



# The Clash of Internationalisms: Prometheism, National Communism, and the Fate of the Soviet Borderlands, 1889-1939

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The Clash of Internationalisms:  
Prometheism, National Communism, and the Fate of the Soviet Borderlands,  
1889-1939

A dissertation presented

by

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to

The Department of History

in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
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**Abstract**

This dissertation charts an intellectual genealogy of internationalist visions of the reorganization of the imperial Russian space that were frustrated and foreclosed by the emergence of the Soviet Union between 1917 and 1922, surviving and continuing to develop in exile communities around the world as well as at the margins of the ethnofederal system assembled by the Bolsheviks. One thread of the dissertation follows the ethnically and ideologically sundry cast of internationally minded national activists from the late imperial Russian borderlands who collaboratively attempted to create a reformed, decentralized multinational state incorporating structures of autonomy and federation following the February Revolution of 1917, turning to secession and fleeing into exile during the civil war years. The dissertation argues that these borderland activists became disillusioned with the failure of their ambitious reformist visions to cohere yet did not abandon their internationalist pursuits, which endured in emigration through the Eurasian network of the Promethean movement, an anti-Soviet organization assembled and sponsored by the Polish military intelligence staff between the mid-1920s and the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939. The dissertation demonstrates that the failure of constitutional, decentralized alternatives to the Soviet Union to emerge from the generalized imperial crisis of 1917 furnished the impetus for a previously unthinkable alliance between the Promethean exiles, who had favored Russia's renovation up through the October Revolution, and their Polish

patrons, who had advocated the dismemberment of the Romanov realm along national lines since the 1890s. Within the Promethean movement, the exiles, based primarily in Paris, strove to devise frameworks for a future post-Soviet order among borderland nation-states, emphasizing the compatibility of their projects, which included federations and confederations, with the liberal internationalism of the League of Nations. Prometheism's leading Poles, meanwhile, viewed the movement primarily as a means by which to gather friendly elites from the borderlands in the event of a Soviet collapse, which they, from their flagship institutions in Warsaw, sought to accelerate by weaponizing nationalism against the Bolsheviks.

The second major thread of this dissertation covers prominent Tatar and Ukrainian national communists from the borderlands who challenged the limits of national autonomy within the Soviet Union during the 1920s. These challenges, the dissertation argues, arose not merely in response to the constraints of the federal system formalized in 1922 but, more profoundly, stemmed from the deeper disillusionment of these national communists with the failure of their expectations of a decentralized, global community of socialist nations to materialize following the October Revolution and the subsequent unrest that shook Eurasia. These dissenting national communists, moreover, creatively appropriated the Leninist principle of the “right of nations to self-determination, up to and including secession,” imagining an order among liberated nations that would individually enjoy far greater independence in their economic, political, and military affairs than what Lenin had intended and the Soviet Union ultimately allowed. The dissertation contends in a broader and more comparative sense that the cases of the Prometheans and the national communists, two cohorts of internationally minded national activists from the borderlands, demonstrate the intellectually generative function of periods of imperial crisis and

failures of imperial reform in providing the momentum for searches for alternative internationalisms in different places, within different institutional structures, and with different partners. The dissertation thus illustrates that the collapse of ambitions hopes for the radical reorganization of empire, in the Russian and Soviet situations, did not lead to an insular embrace of the nation-state but instead reinvigorated, and reconfigured, the transnational pursuit of alternatives to the allegedly neo-imperial Bolshevik model of ethnic federalism in which nationalism and internationalism were imagined as mutually constitutive.

For my father,  
a working-class hero.

## Acknowledgements

The final months preceding the submission of this dissertation have been a personally unprecedented exercise in marshaling a vast and scattered swathe of writing into as coherent, focused, and outwardly presentable a final product as possible. In funneling my energies into pruning overgrown chapters, regimenting unruly footnotes, and ordering my arguments, I have found a deepened gratitude for the sprawling, luxuriant, and profoundly transnational tangle of people, places, and institutions that sustained the production of this dissertation over the better part of the past three years, if not substantially longer, in many cases. The gradual, circuitous conceptualization and composition of this dissertation would have been inconceivable without the abundant inspiration, support, and patience fielded by a cast of remarkable colleagues, mentors, friends, and loved ones whose uniquely creative influences course through the pages ahead and animate the ideas from which they are woven. The emergence of this network is ultimately what enabled the research, thinking, and writing behind the congealment of my narrative, which recovers the formation of international intellectual webs in more distant times and places.

From the start of my time at Harvard University almost seven years ago, Serhii Plokhii's generosity, compassion, and guidance have sharpened my sense of purpose as a scholar while setting the standard for how I understand the intellectual and emotional work involved in teaching and advising. Serhii has provided me with abundant, insightful feedback on practically all of my writing, and especially this dissertation, while the opportunity to serve alongside him in the classroom over three semesters has convinced me that teaching is absolutely essential to my vocation as a historian. As any of my close relatives can attest, Serhii has not only seen me through the most trying vicissitudes of my years as a doctoral student but has equally imparted



to me a stronger sense of personal and professional direction that will remain with me throughout my life.

I have been exceptionally fortunate to have benefited from the insights of a dissertation committee consisting of historians with an astounding range of accomplishments and expertise. Terry Martin has unfailingly provided me with incisive, stimulating feedback on even the earliest and messiest of drafts while motivating me to repeatedly rethink and improve the framing of my project by engaging with historiographies whose relevance did not originally occur to me. I am grateful to Terry for his encouragement in my searches for fellowships that ended up buying me the crucial additional time to make some of my most important discoveries and, particularly in my final year, develop many of the more inchoate portions of the project more thoroughly. My initial batch of drafts, to say the least, evolved significantly over time, with Terry providing a key impetus for these transformations.

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From the time that I drafted my dissertation prospectus, I have been lucky to work with Alison Frank Johnson, whose early insights into the Galician aspects of my dissertation as well as my coverage of interwar Polish Orientalism have remained in my mind as I put together this project. I am especially thankful for Alison's compassion during a particularly challenging time at the beginning of my studies that truly tested my ability to regain my footing and finally gather the energy to resume my work. Having just recently completed my undergraduate degree, I did not appreciate the importance of finding time for rest and recovery, yet Alison reassured me that I could convalesce and be welcomed back to Harvard once the moment was right.

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abated once I started my undergraduate coursework. For each day that I've known the joy of studying what interests me the most, my father has worked tirelessly and often thanklessly to support our small family, and his devotion and industriousness have motivated me throughout the time that we've had together so far. Without my father's labor, love, and belief in my potential, especially in those times in which I've had little or nothing to show for myself, this project would never have cohered because I would not be here. Thank you, Tato, for making this life possible. I love you and wish you peace and health with all of my heart.

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## **Introduction:**

### **Crisis, disillusionment, displacement, and the making of internationalist ideas in the late imperial Russian and early Soviet spaces**

In late September of 1917, eighty-four delegates hailing from across the former Russian Empire convened at the Pedagogical Museum in Kyiv to partake in a Congress of the Enslaved Nations of Russia hosted by the Ukrainian Central Rada.<sup>1</sup> Earlier that month, the Provisional Government in Petrograd formally rechristened Russia as a democratic “republic” of equal citizens following an apparent coup attempt, yet the Congress’s participants, who represented twelve nationalities and an even broader spectrum of political parties, declared that such a measure was insufficient.<sup>2</sup> Only the creation of a “democratic, federal republic,” the majority of them emphasized, could eliminate the constrictive deadweight of excessive “centralization” on the cultural and socioeconomic “development” of Russia’s mosaic of nationalities, effecting a decisive break with the Tsarist past and founding a system predicated on the “right of nations to self-determination, up to the point of secession and the formation of a separate state.”<sup>3</sup> While the Polish and Lithuanian delegations favored full secession, Mykhailo Hrushevs’kyi, the president of the Central Rada, captured prevailing sentiments when he declared that the former empire should be radically renovated as a “palace of nations in which we can all live freely and well,” stressing that “only federalism can save Russia from its demise.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Z'ïzd Ponevolenykh Narodiv*, ed. O.P. Reyent and B.I. Andrusyshyn (Kyiv: Natsional'na Akademiia Nauk Ukraïny, 1994).

<sup>2</sup> “The Proclamation of a Republic,” in *The Russian Provisional Government, 1917: documents*, volume 3, ed. Robert Paul Browder and Alexander F. Kerensky (Stanford: 1961), 1657-1658.

<sup>3</sup> *Z'ïzd Ponevolenykh Narodiv*, 23; 37; 44-46; 48-51.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 31; 40-41; 56-57.



Over the course of the week, a rough blueprint for Hrushevs'kyi's "palace of nations" took shape as the delegates reported on the military and political situations in their homelands before voting to adopt a program on the future structure of a federalized Russia in which the "borderlands" (*okrainy*) would no longer languish under the "rule of the non-toiling classes of the center" (*tseñtr*).<sup>5</sup> The polity that they sketched out encompassed a loose patchwork of territorial "regions" demarcated on ethnographic lines and complemented by a system of extraterritorial institutions of self-rule for spatially dispersed nationalities and minorities. Each "region" (*krai*) united within this common "state" (*derzhava*) would enjoy extensive autonomy in its internal affairs and maintain a national "constituent assembly," bound to the others by lateral ties to be maintained on a voluntary basis and, apparently, without any coercion from the central authorities.<sup>6</sup> This reconfigured Russia would be endowed with a Kyiv-based "Council of Nations" charged with assembling and subsequently upholding the federation, with each nationality receiving four seats, while a "Council of Nationalities" would monitor and advise the government in Petrograd on matters concerning the non-Russian peoples.<sup>7</sup> Even more urgent was the Congress's insistence that Russia's military should be swiftly "nationalized" and entrusted to the various "democratic-revolutionary national organizations" in order to save the faltering war effort against the Central Powers. Russia and its constituent nationalities, moreover, would champion the cause of "national self-determination" at a future "peace congress," pressing for the inclusion of all of the nationalities of the states

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 49-57.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 49-51.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 53.

involved in the fighting while presenting a revolutionary framework for the resolution of the “national question” to the rest of the world.<sup>8</sup>

In the end, the Congress’s plan for the realization of Hrushevs’kyi’s “palace of nations” was less a comprehensive constitution than it was a creative and ambitious manifesto that envisioned mass-based nationalism as a dynamic phenomenon constitutive of modernity, one to be constructively channeled to mobilize Russia’s latent productive energies and turn the tide of the war. At the same time, the concept of the “right of nations to self-determination” appeared as a central structuring principle for the multinational architecture of Russia and the organization of the wider postwar world, surfacing in the Congress’s published resolutions two months before Vladimir Lenin and Iosif Stalin penned their “Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia” after taking power in Petrograd.<sup>9</sup> More broadly, the Congress itself was a colorful embodiment of the emerging milieu of cross-borderland internationalism, or, put differently, cooperation among internationally minded national activists, that burgeoned during the middle months of 1917, germinating within the fragile enclosure precariously placed between the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II in March and the Bolshevik seizure of power in November.<sup>10</sup> Both of these turning points, better known as the February and October revolutions, according to the Julian calendar, may have unfolded in the capital city of Petrograd, yet it was Kyiv, for a moment in the late summer of that year, that emerged as a focal point in the search for

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 35; 55-56.

<sup>10</sup> See Chapter Two for a detailed reconstruction of the development of collaborative federalist projects in the former Russian Empire during 1917.

a post-Tsarist Russia in which internationalist “fraternity” (*braterstvo*) and “national self-determination” would reinforce one another.<sup>11</sup>

### **Palaces of exile**

Despite its promising beginnings, Hrushevs'kyi's “palace of nations” never materialized on the ground, losing out on the map of Eurasia to the Soviet Union, a far more politically and economically centralized sort of multinational state whose foundations the Bolsheviks forged in the turmoil of the Russian civil wars between 1917 and 1922.<sup>12</sup> Yet even if the Bolsheviks inherited the lion's share of the territory of the former Russian Empire, the story of the “palace of nations” raises the largely neglected question of what subsequently became of the fluid yet vibrant landscape of visions of autonomy and federation that took shape among internationally minded national activists from the borderlands by the eve of the October Revolution. The forms of transnational cooperation and intellectual exchange that were on display at the Congress of the Enslaved Nations of Russia, moreover, demonstrate that the Bolsheviks not only crushed individual national governments in the civil war years but also interrupted the formation of alternative visions of international order that cut across lines of ethnicity, religion, ideology, and geography.<sup>13</sup> This dissertation, though, is not a work of counterfactual history that speculates as to what might have been if projects like the “palace of nations” had enjoyed the time, space, and freedom to

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<sup>11</sup> *Z'izd Ponevolenykh Narodiv*, 22; 39.

<sup>12</sup> On the formation of the Soviet Union and its nationalities policies, see Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005); Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001); *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin*, ed. Ronald Grigor Suny and Martin (Oxford: 2001); Jeremy Smith, *The Bolsheviks and the National Question, 1917-23* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999); Richard Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union: Communism and Nationalism* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1997 [1954]).

<sup>13</sup> For the most recent and capacious treatment of the civil war years, which incorporates detailed discussions of the borderland nation-states, see Jonathan Smele, *The “Russian” Civil Wars, 1916-1926: Ten Years That Shook the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2016).

mature beyond the incipient plans drawn up in Kyiv in September of 1917. Instead, it charts the uprooted, spatially diffuse afterlives of the frustrated internationalist visions of imperial reordering that were foreclosed by the rise of the Soviet Union, asking where and how such projects for the reorganization of the imperial Russian space continued to develop as their creators fled into exile in the interwar period.<sup>14</sup> It argues, most fundamentally, that the pursuit of an internationalist framework for the configuration of nationalism and nationhood across the Soviet borderlands did not end in 1917 or 1922 but persisted in other places and by other means, undergoing formative transformations not only in its intellectual content but, just as importantly, in its geographical and institutional structures. The civil war years and their interwar aftermaths, it suggests, witnessed not only a clash of “Red,” “White,” and local nationalist projects but, importantly, a clash of internationalisms with its intellectual roots in the time of the Second International (1889 to 1916).

