-based republics (and other administrative units) are not only inhabited by titular groups, but are also the place of residence of ethnic Russians (and other ethnic communities, which can be regarded as ‘minorities within minorities’). The fact that ethnic Russians are at times considered ‘minorities’ within these regions can result in disagreements on internal policies. Mindful of possible tensions, the republics’ constitutions (and ethnicity-based autonomous districts’ charters), refer to *both* the titular group and the multinational people of the region.<sup>98</sup> This indicates that – at least *de jure* – there is no power asymmetry stemming from a group’s titularity within ‘its own’ territory.

The importance attached to the symbolic and practical significance of titularity, with its link to a territorial homeland, has often meant a rejection of the expression ‘minority’, as opposed to terms such as ‘nationality’ or *narod*. In a study recently conducted by the University of Glasgow,<sup>99</sup> some respondents belonging to various (non-Russian) ethnic groups rejected the expression ‘minority’. In the case of a Tatar respondent (a public official) in Moscow, he argued that ‘no *narod* is a minority.’ He likened the expression to

the implicit belittling of a community’s worth, rather than a mere reference to size.<sup>100</sup> Another respondent, from a non-titular group, was asked a question concerning the (Council of Europe) Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM) and its application in Russia. He rejected the view that minorities are in need of *protection*, as the treaty’s own title suggests, while also noting that ‘minority’ is an offensive expression; rather, communities – he argued – have themselves adjusted to circumstances wherever they resided. Thus, he objected to the view that (non-dominant) ethnic groups need to be defended while instead pointing to these communities’ own agency. When the interviewer suggested that the expression ‘minority’ related exclusively to numerical size (rather than ‘worth’), the respondent argued: ‘Compared to what? In Tatarstan the Russians are a minority or not? Or in Bashkiria are the Russians a minority?’<sup>101</sup> This approach reveals the ambiguous positioning of the Russians vis-à-vis titular groups at the regional level.

According to the same study, international norms and instruments are often equated to *Western* standards.<sup>102</sup> In line with this, the expression ‘minority’ itself, particularly when applied to titular groups, was treated by the respondents as a ‘Western’ import, which does not account for the specificities of the Russian system, in addition to being associated with vulnerability and low prestige. In these cases, a sense of patriotic pride, linked to a (primarily civic) Russian identity seemed to emerge in relation to an ideological conflict between Russia and the West. It sometimes led to the respondents’



distancing themselves from ‘Western’ concepts and norms, and aligning themselves with narratives around Russia’s exceptionalism – a country with a unique history and culture, as well as exceptionally high levels of ethno-linguistic diversity. It resulted in the view that Russia should follow its ‘own path’ in managing diversity, being true to its history and traditions, while penetration into the Russian system of international norms was treated as the imposition of a system of exogenous values. This approach reflects public narratives through which the Russian system of diversity management has sometimes been portrayed as superior to the ‘Western’ one.<sup>103</sup> More broadly, the ‘West’ has often been presented in Russia as repressing spiritual values, resulting in its ‘degradation’ and ‘moral crisis’.<sup>104</sup>

By contrast, some respondents in the same study did use the expression ‘minority’, in relation to non-titular (but also titular) nationalities. One example is a representative of the World Congress of Tatars, who referred to the Tatars as one of Russia’s ‘national minorities’.<sup>105</sup> This usage has, at least partially, a pragmatic reason: employing the expression ‘national minority’ contained in the FCNM – an international treaty legally binding on Russia – enables one to invoke the treaty and call on the Russian state to respect its international obligations, which *inter alia* involve creating the conditions for the promotion of minority languages and cultures. This respondent, indeed, stressed the importance for Russia to access and participate in international mechanisms supporting diversity. This shows, once again,

differing attitudes and interpretations within groups, reflecting a range of views on identity and power, and who should exercise it.<sup>106</sup>

## 5. Tajikistan

Once the Soviet project of creating a *homo soveticus* was no longer relevant, the concept of community identity shifted along with the removal of the colonial superstructure: titular nations were to be given a majority status in line with new nation-building policies of independent states. Tajikistan presents an illustrative example of nation-building attempts, aimed at creating a majority community out of a former Soviet titular nation as well as demonstration how these efforts affected other communities living in the country. While Tajiks were adjusting to the new status as the country’s majority, the Russians, who used to enjoy the status of “political” majority during the Soviet era literally in all Soviet Republics, faced a paradigm shift in their identity too. No longer a majority, the Russians of Tajikistan became a minority – numerically and politically. In the following sections of the paper, we analyse the shift from the Soviet to post-Soviet nation-building in Tajikistan, aimed at ‘majoritizing’ the Tajik community. We look at the resources and tools utilised by the Tajik government in attempting to fulfil this task. Further, we discuss how the status of the Russian community changed in Tajikistan, and which response mechanisms to this change were developed by members of this community.



There are several reasons why we will focus on the case of Tajikistan in this paper. Firstly, Tajikistan, the smallest in terms of territory and the poorest country in Central Asia, underwent a lengthy Civil War (1992-1997), which not only demonstrated the lack of social cohesion among communities, but also effectively determined the future path for the country. The rhetoric of Civil War is still an essential component of the official state discourse, and politicians often resort to vivid depictions of the past conflict not only to restrain political opposition or tighten freedom of speech, but also to promote the Tajik community's majority status. Secondly, Tajikistan is the only country in Central Asia where most of the population speak Tajik, which is very close to Persian, while the Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Turkmen and Uzbek languages have Turkic roots. The Tajik authorities underlined the Tajiks' unique standing in the region, reiterating their Persian origins and their belonging to an ancient Persian civilization, as another form of nation-building. Thirdly, Tajikistan is an authoritarian state and President Emomali Rahmon, who has remained in power since 1994, uses narratives of nation-building projects to consolidate and legitimise his power and rule. In the country, the President, his decisions and speeches are practically the sole source to learn about and analyse Tajikistan's policies. For this reason, a brief overview of the speeches by the President is provided to illustrate the official discourse on the Tajik majority and other communities.

### **The Tajik Civil War**

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Central Asian states faced the challenge of launching nation- and state-building processes. In case of Tajikistan, developing a national idea that would unite Tajikistan's peoples, and at the same time build a consciousness of the Tajik community as new majority in an independent state, was essential, particularly in light of the country's devastating Civil War of 1992-1997, whose aftermath lasted even longer.

