Nationalism
Lecture 9: Nationalism before, during and after Communism

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Nationalism after the end of the Cold War

- Historical overview: Russian / Soviet case
- Explanations of the Soviet Collapse
- Post-communist nationalism in Eastern Europe
- Post-communist nationalism in the former Soviet Union
Europe on the eve of WWI: Before the collapse of the Russian Empire
Tsarist Empire

- Backward, pre-modern empire
- Thin, cosmopolitan elite on top of unfree peasant masses
- Recurrent conflict with neighbors => Absolutism
- Conquest and “colonization” of East
- Some late attempts to modernize, in terms of “Russification”
The Birth of the Soviet Union

- Defeat in Russo-Japanese war and WWI
- Imperial collapse and civil war 1918-20
- Bolsheviks victorious
- Lenin’s nationality policy compromise:
  - “self-determination” instead of “prison of nations”
  - but long-term goal: nations and classes fading
Europe in 1925 after the creation of the USSR

Colonialism
Stalin’s repression

• Stalin shifts policy toward repression
• Paranoia and extreme centralization imply Russification
• Massive purges of opposition, including nationalist leaders
• “Man-made” starvation in Ukraine
• WWII: explicit use of nationalism: “socialism in one country”
The post-WWII world: the Soviets establish their East European Empire
The Nationalities in the Post-WWII Period

- Stalin’s death in 1953 leads to less repressive nationality policy
- Khrushchev tries to modernize
- Brezhnev cements cultural autonomy
- The economy stagnates
- Little cultural convergence
Gorbachev takes over

• In 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev is elected General Secretary of the Communist Party
• Tries to counter crisis with economic reforms but a more radical political transformation needed:
  – Perestroika
  – Glasnost
  – New foreign policy
Nationalist trouble

• Unanticipated consequences of mobilization

• Nationalist conflict:
  – riots in Kazakhstan in 1986
  – first large demonstrations in Baltic Republics and Armenia in 1988
  – Azeri-Armenian conflict in 1988
  – bloody clash in Georgia in 1989
  – Eastern European revolutions in 1989
  – crackdown in the Baltic region in 1990
  – Russian nationalist opposition under Yeltsin
The collapse of the USSR

- Failed coup attempt in August 1991
- Yeltsin emerges as hero
- Gorbachev sidelined and isolated
- December, establishment of Commonwealth of Independent States, Gorbachev resigns
Post-Cold War Europe after the collapse of the USSR, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia (Germany reunified)
Explanations

• External
  – “Rambo” story
  – Western peace movements

• Metropolitan
  – “Gorby did it!”

• Peripheral
  – Heroic nationalities
A more refined picture

- Reagan’s buildup
- Economic stagnation
- Gorbachev’s Reforms
- Sub-nationalism
- Collapse of the USSR
- Collapse of Warsaw Pact
- New foreign policy
- War in Afghanistan
- Command economy
A comparison with the colonial case

• Marxist-Leninism and modernization theory are both materialist theories of development

• External threats and internal obstacles

• Imperial policies were self-defeating:
  – *Perestroika*: provocation, vacuum, no force
  – *Glasnost*: visibility of nationalism, demonstration effects, communication
Institutional factors, cont’d

• Imperialist legacy: National federalism institutionalized national identities and created state frameworks

• Different treatment of nationalities:
  – Ukraine: “Most-favored-lord” status
  – Baltic Republics and Georgia: Autonomy but few chances to advance beyond republics
  – Central Asia: Colonial pattern
Post-Communist Eastern Europe

• Schöpflin: essentialist pessimism
  – Historical pattern: ethnic nationalism
  – Vacuum, weak civil society, irredentism, ethnic resurgence

• Hroch: constructivist optimism
  – Against “fridge theory”
  – Similarities: vacuum, poor civic education, new minorities
  – But difference: speed, economy, communications but European integration
Post-communist nationalism in the former Soviet Union

• No break-up of Russia!
  – Russia ethnically fragmented (21 republics)
  – Exception Chechnya
  – Explanations:
    • Cultural cohesion?
    • Political repression?
    • Economic factors?
    • Selective fiscal appeasement

• The “near abroad” relatively calm too!