The lines of inquiry taken up in this dissertation respond, most immediately, to promising threads in the recent historiography of the interplay of internationalist and nationalist ideas in the late Russian Empire, the early Soviet Union, and their worldwide exile communities. On one hand, scholars have shown that the Bolshevik paradigm of ethnic federalism adopted by Lenin and Stalin in late January of 1918 was likely not an original innovation but a model appropriated from their more moderate and popular Socialist Revolutionary allies, who sent a three-man delegation

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<sup>14</sup> Recent studies of intellectual activity among interwar exiles from the borderlands, namely Ukraine and the Caucasus, include Hiraoki Kuromiya and Georges Mamoulia, *Russia, The Caucasus and Japan, 1904-1945* (Berlin: 2016); *II Rzeczpospolita wobec ruchu prometejskiego*, ed. Paweł Libera (Warsaw: Centralne Archiwum Wojskowe Instytut Polski i Muzeum im. gen. Sikorskiego, 2013); *Kavkazskaia Konfederatsiia v ofitsial'nykh deklaratsiakh, tainoi perezpiske I sekretnykh dokumentakh dvizheniia "Prometei". Sbornik doukmentov*, ed. Georges Mamoulia (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo sotsial'no-politicheskaia mysl', 2012), 6-40. Chris Gilley, *The 'Change of Signposts' in the Ukrainian Emigration: A Contribution to the History of Sovietophilism in the 1920s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); Touraj Atabaki, *Iran and the First World War: Battleground of the Great Powers* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006).

to the Congress of the Enslaved Nations of Russia and had devised detailed plans for the decentralization of Russia along national lines as early as 1902.<sup>15</sup> In other words, the Bolsheviks may have shuttered the democratically elected Constituent Assembly but, it seems, did not forget to take with them the federalist programs of the Socialist Revolutionaries, whose leader, Viktor Chernov, had just recently been striving to establish a “Russian Democratic Federative Republic” grounded in a “brotherhood of nations” that would set a powerful example for the rest of the world.<sup>16</sup> From this point of view, Bolshevik federalism, though triumphant in retrospect, appears as just one possible thread emerging from the internationalist intellectual ferment of 1917, if not the much longer history of plans for the administrative and economic rearrangement of the lands and peoples of the Russian Empire that, as Mark von Hagen shows, extends into the early nineteenth century.<sup>17</sup>

A related current offers an essential complement to this view of Bolshevik federalism developed in recent years by Elizabeth White, who has demonstrated that the expulsion of the Socialist Revolutionaries from Russia during the civil wars did not truncate their intellectual output but, on the contrary, gave it new life, especially in Chernov’s headquarters in interwar Prague.<sup>18</sup> White, in particular, advances the argument that Chernov’s ideas about the “national question” in the former Russian

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<sup>15</sup> Ivan Sablin and Alexander Semyonov, “Autonomy and Decentralization in the Global Imperial Crisis: The Russian Empire and the Soviet Union in 1905–1924,” *Modern Intellectual History* 17.2 (2020); 543-560; Tanja Pentec and Sablin, “Soviet federalism from below: The Soviet Republics of Odessa and the Russian Far East, 1917–1918,” *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 11.1 (2020); 40-52; Jeffrey Kahn, *Federalism, Democratization, and the Rule of Law in Russia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 71.

<sup>16</sup> *Vserossiiskoe Uchreditel’noe sobranie. Stenograficheskii otchet*, ed. T.K. Khorunzhaia (Kyiv: Arbis, 1991), 9-11.

<sup>17</sup> Mark von Hagen, “Federalisms and Pan-movements: Re-imagining Empire,” in *Russian Empire: Space, People, Power, 1700-1930* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), ed. Jane Burbank, von Hagen, and Anatolyi Remnev, 494-510.

<sup>18</sup> Elizabeth White, *The Socialist Alternative to Soviet Russia: The Socialist Revolutionary Party, 1921-39* (London: Routledge, 2010).

Empire evolved significantly over the 1920s, incorporating the view that the non-Russian nationalities, namely the Ukrainians, would now best be served by full independence rather than membership in a multinational federation. This position reflected the anti-Bolshevik aversion of most Ukrainian exiles, including those in Prague, to shared statehood with ethnic Russians, yet Chernov still believed that the resulting nation-states would be able to closely cooperate as a voluntary family of equal peoples, founding, to this end, a Socialist League of the New East that briefly functioned between 1927 and 1929.<sup>19</sup> Most fellow Socialist Revolutionaries, however, were appalled by Chernov's embrace of independence because they desired a return to the "Russian Democratic Federative Republic" of early 1918, spurring intense deliberations over the question of how to rework relations among the nationalities of the Soviet Union in the event of a Bolshevik collapse, which the Socialist Revolutionary exiles considered to be more than probable.<sup>20</sup> The key point here, to draw upon White, is that paying attention to the ideas of exiles is rewarding because it offers a vital lens into the continuation of revolutionary and civil war-era debates outside of the Soviet Union, allowing for the recovery of the otherwise forgotten "blueprints" that figures like Chernov still enthusiastically put together while abroad in the sincere hope that the foundation of the Soviet system would prove a fleeting phenomenon and open the way for dramatic transformations.<sup>21</sup> The sense that exiles were external to the nascent Soviet Union, in other words, was not as strong in the interwar years as it might later have become, primarily because the survival of

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<sup>19</sup> *Idem.*, "The Socialist Revolutionary Party, Ukraine, and Russian National Identity in the 1920s," *The Russian Review* 66.4 (October 2007); 549-567.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Idem.*, *The Socialist Alternative*, 145-148.

Bolshevik rule, and especially the success of its economic and nationalities policies, was far from self-evident as late as 1939.

### **Internationalism in exile: the Promethean movement**

Much as White's study places dominant Bolshevik ideas about nationality and economic organization in a critical, comparative perspective, showing the possibility of alternatives elaborated in exile, I argue that uprooted national activists from the late imperial Russian borderlands continued to pursue visions of cross-borderland internationalism in urban colonies across Eurasia throughout the interwar period. The exiles at the center of my narrative, among them Ukrainian Social Democrats, Georgian Mensheviks, and Azeri Müsavatis, had in common that they did not abandon internationalist ideas when they declared independence from Russia amid deepening chaos in 1918, though the kinds of international order that they imagined after that point generally privileged the sovereign nation-state as the basic juridical, political, and economic unit for the reorganization of the Soviet Union following its anticipated collapse.<sup>22</sup> These exiles, importantly, had all been deeply involved in negotiating the terms of autonomy and federation for Russia's nationalities prior to the October Revolution, generally viewing the continuing integration of the imperial Russian space as preferable to outright secession, believing that the former Romanov autocracy would be definitively replaced with constitutionalism and that Russia, despite its alleged backwardness, could undergo the kinds of supposedly universal socioeconomic development that the industrial powers of Europe and North America had already witnessed. Unlike the Bolsheviks, who claimed to be building a unique socialist society, the more moderate Social Democrats and progressive liberals, like the Socialist Revolutionaries, looked to the United States, the settler dominions of the

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<sup>22</sup> See Chapter Two for a detailed discussion of the frustration of reformist and federalist ambitions within these groupings.

British Empire, Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Switzerland for the territorial structures with which they hoped to accommodate Russia's dizzying national plurality while freeing the latent productive power stifled under Tsarism.<sup>23</sup>

I contend, however, that it was precisely the frustration of these historical prognoses and developmental expectations after 1917 that drove a deepening sense of disillusionment among these internationally minded national activists with Russia's ability to undergo supposedly healthy forms of social progress as well as the viability of their earlier quests for autonomy within a multinational state. For Noe Zhordania, the leader of the Georgian Menshevik emigration, the rise of Bolshevism had illustrated that the collectivist mode of production of the ethnically Russian lands of northeastern Europe had spawned a deviant, ultimately neo-imperial political movement that was essentially different from the "democratic" models that cohered in the "smallholding" borderlands.<sup>24</sup> Zhordania, who had long favored a modest kind of extraterritorial autonomy for the different nationalities of an economically united Caucasus, soon espoused the thesis that all multinational empires were bound to cleave along national lines, a phenomenon that had already played out in the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empire but which the Bolsheviks had artificially obstructed.<sup>25</sup> Crucially, however, neither Zhordania nor his fellow Caucasian, Ukrainian, and Central Asian exiles believed that the transition from empire to nation-

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<sup>23</sup> For a sampling of federalist projects among these Ukrainian, Georgian, and Azeri activists, see Mykailo Hrushevs'kyi, *Iakoï avtonomii i federatsii khoche Ukraïna* (Vienna: Soiuz vyzvolennia Ukraïny, 1917); Mykola Porsh, *Avtonomiia Ukraïny i sotsial'demokratiia* (Kyiv: "Znattia - to syla," 1917); *Programma Tiurkskoï Demokraticheskoi Partii Federalistov "Musavat" (priniataia v 1917 godu 26 oktiabria na pervom partiinom s'ezde v Baku). Perevod s tiurkskogo. Baku, 1919*. Obtained at <https://www.ourbaku.com/index.php/> Програма\_Тюркской\_ДП\_Федералистов\_«Мусават»; Stephen F. Jones, *Socialism in Georgian Colors: The European Road to Social Democracy, 1883-1917* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 2005), 67-68; 266. On the Russian Socialist Revolutionaries, see Sablin and Semyonov, "Decentralization and Autonomy."

<sup>24</sup> Noe Zhordania, *Bol'shevizm* (Berlin: Tsentral'nyi Komitet Sotsial-Demokraticheskoi Rabochei Partii Gruzii, 1922); idem., *Nashi raznoglasii* (Paris: 1928), 20-23.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 43-48.



statehood foreclosed the possibility or desirability of close cooperation among the resulting nation-states.<sup>26</sup> If anything, a future Soviet breakup would have to be saved from the same fate that befell the embattled Tsarist empire at the hands of the Bolsheviks, necessitating collaboration among the emancipated borderlands in order to ensure their survival and keep a potentially resurgent Russia at bay. At the same time, leaving the Russian and Soviet multinational states, for exiles like Zhordania, meant finding an alternative, positive framework of international order, such as the liberal internationalist institutions of the League of Nations and the “civilized” world that it represented.<sup>27</sup>

What all of these internationally minded exiles had in common was not only their belief that nation-statehood was only possible within some wider community but, between 1926 and 1939, their close engagement in an internationalist movement specifically created for the “oppressed peoples” of the Soviet Union. Known as the Promethean movement (*ruch prometejski*), this Eurasian network of anti-Soviet exiles initially arose as an alliance between Caucasian and Ukrainian activists in Paris, among them Zhordania and his Azeri contemporary Mammad Amin Rasulzadeh, and military intelligence agents aligned with Poland’s former Head of State and reinstated dictator, Józef Piłsudski.<sup>28</sup> Prometheism’s basic thesis, which appealed to a colorful cross-section of non-Russian exiles based in cities from Helsinki to Harbin, was that only the unity of the “oppressed peoples” under the yoke of Moscow could break

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<sup>26</sup> Here, I am drawing upon Adom Getachew’s apt formulation in *Worldmaking After Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), 3-4.

<sup>27</sup> Chapter Four illustrates the exiles’ shift towards seeking integration into the “civilized” world, chiefly through the League of Nations. Their embrace of liberal internationalist ideas is also discussed in detail.

<sup>28</sup> Excellent overviews, focusing on the major Promethean centers in Warsaw and Paris, respectively, include Paweł Libera, “Zarys historyczny,” in *II Rzeczpospolita* and Mamoulia, “Predislovie,” in *Kavkazskaia Konfederatsiia*.

Bolshevik rule and lay the groundwork for a post-Soviet order in the borderlands.<sup>29</sup> Though often presented as a uniquely Polish phenomenon, which is how its founders framed it, Prometheism, I argue, is reflective of the more general interwar tendency of ethnically non-Russian exiles to form alliances with state and military patrons in countries with histories of geopolitical rivalry with Russia and the Soviet Union, chief among them not only Poland but also Germany and Japan.<sup>30</sup> It was the rise of such alignments, which would have been largely unthinkable prior to the ascent of the Bolsheviks, that furnished much of the material and logistical infrastructure for the production and dissemination of nationalist and internationalist ideas among borderland exiles in the interwar years. This intellectually generative function, however, was never the first or only preoccupation of the statesmen and military elites who sponsored exiles primarily for the strategic purpose of having allies to install in the borderlands following a Soviet collapse, as the Nazis tried to do through the *Ostministerium* during Operation Barbarossa in 1941.<sup>31</sup>

Despite its structural similarities with parallel German and Japanese projects, Prometheism stands out historically because nearly all of the exiles that it gathered together had, like Zhordania, been deeply involved in trying to reform the Russian Empire in 1917, subsequently turning to an understanding of international order grounded in the nation-state but never giving up on the necessity of cooperation among the borderlands as well as their integration into bodies such as the League of

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<sup>29</sup> Edmund Charaszkiewicz, "1940, 12 luty - Referat o zagadnieniu prometejskim," in *Zbiór dokumentów pplk. Edmunda Charaszkiewicza* (Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, 2000), ed. Andrzej Grzywacz, Marcin Kwiecień, Grzegorz Mazur, 56-60.

<sup>30</sup> Kuromiya and Mamoulia, *The Eurasian Triangle*; Ralph Schattkowsky, "Between Science and Politics: Włodzimierz Bączkowski and the Polish Eastern Europe Research," in *History and Politics Remembrance as Legitimation*, ed. Katarzyna Kačka and Ralph Schattkowsky (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017), 231-248.

<sup>31</sup> Enver Altaylı, *A Dark Path to Freedom Ruzi Nazar, from the Red Army to the CIA* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

Nations. Such a profile hardly fits all of the exiles who left Russia's borderlands during the civil wars, making the Prometheans, in my view, a distinct and self-selected cohort of intellectuals, activists, soldiers, and revolutionaries who shared the general sense that nationalism and internationalism were mutually constitutive. For this reason, I describe them as internationally minded national activists to distinguish them from their more narrowly and aggressively nationalist contemporaries while trying to capture their own enduring, and also evolving, sense of the fundamental interdependence between nation-states, as vessels of modernity, and a wider international structure for their organization.<sup>32</sup> I likewise argue in this dissertation that nations, for most of the Promethean exiles, were not merely static ethnic formations but dynamic, developmental structures moving through trajectories of historical time and stages of progress according to some discernible rhythms.<sup>33</sup> I contribute to the existing historiography of Prometheism the interpretation that the movement was, most fundamentally, premised on the developmental argument that the non-Russian peoples of the borderlands were artificially deprived, both by the Tsars and the Bolsheviks, of their rightful paths to the attainment of nation-statehood and their entry into the world of "civilized" European nations.<sup>34</sup> Even "Eastern" (*wschodnie*) peoples, from as far afield as Central Asia and Siberia, were integrated into the Promethean model by eager national activists who argued that they possessed the right

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<sup>32</sup> In highlighting the mutually constitutive relationship between nationalist and internationalist ideas, I am drawing upon Glenda Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013) and *Internationalisms: A Twentieth-Century History*, ed. Glenda Sluga and Patricia Clavin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

<sup>33</sup> My study draws upon and complements another work that traces changing ideas of historical time and nationhood, Brian Porter, *When Nationalism Began to Hate: Imagining Modern Politics in Nineteenth-Century Poland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>34</sup> The importance of developmental ideas to the Promethean movement is largely absent from Libera, "Zarys," Mamoulia, "Predislovie," and the classic pre-1989 work, Sergiusz Mikulicz, *Prometeizm w polityce II Rzeczypospolitej* (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1971).

prerequisites, such as private property ownership and a history of struggle against Russian rule, for the eventual formation of nation-states within the norms of the “civilized” world.<sup>35</sup> Importantly, the Prometheans were distinctively selective anti-imperialists, portraying their fate as uniquely intolerable because their “civilized” homelands were being plundered by a savage empire while, on the whole, fielding few substantive criticisms of the major European maritime empires of the day.<sup>36</sup>

While Prometheism won no open battles and scored no territory for either Poland or the governments-in-exile from the borderlands, I demonstrate that it was most prolific in generating one of the most voluminous, interdisciplinary bodies of writing on the Soviet Union, and the possibilities for a post-Soviet internationalism, during the interwar years.<sup>37</sup> It was, I argue, the movement’s concept of a capacious alliance of the borderlands, namely without and against an ethnically defined Russia, that most vividly embodied the intellectual shift from the reformist projects of autonomy and federation that prevailed up through 1917 to the new frameworks for a community of nation-states that prevailed by the 1920s. In devising plans for a post-Soviet “Caucasian Confederation” to be shared with the League of Nations, for instance, the Parisian Prometheans consciously denounced the existing Transcaucasian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic created by the Bolsheviks, insisting that their home region deserved a much more decentralized, consensual, and “civilized” pact among equal nations that reflected the supposedly voluntary, egalitarian spirit of the League of Nations rather than the tyrannical stranglehold of Moscow. The federal

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<sup>35</sup> See Chapter Four for a detailed discussion of the “East” in Promethean ideas.