The Civil War was a conflict with multiple characteristics and actors. Many scholars argue that the Tajik Civil War took place because of contradicting political ideologies perpetuated by competing groups trying to establish their rule over the independent state of Tajikistan. Rival parties were represented by the Tajik authorities, including the so-called Popular Front, the Communist Party, which enjoyed support from Russian, Uzbek, Kazakh and Kyrgyz troops, and the opposition of the Islamic Revival party, the Democratic Party, "Rastohez" movement and the Pamiri party "La'li Badakshan."

Started as a rivalry between groups for political influence and control over state resources and power, the conflict turned into a struggle between regional clans. According to Akbarzadeh, competing forces embraced existing networks and the mobilising forces of *regionalism*, as regional identity appealed to consolidated regional-based loyalties.<sup>107</sup> Epkenhans refers to definitions of regionalism as "primordial 'clans' which 'survived' the Soviet transformation of the Tajik society" or "regional-based solidarity



networks”, although he advises not to overestimate the role of regionalism in the Civil War.<sup>108</sup>

As noted, ethnicity, unlike religious identity, was supported and institutionalised during the Soviet regime. Ethnicity became an effective mobilisation source, once conflicting parties started using nationalist rhetoric. Furthermore, conflicting parties built ethnic identity upon regional affiliation, and a new *ethno-regional* identity emerged. Ethno-regional identity implied that a specific ethnic group residing on a particular territory was the bearer of a specific political ideology.

The Civil War demonstrated how fragmented the Tajik society was. Abashin attributes the lack of societal cohesion at the state level in Tajikistan to its specific geographical conditions, where different communities lived in relative isolation from each other, and no real interaction happened between them, which would have contributed to the formation of a nation-wide identity and a sense of belongingness.<sup>109</sup> Akbarzadeh develops this argument, attributing the lack of communication between communities to the Soviet Union’s resettlement campaigns.<sup>110</sup> Moreover, the Soviet process of institutionalisation of nationhood contributed to the lack of social cohesion in Tajikistan. Both elites and communities perceived ethnic identities as fixed and inherited, and this perception had a spill-over effect on other identities (religious, regional, linguistic, etc.). The resulting perceptions and practices further contributed to the lack of social cohesion between different communities of Tajikistan and created a

situation in which people would see each other as bearers of different identities.

The Government of Tajikistan faced a very challenging task once the conflict was over – to develop and implement a nation-building policy focused on a civic identity that would unite groups disjointed from each other after the Civil War and legitimise the rule of the incumbent ruler. However, as is shown below, this task was never completed as the nation-building policies of Tajikistan shifted towards ethnicity-based nation-building, with two aims; to strengthen the majority status of Tajiks, and to legitimise the rule of elites.

## The Tajik Majority

### Terminology

The term “minority” is not widespread in defining ethnic communities in Tajikistan. This is partly due to the fact that the term was not extensively used during the Soviet period, as mentioned before. While the term occasionally features in official statements by the President, other terms such as “national-ethnic communities” (*natsionalno-etnicheskie obschnosti*), “peoples” (*narodnosti, narod*) and “communities” (*obschnosti, obschestva*) and are more common in Tajik media or academic works.

Such incoherence in using different terms can be explained by two reasons. First, due to a lack of state policy addressing ethnic communities, there is no established vocabulary on which terms to use. This lack might be one of the consequences of majority-focused state policies, by which not





only the terms to designate minority communities were missing, but these very concepts seemed irrelevant. Second, ethnic community representatives might be reluctant to be called “minority”, as identification as a minority community was never a part of their practice given the minimal presence of the term and concept under the Soviet regime. In addition, community members might perceive the term as pejorative and imply that self-identification as a minority community member can potentially single them out from the general population. As described previously, a titular nation status implies a perception of superiority, while identifying as a minority community can place group members in a subordinate position on various levels.

The consequences of the Civil War might be an additional reason for the reluctance of both the government and communities to use the term “minority.” The conflict led to an extreme fragmentation of the population of Tajikistan, and rivalries emerged not only between majority and minority communities, but within those groups. The unwillingness of communities to emphasise their different identity became an evident response mechanism during the turbulent post-conflict period in Tajikistan.

To make the Tajik community a majority, the state employed several tools. Firstly, specific terms were used to refer to Tajiks; the term “nation” is applied exclusively to the Tajik community. As discussed by Blakkisrud and Nozimova, titles of history books in Tajikistan routinely refer to the “Tajik nation.”<sup>111</sup> As part of the process of

constructing a majority, “nation” is considered the highest status an ethnic community can reach. In the official discourse, only the Tajik community is entitled to be a nation. Tajik President Rahmon uses the “Tajik nation” in his statements to imply that the community existed as a nation “since ancient times” and did not change since then as a community, possessing the same characteristics of “wise and cultured people.”<sup>112</sup>

Secondly, to strengthen the majority status, Tajiks were contrasted with other ethnic communities. Thus, Uzbeks, the second biggest ethnic community in Tajikistan, were perceived to act as the “constituting other,” a message conveyed mainly through history books.<sup>113</sup> Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have had strained relations, which is reflected in state-sponsored narratives of history. The “friendship of the nations” discourse of the Soviet times changed to Tajikistan’s narratives, almost completely ignoring developments in the history of Uzbekistan and describing a superior civilization and statehood of Tajiks compared to Uzbeks.<sup>114</sup> As a result, Uzbeks were not seen to constitute a “nation” and became a “diaspora.”<sup>115</sup>

The Tajik community is not a homogeneous group of people, and different sub-groups tend to identify in line with their regional origins. Power is not equally distributed among Tajiks coming from different regions, and representatives of the southern Kulyabi Tajiks hold the dominant position, with the President at its apex.





## **Nation-Building Policies for the ‘New Majority’**

Soviet legacies in constructing a national idea and national projects played an important role in post-Soviet undertakings by the Tajik authorities. The top-down practice of commissioning academia to develop official narratives and official history, which was used by the Tajik elite in newly-independent Tajikistan, dates back to the initial phases of the Soviet Union, when the regime tasked ethnographers, political geographers, and other specialists to define categories of ethnicity. The understanding of ethnicity as a biological notion and a primordial approach to defining it migrated to the official Tajik discourse from the Soviet ethnography.<sup>116</sup>

Recreating the “great past” became the primary direction of the Tajik nation building policies. The aim of referring to history was to provide conditions and as many objective reasons as possible for Tajiks to be considered a “majority by default.” To fulfill the role of historical symbols, the Tajik Government introduced national projects linked to a) the Samanid dynasty, b) Zoroastrianism, and c) the Aryan civilization. All three were described as essential parts of the Tajik identity. Historical references were used to reinvent the titular nation of Tajiks.