<sup>36</sup> This point is also discussed in Chapter Four.

<sup>37</sup> Here, I am building on Marek Kornat, *Polska szkoła sowietologiczna: 1930-1939* (Kraków: Arcana, 2003) and Schattkowsky, *Osteuropaforschung in Polen 1918-1939* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2019).

organization of Switzerland, meanwhile, served as the Parisian Prometheans' preferred way of explaining the history, ethnography, and future direction of the Caucasus to Western audiences, a technique that their Polish sponsors had adopted in presenting the territories between the Baltic and Black Seas as distinct from "Russia proper" starting in the 1890s.<sup>38</sup>

Defining the cross-borderland alliance at the heart of Prometheism, crucially, meant establishing what it was not, mainly by presenting Russia, and specifically the ethnically Russian lands of European Russia, as Eurasia's heart of darkness. While Promethean propaganda publications often recycled familiar tropes of Muscovite despotism and its Mongol origins, the Promethean corpus of knowledge concerning Russian history, economics, and political culture actually displayed some nuance, particularly in the swathes of that literature that were published by the movement's principal research institutions in Warsaw and Wilno (today's Vilnius).<sup>39</sup> Anticipating some of the features of post-1945 Sovietological "think tanks" in the West, Promethean centers of knowledge production were directly involved in what I describe as Poland's interwar "arms race" to find means of exploiting the ethnic heterogeneity of the Soviet Union.<sup>40</sup> The search for ways of weaponizing nationalism against the Bolsheviks, which Jan Jacek Bruski partly describes in his book on the Polish-Soviet "cold war" of the 1920s, was not only a focal point of Prometheism's intellectual activities in the interwar period but grew out of the longer, pre-1914 preoccupation of Piłsudski's camp with catalyzing national revolutions in the Russian

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<sup>38</sup> The idea of an Eastern European "Switzerland" arises in Chapter One, while the Caucasian counterpart is discussed in Chapter Four.

<sup>39</sup> See Ireneusz Piotr Maj, *Działalność Instytutu Wschodniego w Warszawie 1926-1939* (Warszawa: Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, 2007); Kornat, *Polska szkoła*; Schattkowsky, *Osteuropaforschung*.

<sup>40</sup> See the Epilogue for a discussion of post-1939 continuities.

and Soviet borderlands.<sup>41</sup> As the Prometheans in Warsaw appreciated, however, nationalism could not be turned against Moscow at will, making it essential to holistically study the geopolitics, history, economics, and ethnography of the Soviet colossus in an effort to anticipate when the next great “conjuncture” (*konjunktura*) of generalized crisis would strike.<sup>42</sup>

For the Prometheans in Paris, chief among them Zhordania, the arrival of such a “conjuncture” could potentially destabilize the Bolsheviks and enable the emergence of more “democratic” currents within Russia, allowing Georgia, along with the other borderland countries, to regain the independence that they had lost in the civil wars and expand the reach of liberal internationalism across Eurasia.<sup>43</sup> For those in Warsaw, meanwhile, the prospect of a “conjuncture” that would throw the Bolsheviks off balance, whether in a foreign war or an economic crisis, provided a source of hope that a Poland increasingly eclipsed by both Germany and the Soviet Union might be able to reemerge from the chaos as a “great power,” sometimes characterized as a continental British Empire, with Ukraine in its orbit.<sup>44</sup> For both of these two major cohorts within the movement, the “national revolution” that had crashed against Tsarism and its Bolshevik successors in 1917 remained unfinished, with the earlier “conjuncture” of 1904 to 1921, as Leon Wasilewski described it, informing their

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<sup>41</sup> Jan Jacek Bruski, *Between Prometheism and Realpolitik: Poland and Soviet Ukraine, 1921-1926* (Kraków: Jagiellonian University Press, 2016).

<sup>42</sup> See Chapter Four on Promethean geopolitical ideas.

<sup>43</sup> Zhordania, *Nashi raznoglasiia*, 43-48.

<sup>44</sup> Włodzimierz Bączkowski, “Jaki ma być polski nacjonalizm?,” *Biuletyn polsko-ukraiński* 6.27 (1937); 1-3. On the broader subject of Polish “great power” ambitions in the interwar period, see Lech Wyszczelski, *Polska mocarstwowa: Wizje i koncepcje obozów politycznych II Rzeczypospolitej* (Warszawa: Bellona, 2015).

expectations for a coming Soviet collapse.<sup>45</sup> Prometheism, in sum, embodied the major structural shifts in the geographical and institutional architecture of internationalist and nationalist ideas in and around the borderlands of the former imperial Russian space between the start of the civil wars and the outbreak of the Second World War.

### **National communist connections**

As White demonstrates in her account of the ideas of the Socialist Revolutionary circles in Prague, a straightforward story of outward emigration from the embattled imperial Russian space does not capture the full complexity of how exiles thought about the Soviet system, whose internal developments they closely followed and attempted to interpret as they formulated their own plans for a non-Bolshevik future.<sup>46</sup> In the case of Prometheism, both the exiles and their Polish patrons were convinced, justifiably into the early 1920s, that Bolshevism was a renewed form of ethnic Russian domination over the borderlands that conveniently clothed itself in the outward trappings of proletarian internationalism. At the same time, Prometheans took a sustained interest in the ethnically non-Russian national communists, whether Bolshevik or otherwise, who operated within the Soviet Union in the 1920s, especially when these national communists sparked controversies for excessively challenging the limits of national decentralization within the federal system or transgressing upon the boundaries of “party discipline.”<sup>47</sup> The national communists who most often intrigued the Prometheans were those, like Andriy Richyts’kyi of the

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<sup>45</sup> Leon Wasilewski, *Kwestja ukraińska jako zagadnienie międzynarodowe* (Warszawa: Drukarnia Piotr Pysz i Skład, 1934), 142-143.

<sup>46</sup> White, *The Socialist Alternative*.

<sup>47</sup> E. Zaboula, “Discussion sur l’oppression coloniale,” *Le Prométhée* 27 (February 1929); 10-14. Wasilewski, “‘Samookreślenie’ narodów byłej Rosji,” “Ruchy separatystyczne Kaukazu i Turkiestanu,” in *Sprawy narodowościowe w teroży i w życiu* (Wydawnictwo J. Mortkowicza, 1929).

non-Bolshevik Ukrainian Communist Party (UKP), who criticized Bolshevism as an outgrowth of Russian political culture that was essentially reproducing the inequities of pre-1917 Tsarist “imperialism” and “colonialism” in internationalist garb.<sup>48</sup>

Bolshevism, in other words, allegedly masqueraded as a universal form of communism despite its deep roots in the history and mode of production of ethnic Russians, who, in Richyts’kyi’s view, were the dominant nationality of the Soviet Union. The disbandment and marginalization of groupings like the UKP during the 1920s was, for the Prometheans, proof not only of nationalist currents behind Soviet lines but also the essentially Russian, Russifying quality of the Bolsheviks.<sup>49</sup>

Thinking comparatively about the structural conditions that made Prometheism possible in the interwar period, I propose in this dissertation that the frustrations of national communists such as Richyts’kyi with the constraints of post-1922 Soviet federalism stemmed from the failure of their own ambitious civil war-era visions of an international community of socialist nations to take shape. More precisely, the longstanding Leninist principle of the “right of nations to self-determination, up to the point of secession” elicited creative interpretations from national communists who envisioned a far more decentralized order than what had actually been meant by Lenin, a strong proponent of the continuing integrity of the Russian “great state” (*krupnoe gosudarstvo*) as a necessary condition for the construction of socialism.<sup>50</sup> Lenin, in

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<sup>48</sup> The most notable English-language treatments of these national communists include Alexandre Bennigsen, *Muslim National Communism in the Soviet Union: A Revolutionary Strategy for the Colonial World*, trans. S. Enders Wimbush (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979); Matthieu Renault, “The Idea of Muslim National Communism: On Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev,” *Viewpoint Magazine* (23 March 2015), <https://www.viewpointmag.com/2015/03/23/the-idea-of-muslim-national-communism-on-mirsaid-sultan-galiev/>; Glenn L. Roberts, *Commissar and Mullah: Soviet-Muslim Policy from 1917 to 1924* (Boca Raton: Dissertation.com, 1990); and Stephen Velychenko, *Painting Imperialism and Nationalism Red: The Ukrainian Marxist critique of Russian communist rule in Ukraine, 1918-1925* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015).

<sup>49</sup> Velychenko, *Painting Imperialism and Nationalism Red*, 1-18.

<sup>50</sup> See Chapter Two for a detailed discussion of Lenin’s concept of national self-determination.



other words, had intended the “right of nations to self-determination” as a way of accepting that bourgeois nation-states might temporarily break away from Russia during capitalist development, though his expectation was that the international proletariat would voluntarily reassemble the “great state” under socialism.<sup>51</sup> National communists associated with the Bolsheviks, such as Vasyl’ Shakhrai, Serhii Mazlakh, and Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev, however, embraced this canonical tenet of Leninist thought as the basis for the creation of a post-Tsarist and, globally, post-imperial family of socialist nations that would enjoy broad self-rule in political and economic terms, if not complete statehood. Sultan-Galiev, in my reading, had believed in a coming revolution in the colonial world, one in which his native Tatarstan would assume a leading part as the most industrialized, proletarian majority-Muslim country.<sup>52</sup> Shakhrai, Mazlakh, and their intellectual successors in the UKP, meanwhile, counted on a revolution in industrialized Europe in which a socialist Ukraine would stand independently and on par with a liberated Russia and an emancipated Germany.<sup>53</sup>

As both of these visions failed to materialize by 1922, Sultan-Galiev and the UKP found themselves wrangling with Bolshevik leaders, both within their own republics and on the all-Union level, over the structure of Soviet federalism, which they found to be far too centralized and dangerously constrictive of local autonomy for the

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<sup>51</sup> Lenin, “Sotsial’isticheskaia revoliutsiia i pravo natsii na samoopredelenie,” in *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii*, volume 27 (Moscow: Institut Marksizma-Leninizma, 1969), 255-258.

<sup>52</sup> Vasyl’ Shakhrai and Serhii Mazlakh, *Do khvyli. Shcho diyet’sia na Ukraïni i z Ukraïnoiu* (Saratov: 1919), 33-35; *Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev*: ed. I.G. Gizzatullin and D.R. Sharafutdinov (Kazan’: Izdatel’stvo “Gasyr”, 1998), 10-11; 47-49; *Kak i pochemu Ispolkom Kominternu raspustil UKP* (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo “Proletarii”, 1925), 8-10.

<sup>53</sup> Shakhrai and Mazlakh, 25-30.

ethnically non-Russian workers and peasants.<sup>54</sup> Based on this observation, which, from my reading, has not yet appeared in the relevant historiography, I suggest that Prometheism can be best understood as the product of the unsuccessful reformist visions of the February Revolution, while national communists like Sultan-Galiev represented the small cohort of pre-*korenizatsiia* borderland Bolsheviks whose ambitious, anti-imperial expectations for the October Revolution went unfulfilled. For Prometheans and national communists alike, the Soviet Union became not the embodiment of liberation but, on the contrary, a source of disillusionment and a retreat from the far more decentralized international orders on which they had wagered in their respective revolutionary moments. With this context taken into account, the dissident national communists, who were prominently disciplined by representatives of the *korenizatsiia*-era establishment such as Mykola Skrypnyk in the 1920s, should be remembered not for their seemingly petty quarrels over the economic planning privileges of Tatarstan or Ukraine but, more significantly, for the possibilities of international proletarian and anti-colonial revolutions whose failures were the real causes of their dissatisfaction and dissent. All the same, these controversies over the acceptable contours of national communism demonstrated that the “forms of nationhood,” as Terry Martin calls them, mattered to figures such as Sultan-Galiev and Rychyts’kyi, who were deeply unhappy with what they saw as the alienation of their native borderlands from their own productive energies and political futures.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> *Kak i pochemu*; Sultan-Galiev, “Vystuplenie na zasedanii Soveta natsional’nostei o predostavlenii avtonomiiam ékonomicheskikh svobod,” in *Izbrannye trudy*, 390; Idem., “Vystuplenie na zasedanii fraktsii RKP(b) X Vserossiiskogo s’ezda Sovetov,” in *Izbrannye trudy*, 409-410.

<sup>55</sup> See Chapter Four for a fuller account of these disputes.

Where national communism truly begins to grow entangled with Prometheism, however, is in the Polish-Soviet struggles over the allegiances and identities of East Slavic peasants and workers in the eastern borderlands of the interwar Second Polish Republic.<sup>56</sup> As Bruski describes it, a “cold war” between the Prometheans and the Bolsheviks was waged across these territories through espionage, infiltration, and attempts at mobilizing national and class grievances, with the Ukrainian and Belarusian Bolsheviks funding cross-border communist movements that, in the mid-1920s, formed alliances with local left-wing nationalist organizations friendly to the westward spread of Soviet power.<sup>57</sup> From roughly 1923 to 1928, the Bolsheviks arguably managed to outpace and outmaneuver even the Polish government in Warsaw in dictating the terms of Ukrainian and Belarusian nation-building in parts of the eastern borderlands, with hundreds of thousands of local peasants joining the momentarily legal, mass-based groupings aligned with the underground communist cells backed by Minsk and Kharkiv. I argue, however, that these developments were hardly unqualified successes from the point of view of the Bolsheviks, who had wished to cultivate a proletarian following within Poland and, in 1927, faced a major row over the alleged ideological deviations of Oleksandr Shums’kyi in which the leadership of the Communist Party of Western Ukraine (KPZU) clashed with Skrypnyk and had to be dramatically reorganized.<sup>58</sup> Although Stalin had recognized the possibility of folding national liberation into the cause of social revolution as early as the civil war years, when Sultan-Galiev had risen as a champion of colonial liberation and even formed ethnically Tatar units of the Red Army, I conclude that the

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<sup>56</sup> This entanglement is the primary subject of Chapter Five.

<sup>57</sup> Bruski, *Between Prometheism and Realpolitik*.

<sup>58</sup> Janusz Radziejowski, *The Communist Party of Western Ukraine, 1919-1929*, trans. Alan Rutkowski (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 1983).

Bolsheviks were, on balance, considerably cautious in their use of weaponized nationalism in the borderlands, where ideological heterodoxy always posed a serious peril.

Though eager to exploit the weaknesses of foreign colonial empires, Lenin and Stalin clearly privileged the preservation of the “great state” at home in the interwar years and knew that contracting national communists in the Soviet borderlands carried operational risks. With this in mind, Lenin and Stalin developed a federal system that would attempt to reconcile the “right of nations to self-determination” with the economic and political necessity of maintaining the “great state” inherited from the Tsars, all but eliminating the possibility of borderland secession from the Soviet Union while developing structures to accommodate the potentially disruptive developmental energies of modern nationalism that they had anticipated even before the First World War. The Prometheans in Poland, by contrast, struggled to find a territorial paradigm that would insulate the country from cross-border Soviet influences and, in spite of cultivating a vast network of exiles, faced a losing battle throughout the interwar period in their limited efforts at securing the borderlands. Meanwhile, I sense that the Prometheans tended to underestimate the progress made by the Bolsheviks in protecting the integrity of the “great state” from weaponized nationalism, particularly during the years of *korenizatsiia*, which witnessed the introduction of policies that helped to deny the Promethean “conjuncture” hoped for in Warsaw and Paris up through the outbreak of the Second World War. What I suggest, in this sense, was that the Prometheans and Bolsheviks were faced with the challenge of finding ways not only of weaponizing nationalism but also demobilizing, containing, and structuring it.

## **Internationalism and imperial crisis**

The emergence of Prometheism and national communism, this dissertation shows, took place not simply because of a preordained collision between nationalism and empire but, more precisely, because of the failure of visions of international order to cohere during moments of revolution and imperial crisis, giving rise to forms of disillusionment and displacement that proved to be highly generative of alternative, post- and anti-imperial configurations of internationalist ideas and institutions. In the case of the Promethean exiles prior to the civil wars, broad social, political, and economic transformations that would empower the borderlands seemed not only possible but desirable within a post-imperial, multinational Russia governed by a constitutional order and structured by a decentralized system of administration. Russia and its constituent nationalities, in this vision, would assemble structures of autonomy and federation according to models tested in the historical experiences of Western Europe and North America, supposedly eliminating the longstanding developmental malaise caused by immoderate centralization.<sup>59</sup> Though far from creating Hrushevs'kyi's "palace of nations" in practice, the future Prometheans who led autonomous national and regional authorities in Ukraine, the Caucasus, the Volga region, and Central Asia nevertheless experienced the end of autocracy as a vital and emboldening change that opened unprecedented space for experiments in decentralization. The rise of the Bolsheviks, however, replaced the fairly distant and, on the ground, spotty rule of the Provisional Government with a far more militant and determined kind of regime that, in January of 1918, declared its commitment to cleansing the borderlands of "bourgeois" governments that, in practice, included many more moderate Social Democrats and Socialist Revolutionaries. When the

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<sup>59</sup> Sablin and Semyonov, "Decentralization and Autonomy."

Prometheans later denounced the Soviet Union as an “empire” while in exile, they were not simply repeating a tired trope but, on the contrary, articulating a genuine frustration with the derailment of the initially promising February Revolution.<sup>60</sup>

The experience of the Prometheans and national communists, I argue, belongs to a wider, global story of alternative internationalisms that grew from disappointment with perceived failures of imperial reform and restructuring which, between the end of the First World War and the early interwar period, were in abundance.<sup>61</sup> Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, for instance, have recently emphasized that 1919 was not the year of the nation-state but a moment of “imperial possibilities” that proved the flexibility and adaptability of empires and their hierarchies of human difference in the face of more radical challenges to their rule.<sup>62</sup> As Adom Getachew has recently illustrated, Woodrow Wilson’s articulation of national self-determination was intended to be “safe for empire,” recognizing the legitimacy of new nation-states in Central, Eastern, and Southern Europe while generally denying nonwhites in the colonies of European empires the ability to govern themselves.<sup>63</sup> Instead, structures like the mandates system placed nonwhite subalterns within timelines of development and historical progress that privileged the “Anglo-Saxon race” as the most advanced while reinforcing the alleged backwardness of others. Getachew shows that this denial of meaningful self-determination to colonized and oppressed peoples in the Black

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<sup>60</sup> Compare this perspective with Velychenko, *Painting Imperialism and Nationalism Red*, 4-8.

<sup>61</sup> Key works in this vein include Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire*; Michelle Ann Stephens, *Black Empire The Masculine Global Imaginary of Caribbean Intellectuals in the United States, 1914–1962* (Durham: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Dónal Hassett, *Mobilizing Memory The Great War and the Language of Politics in Colonial Algeria, 1918-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

<sup>62</sup> Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, “Empires after 1919: old, new, transformed,” *International Affairs* 95.1 (2019); 81-100.

<sup>63</sup> Getachew, *Worldmaking*, 40.

Atlantic world by metropolitan elites spurred a search for different means by which to not only achieve independence for individual nation-states but, more ambitiously, advance paradigms of anti-colonial sovereignty on a global scale.<sup>64</sup> Elsewhere, in Egypt, India, China, and Korea in 1918 and 1919, Erez Manela shows that reform-minded nationalists creatively appropriated Wilsonian ideas and presented their cases for self-determination within the framework of a liberal international order free from national inequality. After colliding with the racial and civilizational exclusions built into Wilson's version of self-determination, however, these same thinkers and activists began looking for other routes to liberation and nation-statehood, including those offered by the Bolsheviks.<sup>65</sup>

For Burbank and Cooper, the case of the Soviet Union's formation provides another example of a former empire that regained most of its territory and population following a stretch of turmoil, albeit under a different form of leadership that approached the theory and practice of territoriality, development, and governance very differently.<sup>66</sup> The Bolsheviks, after all, declared themselves to be enemies of empire, yet it is important to establish, as I attempt to in this dissertation, that characters such as Lenin and Stalin were committed to protecting the territorial wholeness of the Russian "great state" even as they called for capitalist empires to be overthrown. Stalin, for instance, devoted some of his most iconic articles from the civil war years to establishing that "central Russia, that hearth of world revolution" and the poorer, less industrialized "borderlands" were essentially interdependent, with the former's industries and the latter's raw materials and labor supporting one another

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment*, 215-226.

<sup>66</sup> Burbank and Cooper, "Empires after 1919," 94-99.

against the incursions of “imperialist” enemies.<sup>67</sup> This bond, however, was no longer officially voluntary as the civil wars picked up, for although Stalin expressed his view that the “borderlands” could secede if they chose, he simultaneously argued that such a course would be utterly unthinkable and catastrophic for the Bolsheviks.<sup>68</sup> Stalin’s promise, which assumed a far more formalized shape in his *korenizatsiia* theses of 1923, was that “central Russia” and its “cultured” proletariat would support the predominantly peasant and nomadic “borderlands” in developing indigenous forms of Soviet power and making the leap from impoverishment to socialist plenitude.<sup>69</sup>

In contrast to Wilson, Lenin and Stalin claimed to be in the business of radically closing developmental gaps rather than maintaining them, yet the terms on which that development would take place were largely decided in the “center” and favored the tightening economic and political integration of the former Russian imperial space.<sup>70</sup> While historians have shown that the Bolsheviks pragmatically created a dizzying mosaic of modern nations across a vast swathe of Eurasia in an effort to assimilate nationalism into the structure of their state, it is essential to remember that the particular developmental logic of the early Soviet state was not unanimously shared in the borderlands. For many non-Bolshevik Social Democrats and Socialist Revolutionaries in pre-1917 Ukraine, for instance, it was decentralization, not renewed centralization, that was to loosen the suffocating rule of the Tsarist state

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<sup>67</sup> Iosif Stalin, “Polityka Sovetskoi vlasti po natsional’nomu voprosu,” in *Sochineniia*, volume 4 (Tver’: Informatsionno-izdatel’skii tsentr “Soiuz”, 2006), 351-355.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 358-359.

<sup>69</sup> *Idem.*, “Doklad o natsional’nykh momentakh v partiinom i gosudarstvennom stroitel’stve,” in *Sochineniia*, volume 5, 236-263.

<sup>70</sup> Ronald Grigor Suny, “Living in the Hood: Russia, Empire, and Old and New Neighbors,” in *Russian Foreign Policy in the Twenty-First Century and the Shadow of the Past*, ed. Robert Levgold (New York: 2007), 48-51.



apparatus and allow for a flowering of autonomous nations within a federal system.<sup>71</sup> For both Prometheans and national communists, moreover, international fraternity did not necessarily mean rapid developmental convergence among different nations, which, as the Russian Socialist Revolutionaries seemed to agree in the summer of 1917, were endowed with different modes of production and therefore faced a diversity of roads to socialism that would be best traversed by different local authorities rather than a party-state system in the hands of single grouping.<sup>72</sup> Some Prometheans, such as the Georgian Menshevik Noe Zhordania, had indeed been in favor of greater economic centralization among the different regions of the Russian Empire in 1905 as well as in 1917, yet the Bolshevik policies of war communism and, later on, crash industrialization employed a fundamentally different approach to the accumulation and socialization of capital than Zhordania's far more gradual, "scientific" approach taken from European experiences.<sup>73</sup> In a word, the Bolshevik approach to exorcising the enduring legacies of Tsarist imperialism, whether in the creation of national proletarian cultures or the pursuit of industrialization, appeared to many critics in both the borderlands and in emigration as renewed forms of immoderate centralization that were actually averse to development and even imperial in nature.

### **Geographies of development and power**

The Prometheans, however, were seldom eager to find comradeship with the nonwhite colonized societies of their own day, generally accepting French and British

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<sup>71</sup> See Chapter Two for a discussion of Ukrainian socialist and federalist ideas of post-imperial decentralization. Also see von Hagen, "Federalisms and Pan-Movements."

<sup>72</sup> See Velychenko, *Painting Imperialism and Nationalism Red*, 5-11.

<sup>73</sup> On Zhordania's ideas, see Stephen F. Jones, *Socialism in Georgian Colors: The European Road to Social Democracy, 1883-1917* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 2005).

imperialism as tolerable, if not progressive, and stressing that they constituted the last handful of “civilized” nations in the clutches of a backward Russian despotism.<sup>74</sup> Here, I argue that the Prometheans inverted the civil-war era Bolshevik narrative of development flowing from the “center” to the “borderlands,” claiming, instead, that the “center” itself was impoverished, uncultured, and tyrannical, having produced both Tsarism and Bolshevism, whereas the “borderlands,” home to the “oppressed peoples,” were dynamic and capable of developing social and political structures similar or even identical to those of Western Europe, above all the nation-state.<sup>75</sup> As Ronald Suny points out, locating the “metropole” of the Russian Empire or the Soviet Union has historically proven more elusive and contentious than in the cases of maritime empires, particularly because the Romanov and Bolshevik seats of power in Saint Petersburg/Petrograd and Moscow were surrounded by a generally poor, ethnically Russian countryside that messily melded with neighboring territories inhabited by other nationalities, such as Finns, Estonians, Ukrainians, and Tatars.<sup>76</sup> Like Andreas Kappeler, Suny suggests that the Russian or Soviet “center” was not necessarily a fixed geographical region but the ruling institution itself, meaning the autocracy and its multinational nobility in the Tsarist case and the equally diverse party bureaucracy of the Bolsheviks.<sup>77</sup>

I observe that the Promethean exiles seemed to concur with this definition before 1917, viewing the institution of Tsarism as the main enemy and embracing the

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<sup>74</sup> See Chapter Four for a discussion of the selective anti-imperialism of the Prometheans.

<sup>75</sup> For a sample of articles reflecting this narrative, see Stalin, “Oktiabr’skii perevorot i natsional’nyi vopros,” “Politika Sovetskoi vlasti po natsional’nomu voprosu v Rossii,” in *Sochineniia*, volume 4, 155-167; 351-363. Also see Alfred J. Rieber, *Stalin and the Struggle for Supremacy in Eurasia* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 67-72.

<sup>76</sup> Suny, “Living in the Hood,” 40-44.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 43; Andreas Kappeler, *The Russian Empire: A Multiethnic History*, trans. Alfred Clayton (New York: Routledge, 2013 [2001]); 129; 160-171.

possibility of finding progressive Russian allies such as the Socialist Revolutionaries, yet many of these same borderland activists began to take a harsher view of the ethnically Russian lands around Moscow as the source of Bolshevism during the civil wars and after.<sup>78</sup> For the Prometheans, both in Paris and Warsaw, ethnic Russians had failed to join the stream of historical progress by forming their own nation-state, remaining, instead, an imperial people who submitted to vicious despots such as the Bolsheviks while providing the raw manpower with which Lenin and Stalin had built the Red Army and conquered the borderlands.<sup>79</sup> In one sense, this view is largely continuous with well established tropes about the ingrained tyranny and savagery of Russians, yet the Prometheans expressly used it to highlight the disparate developmental trajectories of the “center” and the “borderlands,” something that Piłsudski and his confederates had done in their polemical literature prior to the First World War. These changing spatial categories and geographies of development, I contend, are reflective of the shifting understandings of the nature of Russian imperialism and its Bolshevik successor in the minds of the Promethean exiles, who, unlike Piłsudski, had believed that Russia and the Russians could outgrow Tsarism and form a compact, modernizing nation-state, perhaps, as some of them would later write, in the way that the Turkish Republic had emerged from the multinational Ottoman Empire. For the Parisian Prometheans, and the Azeris in particular, Turkey stood out as a model nation-state that had shed an imperial past, suggesting the possibility for a similar Russian transformation but, more often, emphasizing Russia’s failure to go the way of the “civilized” borderlands.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> See Chapter Two for a discussion of reformist ideas of federation and autonomy in the borderlands.

<sup>79</sup> See Chapter Four for a detailed discussion of Promethean views of Russia and ethnic Russians in the interwar years.

<sup>80</sup> For the Russian-Turkish comparison, see Chapter Four.

In her recent work on socialist visions of utopia, whose chronology largely overlaps with that of my dissertation, Maria Todorova has observed that the idea of a deep division between European and Russian forms of socialism only really took shape in the early 1920s, while such a stark boundary had not existed in the time of the Second International.<sup>81</sup> I find this argument to be true of the Ukrainian and Georgian Social Democrats who would later join Prometheism, though I identify an interesting exception in the case of Piłsudski's Polish Socialist Party (PPS) founded in 1892. In Piłsudski's earliest articles, "Russia proper," a vaguely defined space centered on Saint Petersburg and Moscow, appears as a backwater that is not only underdeveloped but, more importantly, incapable of proper capitalist development and a genuine socialist revolution, a characteristic distinguishing it from the ethnically non-Russian western "borderlands" between the Baltic and Black Seas. Piłsudski, here, portrayed Poland as the easternmost outpost of European socialism, emphasizing, with apparently little effect on the views of his non-Polish contemporaries, that separation from Russia was the only road to progress and emancipation for these regions, an argument that his close collaborator Leon Wasilewski later extended to all of the non-Russian "borderlands" under Tsarist rule.<sup>82</sup> What is notable here is not only how unpopular these rigid distinctions between the ethnically Russian "center" and its "borderlands" were in their own day but, equally so, how quickly they were assimilated into the language of the Promethean exiles following their expulsion from the borderlands in the civil wars. In their interwar articles, Promethean writers now emphasized that the real boundary between the "civilized" world and the Muscovite

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<sup>81</sup> Maria Todorova, *The Lost World of Socialists at Europe's Margins: Imagining Utopia, 1870s-1920s* (London: Bloomsbury Academic Publishing, 2020), 8.

<sup>82</sup> See Chapters One and Two for analyses of the mental geographies of Piłsudski's camp before and during the First World War.

heart of darkness ran not along the external frontiers of the Soviet Union but deep within its territory, namely where the areas of ethnically Russian settlement in northeastern Europe gave way to the homelands of the “oppressed peoples.”<sup>83</sup> This way of visualizing the geographies of power and development in the Soviet Union, I believe, are significant not only in the context of the Promethean movement but also with respect to what Todorova has unearthed more broadly about the spatial imaginations of European socialists.