The Samanid state (875-999) is considered the first Tajik state by Tajik historians, which included territories of Central Asia, Afghanistan, and Iran.<sup>117</sup> Rahmon often stresses the importance of the Samanid era, as their rule is considered the time when “sons of the nation [...] managed to unite Tajik tribes and create a state that became famous

throughout the world.”<sup>118</sup> Ismail Samani, one of the rulers of the Samanid dynasty, appears to be a central figure in the historical context and given the role of the ideal leader, who managed to unite Tajiks against the external threat of Arab conquerors. A selective approach to focus exclusively on the Samanid dynasty led to ignoring, or inaccurate representation of, historical events, which took place before and after the Samanids’ rule.

In the religious sphere, official discourses have referred to Zoroastrianism, one of the most ancient religions which emerged in what is now Iran in around 6<sup>th</sup> century BC.<sup>119</sup> Through alleged close links of Tajikistan to the Persian civilization, the official discourse now presents Zoroastrianism as a “Tajik national product.”<sup>120</sup> Zoroastrianism was considered a part of the Aryan civilization’s cultural heritage. Zoroastrianism was a very “comfortable” identity source to use, as it presented a pre-Islamic religion, allowing promotion of a Tajik identity without attaching it to Islam.

Finally, the Tajik nation was associated to Aryan civilization, with two purposes. Firstly, it had to demonstrate how ancient the Tajik people are; the first mentions of the Aryans date back to 1500 B.C.<sup>121</sup> Secondly, the Aryan civilization was the link between Tajiks and ancient Persian civilizations and culture. Although Iranians, Indians, and Afghans are considered to share the heritage of the Aryan culture, Rahmon is very categorical in this regard. The President states “the world ‘Tajik’ is a synonym of the word ‘Aryan’ meaning generous and noble.”<sup>122</sup> Not only does Rahmon argue that



Tajiks were part of the Aryan civilization (“for us – peoples of Aryan origin”, “We, the descendants of the Aryan culture”); he also links Tajiks to peoples of Iran and Afghanistan.<sup>123</sup>

### **Russians in Tajikistan: From Majority to Minority**

Russians came to Central Asia to work on Soviet projects on industrialisation, agricultural reforms, education initiatives and provide assistance in administration. The territory of the Soviet Union practically was a “single job market” and citizens could travel freely within its borders.<sup>124</sup>

The Russian community in the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR), as well as in other Central Asian states and the USSR as a whole, was previously a “political majority” due to several factors. Supported by the central government in Moscow, the Russians benefited from several privileges living in Tajikistan. They enjoyed education, media, cultural events and facilities in Russian; they did not have to learn local languages or integrate into local societies and adjust their lifestyle in any essential regard. Moreover, Russians often held high-ranking positions and influenced decision-making.

Several factors contributed to changes in the Russian community’s status, as a result of which Russians were no longer a political majority. Firstly, the most obvious factor is the Tajik Civil War. Once the Soviet Union collapsed, a large number of Russians started migrating to Russia. In Tajikistan, the share of Russians who left the country is among the biggest in Central Asia: 85% of Russian

population fled the country because of the Civil War, and their percentage dropped from 32.4% in 1989 to 1% of the overall population in 2000.<sup>125</sup> The local population, who had their grievances because of Russians’ privileged position, started viewing benefits that Russians enjoyed as liabilities and adopted a hostile attitude towards them. In addition, the Russian community became too numerically insignificant to preserve its former political power. The political majority of Russians was replaced by the titular nation of Tajiks.

Secondly, as Peyrouse argues, besides the Civil War, other factors contributed to the motivations of the Russian population to leave Tajikistan, which weakened their majority position. These factors already emerged during the Soviet period: they included nationalisation policies emanating from the process *korenizatziya* since the early Soviet period, which led to ethnicization of public offices. The existence of quotas supporting titular nationalities and the lack of knowledge of local languages contributed to the Russians’ feeling of marginalisation.<sup>126</sup> This can partly explain why not only Russians, but other communities as well were not strengthened through nationalities policies of the Soviet Union as *korenizatsiya* was only applied to titular nations. In addition, Peyrouse suggests, the Russian community in Central Asia became a “symbolic” minority even before the Soviet Union collapsed – already in the 1970s, when the Russians started facing limited access to power and resources.<sup>127</sup>

Linguistic challenges were another issue – the Tajik SSR adopted the Law on State



Language in 1989, which sufficiently limited the usage of Russian and introduced requirements and obligations on the knowledge of Tajik in communications with public institutions or to be employed by them.<sup>128</sup> According to Brubaker, in 1989, only around 5% of the Russian population in Central Asia knew local languages, and the introduction of requirements to communicate in local languages was a big concern for Russians and Russian-speaking minorities.<sup>129</sup>

Thirdly, Russia's compatriot policies (for ethnic Russians who became minorities in newly-independent states after the Soviet Union's collapse) did not pursue the aim to support their political activities and standing. The Russian community in Tajikistan had some expectations that Moscow would strive to improve their conditions and negotiate for their welfare, using the large number of Tajik migrants in Russia as a tool. However, Moscow was rather interested to negotiate the deployment of a Russian military base in Tajikistan than to support the Russian community.

This disappointment can explain why some Russians preferred to stay in Tajikistan – those who migrated to Russia faced a completely different life from what they expected. Moving to Russia would generally imply working in agriculture, which did not match the expectations of high-skilled Russians. Peyrouse argues that Russians from Central Asian countries settled in regions of Russia that are economically disadvantaged and have limited opportunities. Indeed, if Russians wished to resettle through the compatriots programme, they had a limited choice of regions, which

were predefined by the authorities in accordance with Russian legislation.<sup>130</sup> These Russians are perceived as “different” and/or “Orientalized” and met with a certain degree of resentment from locals.<sup>131</sup>

### **Fluid Identity of Russians in the Post-Soviet Tajikistan**

In the Tajik SSR, there were two sources for Russians' national identity construction. First, initially Russia was the primary identity source, and being originally from Russia played an essential part in Russians' self-perception. Second, as Russians settled and lived in Tajikistan for longer periods of time, the country became their secondary identity source. Gradually, Russians in Tajikistan started distinguishing themselves from Russians living in Russia. Russian's self-identification altered; being mainly linked to the country of residence rather than that of origin.