### **Territorial structures and historical comparisons**

In his recent work on the decolonization of the French Empire in equatorial Africa, Frederick Cooper describes a “federal moment” that preceded the empire’s eventual collapse into nation-states in the 1960s, one in which ultimately unrealized possibilities for a post-imperial kind of multinational polity were still being pursued by Charles DeGaulle’s government in Paris and advocates of far-reaching reforms in the colonies.<sup>84</sup> While Samuel Moyn has questioned whether this “federal moment” could have actually produced a viable alternative to the nation-state, Cooper provocatively calls upon historians to investigate the forgotten spaces “between empire and nation,” as his book is titled, as a way of resisting the simplistic and linear narrative of the triumph of the nation-state across much of the globe in the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>85</sup> According to Cooper, the leading figures in the decolonization of France’s African territories preferred the renegotiation of the status of the colonies in order to gain juridical parity with metropolitan France within a

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<sup>83</sup> See Chapter Four for a discussion of Promethean mental geographies and the place of Russia.

<sup>84</sup> Cooper, *Citizenship Between Empire and Nation Remaking France and French Africa, 1945–1960* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

<sup>85</sup> Samuel Moyn, “Fantasies of Federalism,” *Dissent* (Winter 2015). Obtained at <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/fantasies-of-federalism>.

shared federal structure, a proposition that elicited friction in the capital and, in a circuitous and contingent fashion, left the world with a handful of new nation-states.<sup>86</sup> While the relationship between metropolitan France and its African colonies in 1950 was far different from that binding Petrograd and its non-Russian borderlands in 1917, the much more general idea of federation as an alternative to both empires and nation-states, or a hybrid way of maximizing the benefits of multinational states on the basis of equality and self-determination, forms a key motif in my dissertation.

I contend that concepts of federation, whether of Bolshevik, Promethean, or national communist provenance, demonstrate that ideas for the territorial reorganization of the late Russian Empire and the early Soviet Union were often drawn up on the basis of a combination of comparative historical analyses of other composite states and competing theories of the significance of nations as vessels for socioeconomic development. As late as the spring of 1917, Stalin, perhaps most famously, rejected the proposal of a Socialist Revolutionary writer for the reorganization of Russia as a federation on the model of the United States of America, claiming that the former was already a tightly integrated unit with clearly defined national regions, completely unlike the latter, which had been slowly cobbled together from a hodgepodge of territories rooted neither in ethnography nor the geography of production.<sup>87</sup> At best, Stalin wrote, federation could serve as an intermediary structure for the conversion of a vast country like the United States into an apparently decentralized but, in practice, economically consolidated whole, an assessment that he

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<sup>86</sup> Cooper, *Citizenship*, 1-30.

<sup>87</sup> Stalin, "Protiv federalizma," in *Sochineniia*, volume 3, 23-31.

shared with Rosa Luxemburg.<sup>88</sup> As Russia became increasingly fragmented by early 1918, however, Lenin and Stalin decided that federation could serve as a formal mechanism for reintegration, though their strong interest in political and economic centralization provided the developmental underpinnings for a system that, in the interest of preventing the alienation of non-Russians, was engineered to appear fairly decentralized on the surface.<sup>89</sup>

The Bolsheviks, however, should not enjoy a monopoly on federalist ideas in our minds, nor should their particular implementation of a federal model obscure the much wider range of possibilities that their rivals saw in that same form of territorial and temporal organization. Some of the most prominent alternatives circulating in the Russian Empire for the better part of the first two decades of the twentieth century came from the Socialist Revolutionaries, who viewed ethnographically defined nations as the principal economic and territorial units through which “universally human” phenomena such as socialism manifested themselves in practice. While the Socialist Revolutionaries intended to reserve important powers for the federal government of a reformed Russia, potentially on the model of the United States, they refrained from calling for the introduction of a single, unifying economic program for the entire multinational state, making clear that the different national territories would enjoy substantial latitude in deciding what paths to take.<sup>90</sup> An even more radically

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 23-25. Compare this analysis with Rosa Luxemburg, “Federalism, Centralization, and Particularism,” in *The National Question* (1909). <https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1909/national-question/index.htm>.

<sup>89</sup> Sablin and Semyonov, “Decentralization and Autonomy.”

<sup>90</sup> For a sample of Socialist Revolutionary federalist projects, see “Protokoly Tret’ego s’ezda partii sotsialistov-revoliutsionerov (25 maia-4 iunია 1917g.). Prilozheniia: Osnovnye printsipy gosudarstvennogo ustroistva (Tezisy po dokladu M.V. Vishniaka). Respublika, avtonomiia, federatsiia,” in *Partiia sotsialistov-revoliutsionerov: Dokumenty i materialy. 1900-1922 gg.*, volume 3, part 1, ed. N.D. Erofeev and V.V. Shelokhaev (Moscow: Rosspen 2000), 611-613; “Protokoly Tret’ego s’ezda partii sotsialistov-revoliutsionerov (25 maia-4 iunია 1917g.). Prilozheniia: Tezisy k dokladu tov. Shaskol’koi po natsional’nomu voprosu, in *Partiia sotsialistov-revoliutsionerov*, volume 3, part 1, 614;

decentralized model was embodied in Hrushevs'kyi's "palace of nations," which treated ethnographically defined nations as the basic units of production and sovereignty within a federalized Russia that, when compared with what the Socialist Revolutionaries had to offer, would have looked very much like a loose conglomerate of nation-states with a weak central authority in Petrograd. Hrushevs'kyi himself had argued for a broadly "autonomous" Ukraine that would have possessed the maximum possible degree of self-rule without formally becoming a separate state, leaving the federal authorities with a limited set of powers mostly related to foreign policy, infrastructure, international trade, and the defense of the universal constitutional rights of its citizens.<sup>91</sup>

However they envisioned the specific balance of powers among different ethnographic and economic regions, proponents of federalization in the late Russian Empire often justified their arguments by appealing to the precedents set by federations in other parts of the world, most notably the United States. Whereas Stalin and Luxemburg saw federation as essentially outdated and argued that formally federal polities such as Germany were, in fact, economically unitary in practice, others, including Hrushevs'kyi, believed that federation held genuine merits for an excessively centralized state such as Russia. Federation, I show, was attractive to many internationally minded national activists in the borderlands because it promised to reconcile a considerable degree of national self-determination with the wider economic and political benefits of a multinational state, allowing different national units to govern their own internal affairs without breaking Russia into an incoherent

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"Protokoly Tret'ego s''ezda partii sotsialistov-revoliutsionerov (25 maia-4 iunია 1917g.). Rezoliutsii, priniatye na Tret'em s''ezde partii sotsialistov-revoliutsionerov: Natsional'nyi vopros," in *Partiia sotsialistov-revoliutsionerov*, volume 3, part 1, 603-604.

<sup>91</sup> Mykailo Hrushevs'kyi, *Iakoï avtonomii i federatsii khoche Ukraïna* (Vienna: Soiuz vyzvolennia Ukraïny, 1917).



collection of petty nation-states. Perhaps more importantly, federalism was enticing because its American and German varieties had supposedly shown that decentralization could unleash the productive energies suppressed under more unitary systems such as Tsarism, proving that the crystallization of mass-based, industrialized nations was actually an integral part of a modernity in which nationalism and internationalism interacted in a mutually constitutive way. Socialists from the western borderlands and the Caucasus, moreover, saw federalism as a way to replicate the allegedly consensual basis of the Swiss model in their respective regions by bringing together an otherwise chaotic patchwork of nationalities within a common framework of civic belonging. For the interwar Parisian Prometheans, particularly those from the Caucasus, Switzerland continued to stand out as an inspiration for a post-Soviet “Caucasian Confederation” stretching between the Black and Caspian Seas.<sup>92</sup> Finding the right federal model for a given project of political and economic organization, in these regards, meant navigating historical and contemporary examples while inventively thinking of ways in which to apply them to Russia’s borderlands, a reflection of the more widespread tendency towards transnational “comparison” that Vanessa Ogle identifies among reformist thinkers in the globalizing world of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>93</sup>

### **A note on methodology, sources, and chronology**

My dissertation is a contribution to the most recent waves of imperial and international history that have challenged conventional narratives of the twentieth century as a time marked by the irresistible collapse of multinational empires into a patchwork of compact, homogeneous nation-states. Drawing upon the work of

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<sup>92</sup> See Chapter Four for a detailed discussion of the Caucasian Confederation project.

<sup>93</sup> On comparison and developmental thinking in the late nineteenth century, see Vanessa Ogle, *The Global Transformation of Time: 1870–1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 6-11.

scholars such as Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, I have structured my narrative as an investigation of the ways in which episodes of war, revolution, and imperial crisis provided intellectually generative contexts in which competing ideas about empire, nationhood, and forms of post-imperial statehood, such as federation and confederation, took shape. I pay special attention to recovering how these categories and concepts were understood and debated by an ideologically and ethnically diverse cast of thinkers under changing historical circumstances, focusing on reconstructing their mental universes and the intellectual landscapes of the moments in which they lived and interacted. By focusing on ideas and institutions that brought together characters from across the borderlands of the late Russian Empire and the early Soviet Union, whether within these polities or in exile, I present a transnational, entangled history of internationalism in which disillusionment with the foreclosed possibilities of imperial reform and restructuring led to unlikely alliances and the pursuit of alternative models for a post-Tsarist and post-Soviet order.

While independent nation-states are indeed crucial to both of the major cohorts of borderland actors at the center of my study, namely the Prometheans and the heterodox national communists of the 1920s, I strive, like Cooper, to investigate how these nation-states were imagined within wider, post-imperial international communities. My research for this dissertation has centered on the close reading and transnational contextualization of ideological texts, such as the writings of Józef Piłsudski and his comrades in the Polish Socialist Party, that are generally understood within the limits of nationally bounded genealogies of social and political thought. Finally, the fifty-year span covered in this dissertation (1889 to 1939) was expressly chosen to highlight the time of the Second International (1889 to 1916) not merely as a prelude to post-1917 developments but as a time of revolutionary upheaval, war,

and imperial crisis that profoundly impacted how figures like Piłsudski and Lenin thought about the fate of the Russian Empire and the social and spatial contours of nations. While I conclude my narrative on the eve of the Second World War, I have sketched out an epilogue that follows the post-1939 afterlives of the Promethean movement during the global Cold War and decolonization.

### **Dissertation structure**

**Chapter One** of this dissertation begins in the time of the Second International, charting a genealogy of competing socialist understandings of the significance of nations and nationalism in the territorial reorganization of the late Russian Empire. It demonstrates that conflicting positions on the “national question,” such as those articulated by Vladimir Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg, and Józef Piłsudski, were rooted in deeper disagreements about Russia’s developmental trajectory and, specifically, the question of whether the ethnically non-Russian regions were converging with or diverging from the ethnically Russian parts of northeastern Europe. Drawing upon the work of Maria Todorova, this chapter shows that concepts of “core” and “periphery,” more often articulated in terms of “center” (*tsentr* or *centrum*) and “borderlands” (*okrainy* or *kresy*), were understood by their socialist framers not merely as fixed positions on the map but, more importantly, as temporal formations moving through historical time and phases of historical-materialist development. The major rows over the “national question,” I show, arose from clashing interpretations of the ability of the Russian Empire to undergo processes of capitalist development, constitutional reform, and socialist revolution necessary for the liberation of its working classes, disagreements that endured and intensified throughout the clash of internationalisms that I reconstruct in subsequent chapters.

In **Chapter Two**, I shift focus to the years between 1914 and 1921, which Peter Holquist terms Russia's "continuum of crisis," to understand how the shifting fates of wars, revolutions, and attempts at reform and decentralization prepared the groundwork for the rise of the Promethean movement in the 1920s. I find that Piłsudski and his allies in the PPS were already exploring potential ways in which to exploit Russia's ethnic heterogeneity before the outbreak of the First World War, and that their ideas on this issue underwent a significant evolution from early plans for a working-class uprising in Poland and the western borderlands around 1904 to a more regimented, "militarized" vision of the necessity of organizing and disciplining Poles within a formal army. I argue that Piłsudski and his comrades strove to recruit fellow non-Russians for their cause both before and during the First World War yet, for the most part, found little success because most national activists in the borderlands believed in the possibility of transforming Russia into a democratic, federal state. These reformist visions, however, would later crash against the emergence of the early Soviet system, leading the so-called "bourgeois nationalists" in the borderlands to secede from Russia in 1918 and, as the civil wars progressed, increasingly flee into exile. It was precisely this combination of disillusionment with the possibility of reforming Russia and geographical displacement that produced a Eurasian ecology of exiled national activists, many of whom searched for new internationalist projects in which to organize themselves against the Bolsheviks and fight for the emancipation of their homelands. Subsequently, Piłsudski and his associates managed to weave some of these exiles into what would become the Promethean movement in 1926, though their much more important bid to reconfigure the western borderlands, and Lithuania, Ukraine, and Belarus in particular, into a pro-Polish "federation" ultimately failed by 1921. The downfall of this project, I contend, had less to do with the inherent appeal

of the Soviet system and its own peculiar forms of weaponized nationalism than it did with the sense among local nationalists that Piłsudski was building a form of Polish empire.

In **Chapter Three**, I examine national communist frustrations with the structure of the Soviet federation formalized in 1922, concentrating on the prominent cases of Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev, a Tatar Bolshevik, and the non-Bolshevik Ukrainian Communist Party (UKP). I show that the disputes over the boundaries of Soviet federalism that landed these national communists in turmoil emerged primarily because they had believed, before the early 1920s, that the worldwide socialist revolutions initiated in 1917 would create a much wider, decentralized community of toiling nations with broad autonomy in their internal political and economic affairs. Although Lenin's case for the creation of the Soviet Union as a federation of four republics won out over Stalin's idea for the consolidation of a single Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic of "autonomous" territories, some of the more ambitious "pro-independence people" such as Sultan-Galiev actually saw the federal model adopted by the Bolsheviks as constrictive of the socialist development of the non-Russian nationalities. Despite Lenin's anti-imperialist intentions, I demonstrate that the Soviet federation was, for these dissenting national communists, far more centralized and limiting than the architectures of world socialism for which they had hoped, earning, in some cases, criticism for being a reincarnation of the old Russian Empire and violating the very Leninist principle of the "right of nations to self-determination." This chapter, in tandem with the previous one, illustrates the formative effect of revolutionary disillusionment on the emergence of alternative internationalist currents that challenged the emerging Soviet system.

**Chapter Four** presents a transnational history of the Promethean network in Eurasia, outlining its organizational structure while demonstrating the tensions inherent within the movement's work as it grew to encompass a diverse, multifocal community of internationally minded borderland nationalists and Polish state and military patrons interested in overthrowing the Bolsheviks. My account of the evolving intellectual content of Prometheism emphasizes the important tensions that emerged between liberal internationalist exiles in Paris and military intelligence officers in Warsaw, showing that the movement was far from achieving any degree of homogeneity in its aims and methods, which varied in the different urban centers in which it had taken root. I likewise demonstrate that the earlier ideas of Piłsudski and his generation of PPS thinkers for the post-Tsarist and post-Soviet organization of the lands between the Baltic and Black Seas as an ostensibly voluntary federation came to be replaced by the sense of a younger, more right-wing cohort of Prometheans that Poland should pursue aggrandizement and even empire in Ukraine. If Bruski described Prometheism and *Realpolitik* as contrasting poles in Polish geopolitical thought during the 1920s, I argue that Prometheism increasingly became a form of *Realpolitik* in the 1930s as figures such as Włodzimierz Bączkowski turned to the movement and its central ideas in search of ways in which to rescue Poland and its “great power” aspirations from an increasingly dire position between a resurgent Germany and an industrializing Soviet Union.

In **Chapter Five**, I reconstruct one of the most important attempts by Ukrainian and Belarusian Bolsheviks to weaponize nationalism in Poland's eastern borderlands, namely by funding, arming, and inspiring pro-Soviet national communist movements in western Ukraine and western Belarus. I show, however, that this approach to undermining the reach of the Polish state in the borderlands proved to be perilous for

the Bolsheviks, as it involved the recruitment of many non-Bolshevik communists, as well as a broader cast of left-wing Ukrainian and Belarusian nationalists, who embraced their own understandings of “the right of nations to self-determination” that did not always align with those of their sponsors in the Soviet Union. The cross-border communist movements were dramatically reorganized at the end of the 1920s as a series of local controversies and the Komintern’s changing line on cooperation between communists and progressive allies behind a “united front” led to the denunciation of their earlier work between 1923 and 1928. I claim, however, that the Ukrainian and Belarusian experiences diverged in notable ways during this period, namely because national communist influences originating in the formerly Austrian territories of East Galicia proved much stronger and more disruptive in the Ukrainian case than they did in that of the Belarusians, who generally received praise from both Polish and Soviet comrades for their close adherence to Komintern directives.

## Chapter One: In the “Prisonhouse of Nations”

Socialists, Social Democrats, and visions of territorial transformation in the Russian Empire in the time of the Second International (1889-1916)

### **An intellectual genealogy of the clash of internationalisms**

During the final week of July 1896, around 700 representatives of labor organizations, socialist parties, and anarchist groupings from across Europe and the United States converged on the Queen’s Hall in central London for the Fourth Congress of the Second International. Britain alone boasted 475 delegates, followed by 129 from France and another 48 from Germany, yet a smaller handful of thirteen men and women representing the lands of partitioned Poland were just as determined to make a lasting mark on the Congress.<sup>1</sup> Though grouped together on the basis of nationality, the Polish participants were bitterly divided in their visions of Poland’s place on the map of Europe and within the worldwide working-class struggle, and they intended to use the Congress as a global stage on which to reopen the “Polish question.” In the months preceding the Congress, the Polish Socialist Party (PPS), founded in Paris in 1892 by Józef Piłsudski, had lobbied Western European socialists to endorse the creation of an independent Poland, a necessity, they argued, not only for the liberation of the Polish proletariat but also for the destruction of Russian imperialism and the elimination of militarist “annexations and occupations” worldwide.<sup>2</sup> The PPS proposal, however, met with vigorous opposition from Rosa Luxemburg, one of the leaders of the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland (SDKP) established in 1893, who argued that bowing to nationalist separatism would

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<sup>1</sup> *Verhandlungen und Beschlüsse des Internationalen sozialistischen arbeiter- und Gewerkschaftskongresses zu London, vom 27. Juli bis 1. August 1896* (Berlin: Expedition der Buchhandlung Vorwärts 1896), 4-8.

<sup>2</sup> See Leon Wasilewski, *Zarys dziejów Polskiej Partji Socjalistycznej w związku z historią socjalizmu polskiego w trzech zaborach i na emigracji* (Warsaw: Nowe Życie, 1925).



undermine international proletarian unity and open the way for the Second International to be flooded with similar demands from “social patriots” like Piłsudski. Furthermore, Luxemburg challenged the idea that “annexations and occupations” should be categorically denounced by parties of the proletariat, positing that the Polish territories under Tsarist rule had grown tightly integrated with the economic fabric of imperial Russia over the past century, bringing Polish workers into a closer union with the all-Russian Social Democratic movement. Severing this bond, Luxemburg claimed, would be historically regressive, while the PPS proposal offered a concrete example of a demand for national independence that aimed to obstruct the tendency of capitalist development to amalgamate previously unconnected lands and peoples in advance of the coming socialist revolution.<sup>3</sup>

Despite being nearly three years in the making, the showdown for which the Polish delegates had been preparing failed to materialize at the Congress, and the motion put forth by the PPS received only a cursory treatment on the sixth day, without any oral arguments from either Piłsudski or Luxemburg, before failing to be adopted. Inundated with more than 100 proposals to be discussed over just eight days and overwhelmed with wrangling over voting procedures, clashes between socialists and anarchists, and factional splits, the organizers grouped the PPS appeal together with a batch of other, more moderate proposals from larger Western European parties.<sup>4</sup> In the end, the Congress resolved to broadly endorse the right to “autonomy,” rendered by the German delegates as *Selbstbestimmungsrecht*, of all nations, expressing solidarity with workers subjected to “military, national, or other despotism” while envisioning a common struggle of class-conscious toilers who would overthrow

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<sup>3</sup> Rosa Luxemburg, *The Polish Question at the International Congress in London* (1896). Obtained at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1896/07/polish-question.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> *Verhandlungen*, 18.

capitalism and “advance the goals of international Social Democracy.”<sup>5</sup> Karl Kautsky, an Austrian Social Democrat who defended the Congress’s position, criticized Luxemburg for her harsh denunciation of the cause of Polish independence, contending, as Marx and Engels both had, that Poland stood as one of the few major challengers to Russian aggression in Europe. While Kautsky claimed that a Polish state would be the best vehicle for mobilizing Polish workers in their native language, he declined to make any specific guarantees of territory or sovereignty, knowing well that such a move would create an untenable precedent for the leaders of the Second International, especially in the case of multinational empires such as Austria-Hungary. According to Kautsky, the proletarian revolution and the campaign for national equality should unfold together, much as Marx and his comrades had envisioned when they created the International Workingmen’s Association at the same time as Russian forces suppressed the Polish January Uprising in 1863 to 1864.<sup>6</sup>

While Kautsky’s compromise may have won the day in the summer of 1896, the debates between the PPS and the SKDP continued to rage within the Second International until its dissolution in 1916. This was not only because these deliberations concerned the controversial “Polish question” but, more importantly, because they cut to the heart of the more complex problem of reordering the entire territory and economy of the Russian imperial space in a time of uneven capitalist development and the coming of constitutional and socialist revolutions. At the close of the nineteenth century, the PPS and SDKP presented radically opposing internationalist projects for restructuring Russia that embodied competing understandings of the temporal and territorial contours of revolution in the world’s

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<sup>5</sup> Narihiko Ito, “Is the National Question an Aporia for Humanity? ,” in *The National Question and the Question of Crisis*, ed. Paul Zarembka (Bingley, UK: Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2010), 3-68.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

most expansive contiguous polity. For the PPS, and those of its members who joined Piłsudski's Revolutionary Faction after 1906, Russia was headed for a time of violent fragmentation in which the dynamic force of mass-based nationalism would fuel popular insurrections and shatter the Tsarist realm into an alliance of nation-states controlled by the non-Russian working classes of the borderlands, rolling Russia's frontiers back to its ethnic heartlands around Moscow. Poland, in the estimate of the PPS, enjoyed the best chances of defeating Tsarism and inspiring similar rebellions between the Baltic and Black Seas as well as in the Caucasus and even Central Asia. Because the Tsarist state and its bourgeois lackeys desired a submissive, ethnically homogeneous population that they could dominate more effectively, Russification and capitalist exploitation functioned in tandem in the PPS analysis, meaning that socialism, as the progressive alternative to both of these systems, would need to carry a distinctly national content as well as a clear class character wherever it hoped to prevail. According to the PPS, independent nation-states alone could unite the productive forces of the individual nationalities in the "borderlands" (*kresy*) and sustain a genuine socialism free of repression, meaning that a sharp break from the backward, despotic Russian "center" (*centrum*) was the only way forward.<sup>7</sup>

While the PPS prided themselves on forming a "national" party to represent Poles across the German, Austro-Hungarian, and Russian Empires, Luxemburg stressed the "regional" character of the SDKP as a part of the all-Russian Social Democracy, insisting that the future of the Polish labor movement lay in close cooperation with the proletariat of the Russian interior. This was because Luxemburg and her partisans

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<sup>7</sup> For a representative articulation of this argument, see Leon Wasilewski, *We wspólnem jarzmie: (o narodowościach przez carat uciskanych)* (London: Wydawnictwo Polskiej Partii Socjalistycznej 1901).

imagined a trajectory of economic convergence and integration between the former Kingdom of Poland and the rest of Russia, first between the capitalist elites and, later, in the ranks of the growing industrial working classes. The fundamental difference from the PPS, in this case, was that Luxemburg envisioned a historically dynamic, economically evolving Russia that, despite the enduring rule of the Tsars, was demonstrating unmistakable signs of progress towards a modern capitalist order with its own proletariat, not only in Moscow and Saint Petersburg but also in Warsaw and Łódź, the Polish heartlands of the empire's textile industries. Where the PPS argued for impending disintegration on national lines, the SDKP contended that the overarching tendency of capitalist development was to continually weld together far-flung territories and peoples into progressively larger and increasingly interconnected units, a law from which neither Poland nor Russia was exempt. While Luxemburg accepted the possibility of "autonomy" for the Kingdom of Poland given its accelerated development, she rejected the view that nationalism or the nation-state should be accepted as universal phenomena, least of all in Russia, whose inhabitants generally lacked anything resembling a clear collective consciousness or the objective social foundations of a national economy.<sup>8</sup> Far from being the face of the future, Luxemburg saw nationalism as another distraction, albeit an attractive and dangerous one, that could be bypassed through the economically driven amalgamation of economies and working classes. The PPS and SDKP agreed, in a sense, that Russia's emerging capitalist economy was marked by geographically uneven development, yet where the former saw the barbaric Russian center smothering the growth of the peripheries, the latter insisted upon steady coalescence, most markedly between Poland and European Russia.

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<sup>8</sup> Rosa Luxemburg, *The National Question* (1909). Obtained at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1909/national-question/index.htm>.

At the time of their encounter in London in 1896, the PPS and SDKP were young and marginal forces within the Russian Empire, and the interpretations of Russia's future that they embraced represented only two possible orientations within a wider matrix of socialist, Social Democratic, and Socialist Revolutionary ideas at the outset of the twentieth century. Still, their positions are important because they illustrate two vital principles of territorial organization between which visionaries of Russia's reorganization, whether leftist or otherwise, attempted to strike a balance, first in their polemics between the 1890s and 1914 and then in their competing campaigns to remake Eurasia during the World War, civil wars, and revolutions of 1914 to 1922.<sup>9</sup> While some Jewish and Ukrainian socialists drew upon the models of Otto Bauer and Karl Renner and adopted an "extraterritorial" approach to defining nations as voluntary communities of self-identifying individuals decoupled from any particular territory, the dominant trend among leftists in the Russian Empire and the early Soviet Union was to attempt to reconcile the recognition of ethnic boundaries and the principle of national self-determination with the need to integrate composite economic regions that both cut across and lumped together nationalities.<sup>10</sup> Notably, the PPS program, which called for the separation of peripheral nation-states from Russia as early as the 1890s, found scant support among socialist groupings in the borderlands, whose leaders tended to prefer some form of autonomy or federation that would accommodate both ethnic and religious difference as well as uneven levels of historical development. Other Polish socialists, most notably those from the small yet prolific *Proletaryat* circle, denounced the PPS's separatism and envisioned a federalized Russia to which the old Kingdom of Poland would still belong. What

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<sup>9</sup> See *ibid.*, Chapter 2.

<sup>10</sup> Francine Hirsch, "The National Idea versus Economic Expediency," in *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).

ultimately pushed a growing cast of borderland nationalists into the fold of the proto-Promethean PPS and, in the interwar period, the Promethean movement itself was Russia's descent into revolution and civil war after 1917, when the White movement and the Red Army drove nascent national governments into exile. After 1918, Poland, with Piłsudski and his allies from the PPS at its head, emerged as a major destination for these future Prometheans, who received funding and institutional support from the Polish military intelligence staff.<sup>11</sup> While some of these emigres continued to dream of a democratic, post-Bolshevik Russia, the Promethean view of Russia as a backward, aggressive despotism fixed to its own malignant *Sonderweg* took hold in many uprooted minds that increasingly flirted with right-wing anticommunism and fascism by the 1930s.

Significantly, the early clashes between the PPS and the SDKP attracted the attention and polemical fury of Vladimir Lenin, the Bolshevik leader who penned some of his party's most important treatises on the "national question" and the "right of nations to self-determination" in 1903 and 1913 before playing a central part in engineering the federal architecture of the Soviet Union in the early 1920s. Before the First World War, Lenin revisited Kautsky's resolution at the Second Congress as the basis for incorporating a clause on the "right of nations to self-determination" into the Russian Social Democratic program, rejecting the PPS demands for total independence as a nationalist deviation but saving the brunt of his ire for Rosa Luxemburg.<sup>12</sup> According to Lenin, nationalism and nation-states were products of capitalist development that the peoples of the Russian Empire were bound to

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<sup>11</sup> See Chapters Two and Four for a detailed examination of the roots and interwar development of Prometheism.

<sup>12</sup> Vladimir Lenin, *The Right of Nations to Self-Determination* (1914). Vladimir Lenin, "Kriticheskie zametki po natsional'nomu voprosu," in *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii*, volume 24, 115-150; idem., "O prave natsii na samoopredelenie," in *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii*, volume 25, 255-320.

experience as they progressed towards socialism through the “bourgeois-democratic” phase of history, meaning that Social Democrats would not only have to fight for the constitutional equality of nations, but temporarily tolerate autonomy and even full secession before the non-Russians regrouped for the all-Russian revolution.<sup>13</sup> Because Luxemburg rejected the idea that nationalism was a historical inevitability, she earned a reputation for being a “national nihilist” from the Bolsheviks that endured well beyond her death in 1919, providing Lenin, Stalin, and NEP-era national communists such as Mykola Skrypnyk with a convenient rhetorical foil for their solutions to the “national question.”<sup>14</sup> “Luxemburgism,” by the 1920s, came to stand not only for skepticism about the place of “national self-determination” on the Bolshevik agenda, but also connoted a deeper contempt for struggles for national emancipation from “Great Russian chauvinism” that Luxemburg herself never actually articulated.

A closer analysis of these pre-1914 debates reveals that Luxemburg opposed Lenin’s theses on “national self-determination” not so much because of a special antipathy for nationalism and nation-states, but because she was unconvinced that these phenomena should be treated as intrinsic to capitalist development. Luxemburg extensively defended her reasons for opposing the Bolshevik line and even laid out proposals for Polish “national autonomy” within the Russian Empire, applying much stricter standards than Lenin and Stalin, who were prepared, as of 1913, to grant “regional autonomy” to several “crystallized” territories that Luxemburg considered unready for self-rule.<sup>15</sup> The exchange between Luxemburg and Lenin was further

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., section 5.

<sup>14</sup> See Chapter Three.