The Russians in post-Soviet Tajikistan became the only actors engaging in their own identity construction, for two reasons. On the one hand, as noted, the Russian government was not interested in reviving the former status of the Russian community in Tajikistan, but rather in securing its geopolitical interests, alongside some support for Russian identity and the Russian language, including through Russian cultural centres. There were no requests or policy advice from Russia to include the Russian community in official nation-building policies. On the other hand, the Tajik authorities, after a brief, initial attempt to build a civic identity, opted to not include



Russians or any other community into its nation-building narratives; not feeling pressure from Russia to do so, they were able to implement majority-focused policies.

The Russian response mechanisms to the lack of state support and exclusion from nation-building projects, divided the community in two, representatives of which possess different identities. Indeed, in Tajikistan, there is a group of Russians who decided to assimilate, learn the Tajik language, and integrate into local society. In accordance with the intersubjectivity principle, representatives of this group of Russians constructed their identity through their interaction with the Tajik majority (which served as an entry point for assimilation), unlike the Russians who decided to isolate themselves from Tajik society (see below) and, to a lesser extent, other ethnic communities living in Tajikistan. This group does not maintain strong connections and sentiments with Russia and builds their identity around being “different” from Russians in Russia. Although this approach exists, it is not very common because it requires learning language, following traditions and actively participating in community activities.

Another group of Russians live in an isolated manner, does not actively engage with the Tajik public bodies and society. Representatives of this group are not interested in learning the language; they follow exclusively Russian media and Russian political developments. These Russians maintain strong feelings of connection with Russia and consider moving there as the only option for their well-being.

This approach seems to be more common as it does not require major efforts as full integration would. In addition to the said response mechanisms, according to Kolstø, in some post-Soviet states, there is a group of people who feel attachment to the former Soviet Union and identify with the state that does not exist anymore.<sup>132</sup> In Tajikistan this group might consist of various communities, not only Russians.

Tajikistan’s Russian community still enjoys some benefits. Among these is the fact that the Russian language retains a certain prestige. Regardless of the small number of Russians living in Tajikistan, the use of Russian remains widespread, especially in urban areas. Russian-language schools exist in all major cities, nearly all media is published in Russian, and the intelligentsia still prefers to communicate in Russian. The importance of the Russian language is recognised by the Constitution of Tajikistan, where it is assigned the role of “language for inter-ethnic communication.”<sup>133</sup> Despite a shift towards the increased use of Tajik, the enduring popularity of Russian is linked to pragmatic reasons among other: the knowledge of Russian is vital for migrants who leave for Russia from Tajikistan, and the transition to Tajik is forcefully a lengthy process. At the same time, overall, the Russian community of Tajikistan remains politically passive when it comes to power relations between Russians and the Tajik majority. Several factors contributed to this. Firstly, there is no single leader who could represent the local Russian community and unite its members for political action. Secondly, the distribution of political power



happens in line with the regional division and ethnic identity in Tajikistan. While Tajiks from the southern parts of Tajikistan are most likely to succeed in their careers, Russians and other minority communities are excluded from power distribution. The final factor is the size and the level of cohesion of the Russian community in the country. As Brubaker argues, the smaller communities are more likely to emigrate, and the gradual decrease of the Russian population in Tajikistan confirms this view.<sup>134</sup>

Illustrative is the transformation of the Russian community's status - from the "older brothers" and the "leading nation" to one of the most passive and numerically insignificant communities of Tajikistan.<sup>135</sup> The fluidity of identity of Russians in Tajikistan was mainly triggered by such external factors as a lack of support from their kin-state and the absence of policies promoting minority participation in the country of residence. Russians had to give up the benefits they once enjoyed and accept an inferior position once they lost support from Moscow.

As discussed in the above section on Interaction and Positionality, relationships between majority and minority communities change over time because of various events. In the case of Tajiks and Russians in independent Tajikistan, postcolonial developments altered relationships between these two communities and placed them on different power levels. However, what is remarkable in this case is that the Tajik community during the Soviet rule, despite being a titular nation and participating in decision-making processes, was still not

comparable to the "political majority" of Russians. This created a situation of effectively two majorities in the Tajik SSR: Tajiks being a numerical majority, and Russians a political one. With the end of the USSR, Russians in Tajikistan, however, lost their status of political majority and became a minority – both in terms of political influence and numerical presence. With this loss came the limited access to power and resources, as well as a range of challenges in education and employment.<sup>136</sup>

## 6. Conclusions

A pervasive uncertainty permeates attempts to define the concepts of majority and minority in the post-Soviet space, exacerbated by the combination of post-Soviet and postcolonial factors. There is an entanglement of post-socialist, postcolonial, and coloniser/colonised elements, reflecting the intersubjectivities of mutually constituted entities (though bottom-up in addition to top-down moves). This encourages a reading of postcoloniality by which both sides are involved in shaping identity construction and socio-political processes. As Morozov puts it, 'a typical colonial relationship is one of hybridity, in which the cultural border between the centre and the periphery itself becomes irreversibly blurred'.<sup>137</sup> At the same time, an individual identifying with a particular community self-determines on the basis of the 'other', which is simultaneously an alter ego and constitutive through co-construction.

A condition of ambiguity further derives from the fact that the status and social





positioning of groups alter over time, adjusting to particular historical trajectories, as is shown by the post-Soviet context. Thus, for example, the Russians in Tajikistan went from ‘political majority’ to ‘minority’, and the Russians in the post-Soviet space have become what some perceive as a ‘divided nation’. The changes brought about by the transition from the Soviet to the post-Soviet period has led to forms of soul-searching, and uncertainty as to the positioning of different groups within a new social reality. In Tajikistan the priority has been nation-building and particularly the process of ‘majoritising’ the titular nation. Like other post-Soviet states, it has chosen the route of the ‘nationalising state’,<sup>138</sup> while Russia has retained a form of multi-ethnicity, albeit with a prominent patriotic component. These dynamics imply a reinterpretation of identities, while reconfirming the nature of ethnic communities as multi-layered and historically contingent.

Three conclusions can be drawn from this working paper. First, the continuous readjustment of identity leads to the said, heightened ambiguity in the post-Soviet space in the perceptions of communities (both the majority and minorities). The dynamics of group interaction (the type of intersubjectivity) change over time, resulting in differing (self)perceptions among (sub)communities whose circumstances have altered.