<sup>15</sup> Compare Luxemburg, *The National Question*, Chapter 1, with Stalin, “The National Question in Russia,” in *Marxism and the National Question* (1913). Obtained at <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1913/03.htm>.

charged because the question of “the right of nations to self-determination” was intimately linked to how the SDKP and the Bolsheviks sought to defend their respective revolutionary projects from the divisive effects of modern nationalism. For Luxemburg, the chief challenge lay in convincing Polish workers to join the Social Democratic movements of the different multinational empires in which they lived and labored, which meant combating the demands of both the PPS and the “all-Polish” National Democrats (*Narodowa Demokracja*) for an independent Poland while proving that Polish statehood ran contrary to the revolutionary struggle. Lenin, meanwhile, faced the problem of encouraging millions of non-Russian workers to resist secession and back an all-Russian movement, one that had to decisively distance itself from accusations of imperialism and “great power chauvinism,” even as he and Stalin rejected national “federalism” within their party while offering “autonomy” solely on the basis of economic geography. Despite their contrasting understandings of nationalism, Luxemburg and Lenin fought for the maintenance of an all-Russian revolution and, in the future, the unity of a post-Tsarist Russian polity with limited room for “autonomy.” The Bolshevik turn to “federalism” came only in 1918, by which point the situation in the borderlands had shifted dramatically as Piłsudski’s PPS, with their own state and army starting in November of that year, sought to push back Russia’s reach by force.<sup>16</sup>

The confrontation between the PPS and the SDKP in 1896 arose most immediately from opposing interpretations of the “Polish question,” yet it equally exposed a clash of competing visions of the future of the Russian Empire and, more broadly, divergent approaches to the territorial reorganization of multinational states in the name of revolutionary internationalism. Over the course of the next two

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<sup>16</sup> See Chapters Two and Three.



decades, the key figures embroiled in these conflicts, namely Piłsudski, Luxemburg, Lenin, and their comrades, laid the intellectual groundwork for the coming contest to reconfigure a Russian imperial space engulfed in war and revolution between 1914 and 1922. Piłsudski and his allies in the PPS, many of whom had been present at the Fourth Congress, provided the intellectual, material, and organizational foundations for the interwar Promethean movement, attracting exiled non-Russian nationalists from the borderlands and envisioning the replacement of the Soviet Union with a patchwork of nation-states grouped into alliances and confederations. Briefly, in 1920, Piłsudski and his confidants even tried their hand at federalizing the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania and forming a “fraternal” alliance with the Ukrainian People’s Republic, though these experiments showed the Prometheans to be more than capable of prioritizing Polish geopolitical and economic interests over the ideal of “national self-determination.” While some PPS thinkers attempted to draft the blueprints for a federalized Poland after 1921, neither the right-wing governments of the early to mid-1920s nor the post-1926 *Sanacja* regime led by Piłsudski was willing to jeopardize the delicate integrity of the Polish state by devolving powers to representatives of the national minorities that accounted for at least one-third of the total population.

The Bolsheviks, meanwhile, increasingly faced the difficult reality that the October Revolution would not spread to either Western Europe or the colonial world by 1921, and Lenin and Stalin now began to think in greater detail about how to reconfigure the former imperial Russian territories under their control. The debates about the overarching structure of the Soviet Union and the demarcation of the boundaries between its units, or *raionirovanie*, uncovered serious disagreements not only between Lenin and Stalin in 1921 to 1922 but also between an “opposition,” headed by figures such as Khristian Rakovskii, Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev, and Polikarp

Makharadze, and Stalin's majority at the Twelfth Party Congress in 1923.<sup>17</sup> Much of the struggle centered on defining the kind of self-rule to be enjoyed by the non-Russian republics and the autonomous territories within the republics, as well as the problem of balancing ethnic and economic principles in drawing internal borders. Many of the national communists in the "opposition" considered Stalin's theses on the "indigenization" (*korenizatsiia*) of Soviet power to be insufficient and demanded expanded rights for the non-Russians within a loose Soviet confederation, though they were ultimately defeated and, in many cases, faced ejection from the party, imprisonment, or, later on, execution. Many of these national communists had joined the Bolshevik cause during the revolutions and civil wars because they saw it as a radical internationalism that would demolish the burdens of class exploitation and national oppression, yet the boundaries of Bolshevik internationalism grew less capacious and increasingly subjected to discipline once the time arrived to consolidate a functioning polity from the wreckage of imperial Russia in the early 1920s.

The SDKP, which became the SDKPiL when it entered an alliance with the Union of Workers of Lithuania in 1899, found itself entangled in the clash of Promethean and Bolshevik internationalisms. While Rosa Luxemburg famously criticized Lenin's policies in 1917 to 1918 and devoted herself to the abortive German Revolution of 1918 to 1919, many of her comrades, including Feliks Dzierżyński and Julian Marchlewski, joined the ranks of the Bolsheviks when their organization officially disbanded at the close of 1918, entering the main current of the "all-Russian revolution."<sup>18</sup> Others, however, such as Adolf Warski, banded together with former

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<sup>17</sup> See Francine Hirsch, "The National Idea versus Economic Expediency," in *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008); also see Chapter Three.

<sup>18</sup> Liliana Riga, "The Polish and Lithuanian Bolsheviks," in *The Bolsheviks and the Russian Empire* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

members of PPS-*Lewica*, which broke from Piłsudski's Revolutionary Faction in 1906, to create the Communist Workers' Party of Poland (KPRP, later KPP) in 1918, attempting to steer a Polish course to proletarian-peasant revolution that would resist the Komintern's demands for "Bolshevization" as well as the rise of Stalin. For a short while in the early to mid-1920s, the KPP's "majority" envisioned a place for Poland as an independent, equal member of a federation of socialist nations in Europe and created its own structures of "autonomy" for Belarusian and Ukrainian national communists in the eastern borderlands. Outlawed and devoid of state power, the KPP's "majority" struggled to avoid Bolshevik influences and faced a turbulent relationship with the Communist Party of Western Ukraine, supposedly one of its regional organs that operated more as its own independent grouping until 1929. With the downfall of Warski and Maria Koszutska's "majority" in the late 1920s came an end to the KPP's experiment in Polish national communism, yet this attempt at organizing a revolutionary movement within interwar Poland, one of the Russian Empire's main successor states, should be remembered as part of the wider transnational struggle to define the boundaries of proletarian internationalism in the former imperial Russian space after 1917. Even without their own government or army, the KPP and its affiliates established a strong presence among Ukrainian and Belarusian peasants in areas in which the Polish authorities were weak and thinly spread on the ground, and they also faced the challenge of responding to Polish state projects for regional autonomy while avoiding "deviations" in the eyes of the Bolsheviks and the Komintern.<sup>19</sup>

Before this clash of internationalisms can be meaningfully traced, it is necessary to first reconstruct the territorial imaginations of its key actors, who operated in a

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<sup>19</sup> See Chapter Five.

shared world of polemics, congresses, and, occasionally, street battles on the territory of the Russian Empire and across Europe during the time of the Second International (1889-1916). The first part of this chapter traces a history of proto-Promethean ideas in the PPS prior to 1914, focusing upon the party's critique of the political economy of Tsarism and the resistance that it elicited from other Polish socialist groupings, with an eye to establishing a foundation for later discussions of the Promethean movement in the dissertation. Next, the narrative turns to a divisive yet revealing conflict over the possibility of "federalism" in the Russian imperial space following the Revolution of 1905 that drew out important territorial ideas from thinkers affiliated with the PPS, the SDKPiL, and the *Proletaryat* circle. Contrary to conventional portrayals of the PPS as a source of "federalist" ideas, it was Ludwik Kulczycki, one of the leaders of *Proletaryat*, who developed a rigorous framework for the federalization of Russia rooted in a materialist understanding of history. Finally, to draw connections between the Polish and Russian Social Democratic milieus, the chapter revisits the polemics between Lenin and Luxemburg, arguing for a reassessment of the latter's territorial ideas in light of her writings on national autonomy. While Luxemburg was murdered at the hands of the *Freikorps* in 1919, her legacy as a "national nihilist" became an important part of the Bolshevik claim to have found the "correct" Marxist line on nationalism in the early 1920s, yet this simple portrayal omits the nuances of her view of the place of nationalism and nation-states under global capitalist development. Traversing these three major episodes will provide a foundation for understanding the origins of the wartime and interwar Promethean-Bolshevik struggle for the imperial Russian borderlands as well as the key ideas about nationhood, empire, and territory that circulated within these rival yet interconnected internationalist movements well into the twentieth century.

## **Framing the “Polish question” and the “Russian menace” after Marx**

When Karl Marx died in 1883, he left behind a substantial body of articles and speeches, some of them coauthored with Friedrich Engels, that vigorously advocated for Poland’s reestablishment as an independent state. Marx’s position, articulated most fervently amid the revolutions of 1848 and again in the wake of the suppression of the January Uprising in the mid- to late 1860s, was closely bound up with his contempt for the Russian Empire as a backward, brutal despotism that threatened the entirety of Europe and the gains made by socially progressive movements across the continent.<sup>20</sup> As Erica Benner points out, Marx’s attitude was heavily inspired by the idea that democratic, radical nationalist struggles for independence could be historically constructive forces, especially when they collided with the entrenched interests of reactionary, militarist monarchies and promised to introduce labor reforms and constitutionalism on the ruins of empires.<sup>21</sup> Up until Marx’s final years, the lands of partitioned Poland boasted little in the way of an industrial proletariat, while the standards of national and social emancipation were borne by descendants of the landed nobility rather than any socialist or communist party. Still, Marx considered Poland and the Poles to carry a special “European mission” in rolling back Russian influences in Europe while challenging the ideological and material foundations of Tsarism from within.<sup>22</sup> Engels, who passed away in London just less than one year before the Fourth Congress convened in the summer of 1896, appears to have shared Marx’s general line of argumentation, writing to Karl Kautsky in 1882 that true

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<sup>20</sup> A late but representative example may be found in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *For Poland* (1875). Obtained at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1875/03/24.htm>.

<sup>21</sup> See Erica Benner, *Really Existing Nationalisms* (New York: Verso, 1995).

<sup>22</sup> Karl Marx, *Poland’s European Mission* (1875). Obtained at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867/01/22a.htm>.

internationalism in Europe could only be achieved once oppressed nations such as Poland attained independence and achieved socialism through their own efforts. Engels, however, was uncertain as to how Poles would come to an agreement with the Lithuanian and “Ruthenian” inhabitants of the former Commonwealth, so he stopped short of explicitly calling for the restoration of the borders of 1772.<sup>23</sup>

Already in the aftermath of the January Uprising, the question of Poland’s independence and its relationship with the cause of working-class emancipation proved to be deeply divisive among Polish socialists, both in emigration in Western Europe and, after the 1880s, within nascent socialist parties operating in the lands of the former Commonwealth. One current was led by the “internationalists” affiliated with groups based in the former Congress Kingdom, such as *Proletaryat*, whose program emphasized cooperation with Russian radicals from *Narodnaia Volia* (The People’s Will) and rejected Polish secession from the Russian Empire, instead seeking the abolition of autocracy and the introduction of a constitutional order.<sup>24</sup> A competing “nationalist” tendency, however, developed under the leadership of Bolesław Limanowski, an emigre based in France and Switzerland who insisted that the restoration of Polish statehood and the liberation of the toiling masses must be accomplished together.<sup>25</sup> While *Proletaryat* persisted as a small but intellectually prolific organization until 1909, Limanowski helped with founding the larger and more prominent Polish Socialist Party (PPS), which attracted an influx of younger patriots who demanded a return to “active struggle” against both Tsarism and

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<sup>23</sup> Friedrich Engels to Karl Kautsky, *Nationalism, Internationalism and the Polish Question* (1882). Obtained at [http://hiaw.org/defcon6/works/1882/letters/82\\_02\\_07.html](http://hiaw.org/defcon6/works/1882/letters/82_02_07.html).

<sup>24</sup> Wasilewski, *Zarys*, 12-15.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-14.

capitalism while embracing violent insurrection as a legitimate strategy.<sup>26</sup> The earliest PPS policies adopted in Paris, however, focused on winning health benefits, access to education, and a shorter working day for the proletariat, calling for the creation of an “independent Polish republic” led by the working classes without specifying precise borders. Ignacy Daszyński, a key PPS figure active in Galicia, argued that the party would be the first of its kind to operate across imperial boundaries, appealing to Polish workers and peasants, as well as their fellow Jewish, Lithuanian, and East Slavic toilers, throughout the entirety of the divided Commonwealth territory.<sup>27</sup>

While Piłsudski, Daszyński, and other members of the generation of “unruly ones” (*niepokorni*) born around or after the January Uprising emerged as the leaders of the PPS in the 1890s and the patrons of the Promethean movement after 1926, it was actually Limanowski, born in 1835, whose loosely Marxian sociology provided the intellectual foundations for the party’s core proto-Promethean ideas. For Limanowski, the nation (*naród*) constituted the highest form of human social organization and was defined, ideally, by the conscious, consensual participation of its constituent members in maintaining a common political, cultural, and economic existence predicated upon direct democracy and full equality.<sup>28</sup> Other social organisms, such as “tribes” and “races,” belonged to a lower order and supposedly lacked a sense of coherence, yet Limanowski did not consider it impossible for these communities to congeal into nations, which is what had supposedly happened when different ethnic and linguistic groups merged into a single French or Italian nation. For Limanowski, “socialism” and “patriotism” formed the purest emanations of the will of the working classes,

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 20-28.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 31-32.

<sup>28</sup> Bolesław Limanowski, *Naród i państwo: studium socyologiczne* (Kraków: Towarzystwo Wydawnictw Ludowych, 1906).

whose mission, in the case of Poland, was to secure an independent nation-state within which the dictatorship of capitalists and large landowners would be radically replaced with agrarian cooperatives and workers' collectives. National rebirth and social revolution, according to Limanowski, had to be accomplished in unison or not at all, since a Poland controlled by the powerful and propertied would stifle popular democracy and collective ownership of the country's resources.<sup>29</sup>

Creating nation-states based on the consent of the masses, for Limanowski, meant bringing down multinational empires constructed by force and reorganizing Europe as a voluntary federation of fraternal socialist nations that would replicate the cantonal structure of Switzerland on a continental scale.<sup>30</sup> "Lithuania" and "Ruthenia," as Limanowski referred to the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Right-Bank Ukraine, could join Poland in a resurrected Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth on the Swiss model, with the Grand Duchy being further federalized on an ethnographic basis.<sup>31</sup> The fact that such an arrangement would leave Ukrainians and Belarusians divided between states did not appear to trouble Limanowski, who considered the enduring spiritual and institutional unity of the Commonwealth to transcend ethnic borders and, in any case, to constitute a preferable alternative to Russian rule. For Limanowski and his comrades in the PPS, the nation-state was neither a barrier nor a mere transitional structure on the way to the socialist revolution, but the cornerstone of an internationalist order premised upon cooperation among the working classes across Europe. Importantly, the specific federal models outlined by Limanowski never

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<sup>29</sup> Idem., *Patryotyzm i socjalizm* (Geneva: 1883).

<sup>30</sup> Idem., *Rozwój przekonań demokratycznych w narodzie polskim* (Kraków: Spółka Nakładowa „Książka,” 1906), 38-39.