Second, social hierarchies (and perceptions of the ‘majority’ and ‘minority/ies’) are linked to ideas of *power*. Some persons object to being labelled as ‘minority’ representatives, given the negative

connotations associated with it in particular contexts and how this is considered to affect their sense of self-worth. Power differentials can extend to the global level and manifest themselves in a ‘competition’ between indigenous systems of diversity management and international norms; this is reflected by the position of Russia – and the post-Soviet space more broadly – in global affairs, captured by the notion of Russia as a ‘subaltern empire’.

Third, colonial constructs can carry on into postcolonial periods, yet they are renegotiated and sometimes transformed. A group-oriented approach to diversity has transitioned into the post-Soviet period: in both Russia and Tajikistan, society continues to be primarily imagined as comprising isolated segments ‘interacting’ with one another, rather than amalgam of individuals with intricate, overlapping connections. Other continuities are the link between ethnicity and territory, the distinction between titular and non-titular nations, and a specific terminology to designate ethnic groups in the post-Soviet space. In Russia ethnic identity is still a major factor in social exchanges, the organisation of society (with the Federation still partially ethnicity-based), and the presence of multiple ethnic institutions. In Tajikistan an essentialising approach to ethnicity is retained, despite the Tajik and Russian communities being highly heterogeneous. The Tajik majority is characterised by a complex system of ethnic and regional/clan identities, while persons belonging to the country’s Russian community display varying levels of hybridity with regard to their sources of





identity, presupposing greater or lesser integration into Tajik society. Socio-cultural legacies are, however, altered by new – and ever evolving – political circumstances in the two countries, as well as by border changes and the new dynamics of post-Soviet migration. This leads to a sense of dislocation as well as a form of cognitive dissonance, as different individuals may embrace different

visions of how a post-Soviet society ought to be structured, how historical legacies should be approached, and how communities ought to be relate with one another.



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See below, '[The Post-Soviet/Postcolonial Condition](#)'.

<sup>2</sup> Vladimir Malakhov and Alexander Osipov, 'The Category of Minorities in the Russian Federation: A Reflection on Uses and Misuses', in *International Obligations and National Debates: Minorities Around the Baltic Sea*, ed. Sia S Åkermark (Marienhamn: The Åland Islands Peace Institute, 2006), 499. The authors draw on Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> Seyla Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 3–4.

<sup>4</sup> Benhabib, 4.

<sup>5</sup> Brubaker observes that '[w]e should not ask "what is a nation" but rather: how is nationhood a political and cultural form institutionalized within and among states?' Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 16.

<sup>6</sup> John Packer, 'Problems in Defining Minorities', in *Minority and Group Rights in the New Millennium*, ed. Deirdre Fottrell and Bill Bowring (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1999), 223–73; Jennifer Jackson-Preece, 'Beyond the (Non) Definition of Minority', *ECMI Issue Brief No.30, European Centre for Minority Issues*, 2014.

<sup>7</sup> Jackson-Preece, 'Beyond the (Non) Definition of Minority'.

<sup>8</sup> See below, '[Power and Disempowerment](#)'.

<sup>9</sup> John Packer, 'On the Definition of Minorities', in *The Protection of Ethnic and Linguistic Minorities in Europe*, ed. John Packer and Kristian Myntti (Turku: Abo Akademi University, 1993), 57.

<sup>10</sup> As will be seen below.

<sup>11</sup> Jackson-Preece, 'Beyond the (Non) Definition of Minority'.

<sup>12</sup> Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*, 60.

<sup>13</sup> Jackson-Preece, 'Beyond the (Non) Definition of Minority', 10–11.

<sup>14</sup> Jackson Preece notes that an individual can experience a range of circumstances in positioning him/herself vis-a-vis a community: 1) self-identification as belonging to a minority and recognition as others; 2) self-identification but non-recognition by others; 3) self-identification, recognition but discrimination as a result of recognition; 4) recognition by others but lack of self-identification as a member of a minority [authors' summary]. Jackson-Preece, 11.

<sup>15</sup> Brubaker and Cooper reflect upon the use of 'dentification' instead of 'identity', linking the former linked to a more active, dynamic process. Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, 'Beyond "Identity"', *Theory and Society* 29, no. 1 (2000): 1–47.

<sup>16</sup> Jackson-Preece, 'Beyond the (Non) Definition of Minority', 10.

<sup>17</sup> Jackson-Preece, 11.

<sup>18</sup> Jackson-Preece, 10.

<sup>19</sup> Tove H. Malloy, *National Minority Rights in Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 38.

<sup>20</sup> Ephraim Nimni, 'National-Cultural Autonomy as an Alternative to Minority Territorial Nationalism', *Ethnopolitics* 6, no. 3 (2007): 348.

<sup>21</sup> Jackson-Preece, 'Beyond the (Non) Definition of Minority', 11.

<sup>22</sup> For example, the working definition of 'minority' developed by Caportorti's successor, Jules Deschênes, refers to [a] group of citizens of a State, constituting a numerical minority and in a non-dominant position in the State [...] motivated, if only implicitly, by a collective will to survive and whose aim is to achieve equality with the majority in fact and in law.'

<sup>23</sup> Alexander Etkind, *Internal Colonization: Russia's Imperial Experience* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013).

<sup>24</sup> Drawing on Weber (1976), Etkind argues that similar dynamics took place in other parts of Europe: 'In France and Germany, the nationalization of agrarian culture was also similar to self-colonization: the 'people,' who were divided into classes, provinces, dialects, and sects, were transformed into a 'nation.'" Etkind. p. 254. See Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976).

<sup>25</sup> Etkind, *Internal Colonization: Russia's Imperial Experience*.

<sup>26</sup> For example, in relation to the UK, see Paul Gilroy, *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture?* (London: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>27</sup> V.I. Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (Sydney: Resistance Books, 1999).

<sup>28</sup> David Chioni Moore, 'Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Toward a Global Postcolonial Critique' 116, no. 1 (2001): 111–28; Epp Annus, 'The Problem of Soviet Colonialism in the Baltics', *Journal of Baltic Studies*



43, no. 1 (2012): 21–45; Andrzej Szeptycki, ‘Ukraine as a Postcolonial State?’, *The Polish Quarterly of International Affairs* 1, no. 1 (2011): 5–29; Nataša Kovačević, *Narrating Post/Communism: Colonial Discourse and Europe’s Borderline* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008). [chioni moore\*] See also the special issue ‘On Colonialism, Communism and East-Central Europe – Some Reflections’, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 48, no. 2 (2012).

<sup>29</sup> Chari and Verdery argue that imperial relations were established not only within the Soviet Union itself (through the incorporation into the polity of subordinate peoples), but also with the Eastern European satellites and some Third World countries (with a client status), such as Cuba and Yemen. Sharad Chari and Katherine Verdery, ‘Thinking between the Posts: Postcolonialism, Postsocialism, and Ethnography after the Cold War’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51, no. 1 (2009): 15.

<sup>30</sup> Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union*, Culture and Society after Socialism (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005); Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001); Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin, *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin* (Oxford; New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>31</sup> Chari and Verdery, ‘Thinking between the Posts: Postcolonialism, Postsocialism, and Ethnography after the Cold War’. They draw on David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>32</sup> And population movement.

<sup>33</sup> Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceaușescu’s Romania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, n.d.); Chari and Verdery, ‘Thinking between the Posts: Postcolonialism, Postsocialism, and Ethnography after the Cold War’, 15.

<sup>34</sup> Suny and Martin, *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin*; Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*; Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union*; Yuri Slezkine, ‘The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism’, *Slavic Review* 53, no. 2 (1994): 413–52.

<sup>35</sup> Chari and Verdery, ‘Thinking between the Posts: Postcolonialism, Postsocialism, and Ethnography after the Cold War’, 15. The authors cite Chatterjee on India. Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

<sup>36</sup> For example, Madina Tlostanova, ‘Between the Russian/Soviet Dependencies, Neoliberal Delusions, Dewesternizing Options, and Decolonial Drives’, *Cultural Dynamics* 27, no. 2 (2015): 267–283.

<sup>37</sup> Viatcheslav Morozov, ‘Subaltern Empire?’, *Problems of Post-Communism* 60, no. 6 (2013): 16.

<sup>38</sup> Morozov, 16. See also Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2005), 145–74. and Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

<sup>39</sup> Morozov, ‘Subaltern Empire?’, 17.; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’, Ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg’, in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana, Ill: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–313. In particular, Spivak refers to the difficulties in the emergence of subaltern women’s voices.

<sup>40</sup> Morozov, ‘Subaltern Empire?’, 18.

<sup>41</sup> On this notion, see Philippe Van Parijs, *Linguistic Justice for Europe and for the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). With reference to the case of Moldova, see Federica Prina, ‘Linguistic Justice, Soviet Legacies and Post-Soviet Realpolitik: The Ethnolinguistic Cleavage in Moldova’, *Ethnopolitics* 14, no. 1 (2015): 52–71, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449057.2014.928097>.

<sup>42</sup> Skutnabb-Kangas, ‘Marvelous Human Rights Rhetoric and Grim Realities’, *Language Rights in Education* 1, no. 3 (2002): 186. Uldis Ozolin, ‘The Impact of European Accession upon Language Policy in the Baltic States’ 2 (2003): 217–238.

<sup>43</sup> Rogers Brubaker, ‘Nationhood and the National Question in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Eurasia: An Institutional Account’, *Theory and Society* 23, no. 1 (1994): 47–78. See also V.A. Tishkov, *Ethnicity, Nationalism, and Conflict In and After the Soviet Union: The Mind Aflame* (London: Sage, 1997).

<sup>44</sup> Claus Offe, ‘Political Disaffection as an Outcome of Institutional Practices? Some Post-Tocquevillean Speculations’, in *Political Disaffection in Contemporary Democracies: Social Capital, Institutions and Politics*, ed. Mariano Torcal and José R. Montero (London: Routledge, 2006), 35.

<sup>45</sup> Gorenburg describes ‘ethnic institutions’ as:

those institutions that are established to oversee a state’s interaction with ethnic groups living on its territory. They include territorial administrative units for ethnic minorities, separate educational systems, language laws, official ethnic categories for censuses and identity papers, affirmative action programs for ethnic minorities, etc.



Dmitry P. Gorenburg, *Minority Ethnic Mobilization in the Russian Federation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 3, fn 2.

<sup>46</sup> Brubaker, 'Nationhood and the National Question in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Eurasia: An Institutional Account'; Gorenburg, *Minority Ethnic Mobilization in the Russian Federation*; Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993).

<sup>47</sup> Malakhov and Osipov, 'The Category of Minorities in the Russian Federation: A Reflection on Uses and Misuses', 498.

<sup>48</sup> Teodor Shahin, 'Ethnicity in the Soviet Union: Analytical Perceptions and Political Strategies', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 31, no. 3 (1989): 412.

<sup>49</sup> Shahin, 414.

<sup>50</sup> See, for example, Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era*.

<sup>51</sup> Malakhov and Osipov, 'The Category of Minorities in the Russian Federation: A Reflection on Uses and Misuses'.

<sup>52</sup> Stalin's definition of a 'nation' (see next paragraph) referred to a 'stable' community's 'psychological make-up'. In post-Soviet Russia, draft definitions of 'minority' have included references to a 'stable ethnic character' and 'primordial culture'. See below, '[Russia's Minorities](#)'.

<sup>53</sup> For a nuanced analysis, see Shahin, 'Ethnicity in the Soviet Union: Analytical Perceptions and Political Strategies'.

<sup>54</sup> Josef Stalin, *Marksizm I Natsional'nyi Vopros [Maxism and the National Question]* (Moscow: State Political Literature Publishing, 1950), 239.

<sup>55</sup> Mark Bassin and Catriona Kelly, eds., *Soviet and Post-Soviet Identities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>56</sup> Catriona Kelly, 'Competing Orthodoxies: Identity and Religious Belief in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia', in *Soviet and Post-Soviet Identities*, ed. Mark Bassin and Catriona Kelly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 299–320.

<sup>57</sup> Marjorie Mandelstam Balzer, *The Tenacity of Ethnicity: A Siberian Saga in Global Perspective* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

<sup>58</sup> Bill Bowring, 'The Tatars of the Russian Federation and National-Cultural Autonomy: A Contradiction in Terms?', *Ethnopolitics* 6, no. 3 (2007): 417–35.

<sup>59</sup> Emil Pain, 'The Imperial Syndrome and Its Influence on Russian Nationalism', in *The New Russian Nationalism Imperialism, Ethnicity and Authoritarianism 2000–2015*, ed. Pål Kolstø and Helge Blakkisrud (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 46–74.

<sup>60</sup> Article 26(1), Russian Constitution.

<sup>61</sup> Malakhov and Osipov, 'The Category of Minorities in the Russian Federation: A Reflection on Uses and Misuses', 503.

<sup>62</sup> Similarly, Shahin writes that *natsional'nost'* has been 'centrally important as a term common speech, analytical discourse, and explicit political strategies'. Shahin, 'Ethnicity in the Soviet Union: Analytical Perceptions and Political Strategies', 410.

<sup>63</sup> For example, positioning oneself as the leader of an ethnic community can lead to advantages, in the shape of access to social networks and funding. Malakhov and Osipov, 'The Category of Minorities in the Russian Federation: A Reflection on Uses and Misuses', 502. See also Federica Prina, *National Minorities in Putin's Russia: Diversity and Assimilation* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016).

<sup>64</sup> Malakhov and Osipov, 'The Category of Minorities in the Russian Federation: A Reflection on Uses and Misuses'. At the same time, self-identification mostly continue to be based on a grid of ethnic categories that have themselves remained the same as in the Soviet period.

<sup>65</sup> Osipov links this approach to Brubaker's notion of 'groupism' or '[T]he tendency to take discrete, sharply differentiated, internally homogeneous and externally bounded groups as basic constituents of social life, chief protagonists of social conflict, and fundamental units of social analysis'. Rogers Brubaker, 'Ethnicity without Groups', *European Journal of Sociology* 43, no. 3 (2002): 164.; Alexander Osipov, 'National Cultural Autonomy in Russia: A Case of Symbolic Law', *Review of Central and East European Law* 35 (2010): 29–30.

<sup>66</sup> He argues that 'Only issues that relate to political stability and public order gain widespread attention and enter public discussion, while nonviolent discrimination is largely overlooked.' Alexander Osipov, 'Ethnicity, Discrimination and Extremism in Russia', *Problems of Post-Communism* 57, no. 2 (2010): 58.

<sup>67</sup> See, for example, Government of the Russian Federation, Resolution of 29 December 2016, No 1532, 'On the Approval of the State Programme of the Russian Federation "Realisation of the State Nationality Policy"'; Decree of



the President of the Russian Federation of 19 December 2012 No. 1666 ‘On the Strategy of State Nationality Policy of the Russian Federation for 2025’.

<sup>68</sup> Law ‘On National Cultural Autonomy’, No. 74-FZ, 17 June 1996. On the Law’s adoption, see Osipov *Natsionalno-Kulturnaya Avtonomiya: Idei, Resheniya, Instituty [National Cultural Autonomy: Ideas, Decisions, Institutions]* (St. Petersburg: Centre for Independent Sociological Research, 2004).

<sup>69</sup> Articles 5(2) and 68(2) of the Russian Constitution.

<sup>70</sup> Malakhov and Osipov, ‘The Category of Minorities in the Russian Federation: A Reflection on Uses and Misuses’, 508.

<sup>71</sup> We should also note that more than half of Russia’s Tatars reside outside Tatarstan,

<sup>72</sup> Chechnya, Chuvashia, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Kalmykia, North Ossetia and Tuva.

<sup>73</sup> See, for example, ‘V Kazani proshel miting za pravo izuchat ‘rodnoi russkii yazyk’ [In Kazan a Meeting took place on the right to learn Russian as a native language], *EurAsia Daily*, 24 April 2017,

<https://eadaily.com/ru/news/2017/04/24/v-kazani-proshel-miting-za-pravo-izuchat-rodnoy-russkiy-yazyk> (accessed 17 July 2018).

<sup>74</sup> ‘Small-in-number’ refers to the fact that each group counts less than 50,000 members.

<sup>75</sup> Resolution of the Government of the Russian Federation ‘On the Unified List of Small-in-Number Indigenous Peoples of the Russian Federation’ (No. 255, 24 March 2000).

<sup>76</sup> See Article 69 of the Russian Constitution, and special laws: Law ‘On Guarantees of the Rights of Small-in-number Indigenous Peoples of the Russian Federation’ (No. 82-FZ, 30 April 1999); Law ‘On the Territories of Traditional Nature Use of the Small-in-Number Indigenous Peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East of the Russian Federation’ (No. 49-FZ, 7 May 2001); and Law ‘On Basic Principles of Community Organization of Small-in-Number Indigenous Peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East of the Russian Federation’ (No. 104-FZ, 20 July 2000).

<sup>77</sup> No. 1666, 19 December 2012.

<sup>78</sup> President of Russia, Address to the National Assembly of the Russian Federation, 12 December 2012,

<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/17118> (accessed 25 June 2018).

<sup>79</sup> Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union*.

<sup>80</sup> The preamble of the Russian Constitution refers to the ‘multinational people [*mnogonatsional’nyi narod*] of the Russian Federation’.

<sup>81</sup> Marlène Laruelle, *In the Name of the Nation* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 196.

There is a tension between civic and ethnic forms of Russian nationalism, with what is presented as ‘civic’ nationalism appearing to conceal ethnic undertones. Helge Blakkisrud, ‘Blurring the Boundary between Civic and Ethnic: The Kremlin’s New Approach to National Identity under Putin’s Third Term’, in *The New Russian Nationalism Imperialism, Ethnicity and Authoritarianism 2000–2015*, ed. Pål Kolstø and Helge Blakkisrud (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 249–74; Prina, *National Minorities in Putin’s Russia: Diversity and Assimilation*.

<sup>82</sup> For example, according to a 2013 survey by the Levada Center, 66% of Russians overall agreed with the slogan ‘Russia for the Russians’, and 71% with ‘Stop Feeding the Caucasus’. See Levada Center, ‘Rossiyane o Migratsii i Mezhnatsional’noi Napryazhennosti’ [Russians about Migrations and Inter-ethnic Tensions], 5 November 2013. The survey’s participants were 1,603 persons from 45 regions of the country, from both urban and rural areas.

<sup>83</sup> Geoffrey Hosking, *Rulers and Victims: The Russians in the Soviet Union* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>84</sup> Slezkine, ‘The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism’.

<sup>85</sup> On this, see Oxana Shevel, ‘Russian Nation-Building from Yel’tsin to Medvedev: Ethnic, Civic or Purposefully Ambiguous?’, *Europe-Asia Studies* 63, no. 2 (2011): 179–202. See also discourses around Russia as a ‘divided nation’. Marlène Laruelle, ‘Russia as a “Divided Nation,” from Compatriots to Crimea: A Contribution to the Discussion on Nationalism and Foreign Policy’, *Problems of Post-Communism* 62, no. 2 (2015): 88–97; Alan Ingram, “‘A Nation Split into Fragments’: The Congress of Russian Communities and Russian Nationalist Ideology”, *Europe-Asia Studies* 51, no. 4 (1999): 687–704.

<sup>86</sup> Even though there have been no clear procedures to recognise particular groups as ethnic groups (or ‘minorities’) in either the Soviet Union or Russia.

<sup>87</sup> Malakhov and Osipov, ‘The Category of Minorities in the Russian Federation: A Reflection on Uses and Misuses’, 509.

<sup>88</sup> For example, (e.g. Art 71(c), 72 (b) of the Constitution).

<sup>89</sup> An exception is the small indigenous peoples, of which a list is provided in official documents.





<sup>90</sup> Malakhov and Osipov, 'The Category of Minorities in the Russian Federation: A Reflection on Uses and Misuses', 504–5.

<sup>91</sup> Malakhov and Osipov, 515.

<sup>92</sup> See note 68.

<sup>93</sup> Malakhov and Osipov, 'The Category of Minorities in the Russian Federation: A Reflection on Uses and Misuses', 516.

<sup>94</sup> Federal Law 'On the Amendment of the Federal Law "On National Cultural Autonomy"', 10 November 2003, No. 136-FZ.

<sup>95</sup> According to Tolz and Harding, '[t]hose who call North Caucasians "migrants" (often unconsciously) evoke the former colonial status of the North Caucasus, the legacy of which the Soviet integrationist project did not overcome.' Vera Tolz and Sue-Ann Harding, 'From "Compatriots" to "Aliens": The Changing Coverage of Migration on Russian Television', *The Russian Review* 74 (2015): 473.

<sup>96</sup> See also Madeleine Reeves, 'Clean Fake: Authenticating Documents and Persons in Migrant Moscow', *American Ethnologist* 40, no. 3 (2013): 508–24.

<sup>97</sup> In fact, persons of Tajik ethnic background resident in Russia can be divided into two main groups: Tajik migrants who have recently (or relatively recently) arrived in Russia, and the established Tajik (sub)communities.

<sup>98</sup> For example, the Preamble of the 1992 Tatarstan Constitution refers to the 'the will of the multinational people [*mnogonatsional'nyi narod*] of the Republic of Tatarstan and the Tatar people [*Tatarskii narod*]', and Art 3(1) states that the sovereignty of the Republic of Tatarstan 'shall lie on its multinational people'.

<sup>99</sup> Project "National Minority Rights and Democratic Political Community: Practices of Non-Territorial Autonomy in Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe" (2014–2017). The research was supported by the Economic and Social Research Council [grant number ES/L007126/1]. In Russia in-depth interviews were carried out between June 2015 and June 2016 in six cities of the Russian Federation. In total 76 persons were interviewed, mostly from minority representative organisations.

<sup>100</sup> The respondent spoke in favour of, in principle, cooperation with international organisations but he rejected some of the (perceived) principles/terminology underlying their instruments, and particularly the expression 'national minority'.

<sup>101</sup> Interview in Kazan, 19 May 2016.

<sup>102</sup> See also Prina, *National Minorities in Putin's Russia: Diversity and Assimilation*.

<sup>103</sup> For example, in the Valdai speech of September 2013 Putin criticised Western multiculturalism as 'compensation for a colonial past', while 'it is unable to guarantee integration into society of persons with other languages and cultures', while Russia naturally developed as a 'poli-ethnic and poli-cultural' society. Speech by V. Putin, Meeting of the International Discussion Club 'Valdai', 19 September 2013 [in Russian]. Available from: [www.kremlin.ru/news/19243](http://www.kremlin.ru/news/19243)

<sup>104</sup> Speech by V. Putin, Meeting of the International Discussion Club 'Valdai', 19 September 2013. See also Robert Horvath, 'The Reinvention of "Traditional Values": Nataliya Narochitskaya and Russia's Assault on Universal Human Rights', *Europe-Asia Studies* 68, no. 5 (2016): 868–93; Tatiana Romanova, 'Russian Challenge to the EU's Normative Power: Change and Continuity', *Europe-Asia Studies* 68, no. 3 (2016): 371–90.

<sup>105</sup> Interview in Kazan, 25 June 2015.

<sup>106</sup> Jackson-Preece, 'Beyond the (Non) Definition of Minority', 9.

<sup>107</sup> Shahram Akbarzadeh, 'Why Did Nationalism Fail in Tajikistan?', *Europe-Asia Studies* 48, no. 7 (1996): 1126.

<sup>108</sup> Tim Epkenhans, *The Origins of the Civil War in Tajikistan Nationalism, Islamism and Violent Conflict in Post-Soviet Space* (London: Lexington Books, 2016), 8.

<sup>109</sup> Sergey Abashin. 'Regionalism v Tadjikistane: stanovlenie "etnicheskogo yazyka"' [Regionalism in Tajikistan: the establishment of the "ethnic language"]. Tsentr Nezavisimykh Sotsiologicheskikh Issledovaniy. Available from: <http://geum.ru/next/art-317453.php>

<sup>110</sup> Akbarzadeh, 'Why Did Nationalism Fail in Tajikistan?', 1107. As a result of these campaigns, whole villages were resettled to more fertile territories to increase the production of cotton. Resettled communities did not engage with their neighbours and often nurtured a feeling of nostalgia for their place of origin, thus, contributing to the isolation of the various communities from one another.

<sup>111</sup> Helge Blakkisrud and Shahnoza Nozimova, 'History Writing and Nation Building in Post-independence Tajikistan', *Nationalities Papers* 38, no. 2 (2010): 175–6.

<sup>112</sup> Emomali Rahmon, 'Pozdravlenie po sluchayu prazdnovaniya prazdnika "Navruz"' [Congratulations on the occasion of the celebration of the holiday "Navruz"]. Official Website of the President of the Republic of Tajikistan. Available from: <http://www.president.tj/ru/node/1408>





- <sup>113</sup> Blakkisrud and Nozimova, 'History Writing and Nation Building in Post-independence Tajikistan', 175.
- <sup>114</sup> Blakkisrud and Nozimova, 179.
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