<sup>31</sup> Krzysztof Grygajtis, "Koncepcja kantonalna," in *Polskie idee federacyjne i ich realizacja w XIX i XX w.* (Częstochowa: Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Pedagogicznej w Częstochowie), 18-71.



officially entered the program of the PPS, which remained committed to transforming the imperial Russian borderlands into a belt of sovereign nation-states while leaving the territorial contours of a future “independent Polish people’s republic” unspecified. Nationalism, for the PPS, constituted a dynamic, revolutionary force that would mobilize mass unrest and lead the despotic Russian Empire into a state of crisis and collapse, leaving the liberated peoples of the peripheries to decide for themselves upon the borders between their homelands, potentially on the basis of ethnography, as some programmatic documents suggested. For Limanowski, the French Revolution provided a beacon of inspiration for how this transformation could be achieved, while the model of Switzerland, as well as Poland’s own “federalist” traditions, offered ideas for how Europe would actually be organized once the upheavals had settled.<sup>32</sup>

If Limanowski often looked westward for a blueprint for the future of Central and Eastern Europe, then it was the younger members of the early PPS, born in the 1860s and 1870s, who directly confronted the challenge of making a compelling case for Poland’s separation from the Russian Empire between the 1890s and 1914. While the leaders of *Proletaryat* had already opposed the PPS on this issue, another vigorous challenger emerged in the form of Rosa Luxemburg, who founded the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland (SDKP) in 1893 in order to combat the “social patriotic” deviation represented by Limanowski and Piłsudski, which, she alleged, threatened to derail the Polish labor movement from the “all-Russian” path to revolution.<sup>33</sup> According to Luxemburg, the PPS had anachronistically dredged up Marx’s support for Polish independence from earlier in the nineteenth century, when both Poland and the rest of Russia had been in a precapitalist stage of economic

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<sup>32</sup> Limanowski, *Rozwój*, 39.

<sup>33</sup> Ito, “Is the National Question...?,” 11-14.

development in which the proletarian struggle had not yet taken shape and the democratic nationalism of the nobility could still be considered a revolutionary force. Yet, with the growth of industry in Moscow, Warsaw, and the lands between them since the 1880s, the situation had changed, and the cause of Polish independence no longer neatly overlapped with the class-based program of a proletarian party such as the SDKP, whose present task was to unite Polish workers with those in the rest of the Russian Empire and, eventually, the wider world. According to Luxemburg, the “social patriotic” deviation sought to misdirect the Polish labor movement away from genuine internationalism and towards the formation of an independent Poland that would effectively remain in bourgeois hands, a goal that the SDKP’s predecessors in *Proletaryat* had already renounced.<sup>34</sup> The overwhelming tendency of capitalist development, Luxemburg posited, was to amalgamate territory, labor, markets, and resources in an increasingly interconnected fabric, making the PPS program nothing more than a dead end for the working classes.<sup>35</sup>

The challenge of systemically refuting the position of the SDKP (after 1899 the SDKPiL) on Polish separatism was taken up right around the turn of the century, when Leon Wasilewski, Witold Jodko-Narkiewicz, and Kazimierz Kelles-Krauz published brochures devoted to proving the essential interdependence between independent statehood and the victory of the socialist movement. The primary task of these PPS activists was to elaborate a theory of the political economy of Tsarism that not only demonstrated the interconnection of class exploitation and national repression, but which also proved that the Russian Empire and its borderlands were bound for fragmentation rather than growing integration. At the same time, the PPS

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<sup>34</sup> Maciej Różga [Rosa Luxemburg], *Niepodległa Polska a sprawa robotnicza* (Paris: 1895).

<sup>35</sup> Idem., *The Polish Question*.

faced not only Luxemburg's argument, but also had to contend with other Polish socialists, like those from *Proletaryat*, who advocated the reformation of Russia along constitutional and federal lines through cooperation with Russian leftists and progressives interested in eliminating the institutional fetters of Tsarism. Meanwhile, most non-Polish nationalists and socialists in the borderlands, whether in the Baltic region, Ukraine, or the Caucasus, preferred the renovation of the Russian multinational state over its division along ethnic lines, presenting yet another difficulty with which the PPS and, in later years, the Promethean movement had to deal.<sup>36</sup> Even if the SDKP formally emerged after the PPS, it was the latter, prior to 1914, that represented an alternative internationalism that called for a radical break from the more widespread tendency towards an "all-Russian" movement among both ethnic Russians and the borderland nationalities.

According to Józef Piłsudski, "Russification" constituted the "main axis" around which the entire state apparatus and bureaucratic machinery of imperial Russia was organized, reflecting the determination of the Tsarist state to erode the ethnic distinctiveness and collective consciousness of its non-Russian subjects, gradually transforming them into a homogeneous mass of docile subjects.<sup>37</sup> Leon Wasilewski, an ethnographer and one of Piłsudski's close collaborators in the early years of the PPS, elaborated upon this assertion in 1901 by placing the evolution of the imperial Russian state in historical perspective, arguing that the Tsars, driven by a ruthless hunger for labor and resources to exploit, had rapidly cobbled together a despotism encompassing many different national groups that they lacked the means to properly

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<sup>36</sup> See Rex Wade, "The nationalities: identity and opportunity," in *The Russian Revolution 1917* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017 [2005]).

<sup>37</sup> Józef Piłsudski, "Rusyfikacja," in *Pisma zbiorowe: wydanie prac dotyczących drukiem ogłoszonych*, volume 1 (Warszawa: Instytut Józefa Piłsudskiego, 1937), 97-101.

assimilate, leading them to practice a policy of untrammelled coercion towards the borderlands. Russification, Wasilewski wrote, assumed different forms depending upon the particular context in question, yet its overarching logic universally pushed for the transformation of Poles, Ukrainians, Georgians, and Tatars into obedient slaves of the Tsar who lacked any feelings of national loyalty that might turn them against their Russian rulers.<sup>38</sup> Restrictions on expressions of national identity, education, language, and political life all weighed heavily upon non-Russians, yet Wasilewski alleged that the Tsarist authorities went further by cynically manipulating the empire's ethnic heterogeneity to strengthen their hold on the borderlands, following a "divide and conquer" strategy by posting non-Russian bureaucrats and soldiers far away from their homelands to prevent them from developing sympathy for the local population. A Kalmyk rifleman, Wasilewski wrote, would sooner fire upon an unruly crowd of Poles than he would if confronted with his own compatriots, and Tsarist officials understood this perfectly as they sought to use the peoples of the peripheries against one another while Russifying them over the long term. With this in mind, Wasilewski called upon all of the non-Russians of the empire to adopt a shared struggle against their common enemy and prepare for a concerted uprising against Tsarism as soon as another political or military crisis shook its foundations.<sup>39</sup>

So far, Piłsudski and Wasilewski had presented a general account of Russian imperialism stretching back to the ascent of Muscovy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, yet they and their comrades in the PPS went further in arguing for a direct connection between the national struggle and the working-class cause in a period of capitalist development. In the first place, Wasilewski and Kelles-Krauz contended that

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<sup>38</sup> Wasilewski, *W wspólnym jarzmie*, 7-10; 32-33.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 35-37.

Russian bourgeois capitalists aligned with the Tsarist state desired a nationally homogeneous home market within the boundaries of the empire and saw Russification as a way to more effectively submit the multinational labor force to their exploitation.<sup>40</sup> While non-Russian capitalists contributed to the subjugation of the working masses, Kelles-Krauz stressed that the union of Russian capital and Tsarism was the principal source of both national and class oppression throughout the borderlands, arguing that the bourgeoisie of the dominant nationality in a multinational state, as a rule, treated workers of marginalized nationalities with special brutality.<sup>41</sup> For this reason, both Kelles-Krauz and Jodko-Narkiewicz agreed that workers and peasants were especially exposed to Russification, lacking the material resources and collective organization to resist the erasure of their identity while the more privileged classes managed to circumvent Tsarist policies and shield themselves from the worst effects.<sup>42</sup> Until non-Russian toilers could unite their productive energies within independent socialist nation-states, Kelles-Krauz wrote, they would continue to grow alienated from both their nationality and their creative potential, meaning that the socialist movement in a state such as Russia would have to mobilize the power of modern nationalism in their fight for complete liberation.<sup>43</sup>

Responding directly to Luxemburg, Kelles-Krauz insisted that the continuing division of Poland constituted an obstacle to normal economic development and the achievement of socialism by Polish workers. While Kelles-Krauz attacked the imperial German government for supporting Germanization campaigns in its “Polish

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 37; Kelles-Krauz, *Niepodległość Polski w programie socyalistycznym* (Paris: 1900), 26-29.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 28-30.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.; Witold Jodko-Narkiewicz, *Objaśnienia programu Polskiej Partji Socjalistycznej* (St. Petersburg: Drukarnia polska “Sztandar,” 1917), 17-21.

<sup>43</sup> Kelles-Krauz, *Niepodległość*, 33-35.

provinces” and criticized the Austro-Hungarian system for upholding the power of the Polish nobility in Galicia under the guise of “autonomy,” he emphasized that the situation in Russia was by far the worst out of the three partitions.<sup>44</sup> Because of the extreme economic backwardness and despotism of the Russian interior, Kelles-Krauz posited that Poland’s real path to social, cultural, and economic maturation was being artificially stunted by the Tsarist authorities, who sought to tightly yoke the outlying borderlands to the ethnically Russian provinces.<sup>45</sup> This meant, as Wasilewski agreed, that Polish efforts at winning a constitution or introducing social reforms could never progress far beyond what the Tsarist officials would allow for all of the empire, effectively stifling Poland’s creativity and binding a territory with strong ties to Western Europe to the lumbering, underdeveloped backwaters of Russia.<sup>46</sup>

Wasilewski even contended that the apparent failure of Jews to integrate with Poles in the Congress Kingdom owed not to Polish antisemitism or Jewish obstinacy, but to the suspension of normal socioeconomic development by the heavy hand of Russian autocracy.<sup>47</sup>

While PPS theorists could write of a slow convergence between the borderlands and the rest of Russia, they blamed this phenomenon for suffocating the growth of places like Poland while condemning the peripheries to abnormal trajectories of development that could only be altered through the creation of independent, democratic nation-states. This task, according to Kelles-Krauz, had already been completed in France and Italy by constitutionally minded “democrats” in the

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 55-58.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 26-27.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.; Wasilewski, *W wspólnym jarzmie*, 5-10; 38-40.

<sup>47</sup> Idem., *Kwestia żydowska na ziemiach dawnej Rzeczypospolitej* (L’viv: “Zjednoczenie”, 1913).

eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, preparing the ground for the “Social Democrats” of those countries to pursue working-class liberation.<sup>48</sup> In Central and Eastern Europe, by contrast, the national emancipation requisite for socialism had never been fully achieved, so Kelles-Krauz, much like Limanowski, asserted that the duty of all Social Democrats should be to complete the national struggles of the earlier “democrats” whose struggles against autocracy had been crushed by Russian, Prussian, and Habsburg armies. Continuing Limanowski’s argument, Kelles-Krauz bluntly rejected Rosa Luxemburg’s claims that an independent Poland would likely end up in the hands of the propertied classes, insisting that the national and socialist revolutions must be united and that the PPS’s position on separation from Russia was historically sound.<sup>49</sup>

At the same time, Kelles-Krauz made sure to address counterarguments from socialists who considered Polish membership in a reformed, federalized Russia to constitute the best alternative to both Tsarism and secession. Piłsudski had already maintained throughout the 1890s that Russian liberals and socialists were unprepared to truly allow the peoples of the borderlands to decide their own fate, writing that the PPS had yet to find a Russian grouping whose members had fully purged the contours of the empire from their mental geographies to make way for an independent Poland.<sup>50</sup> Kelles-Krauz, however, went into much further detail in refuting federal programs, once again drawing upon the basic idea that the developmental gulf between the former Congress Kingdom and the ethnically Russian provinces was too tremendous to overcome, even with the best intentions. Because of Russia’s

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<sup>48</sup> Kelles-Krauz, *Niepodległość*, 47-48; 67-68.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 28-30.

<sup>50</sup> Piłsudski, “Zadania praktyczne rewolucji w zaborze rosyjskim,” in *Pisma*, volume 3, 5-22.

backwardness, a potential constitution issued for the entire empire in Saint Petersburg would hardly satisfy Poland's needs, meaning that the limits of autonomy for the old Congress Kingdom would already be set according to Russian standards. Such a situation would be no real surprise, Kelles-Krauz claimed, because the abortive attempt at introducing autonomy for the post-Napoleonic Congress Kingdom between 1815 and 1830 had been curtailed by Nicholas I and finished with a bloody, failed uprising by proponents of a Polish constitutional system.<sup>51</sup> Mutual distrust, furthermore, would prevent the Russian authorities from allowing Poles to adopt a constitution for the Congress Kingdom that would guarantee them a broadly autonomous government on par with the one in Saint Petersburg. In theory, Kelles-Krauz conceded, the more developed, cultured members of a federation could exercise a positive influence on their poorer, benighted counterparts, so long as the former would be given the right to continuing evolving without the latter weighing them down. This complete freedom, however, would never appear in even a constitutional Russia, leaving Poland, at best, as the frustrated Catalonia of a vast, impoverished empire that would perpetually be trailing behind.<sup>52</sup>

Only an independent Poland created from all three partitioned territories, according to Kelles-Krauz, could sustain true socialism and break free of Russia's deadweight. Kelles-Krauz, like Wasilewski, encouraged all of the peoples of the Russian Empire to follow this course, recommending that "Lithuania and Latvia," meaning the former Grand Duchy and the *Inflanty polskie* to the north, should form "one state organism" with Poland, while Poles could create a "looser union" with

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<sup>51</sup> Kelles-Krauz, *Niepodległość*, 23-24.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 25-26.



“Ruthenia.”<sup>53</sup> Kelles-Krauz and Wasilewski further concurred that breaking away from Russia would not be a peaceful affair, much as they contended that the attainment of socialism within the Russian Empire would not guarantee an end to Polish national oppression, and the PPS program from the 1890s envisioned widespread national revolts in the borderlands as the only force that could topple Tsarist rule.<sup>54</sup> While Kelles-Krauz passed away in 1905, just five years after the publication of his programmatic brochure, his vision of an alliance of nation-states forged on the ruins of international struggle was strikingly prescient of the kind of multinational system that Piłsudski tried to create in Eastern Europe in 1920. Wasilewski, meanwhile, was generally more cautious in his writings, commenting that the whole of Ukraine, not just Right-Bank “Ruthenia,” posed the greatest potential threat to Tsarism’s survival by virtue of its expansiveness, demographic might, and historical traditions of statehood under Kyivan Rus’ and the Cossacks, while the peoples of the old Grand Duchy, as late as 1911, were still very much in flux in terms of their national identities.<sup>55</sup> While Limanowski and Kelles-Krauz presented interesting outlines for federal systems before 1914, it was Wasilewski’s gravitation towards statehood within ethnic borders that made it into the last Revolutionary Faction program issued before the First World War by Jodko-Narkiewicz.<sup>56</sup> In the end, Piłsudski drew inspirations from both currents amid the wreckage of 1918 to 1921, proclaiming a fraternal federation for the old Grand Duchy

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 38-40.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 34-36; Wasilewski, *W wspólnym jarzmie*, 7-10.

<sup>55</sup> Idem., *Ukraina i sprawa ukraińska* (Kraków: “Książka”, 1911), ix-xxi; idem., *Litwa i Białoruś: przeszłość - teraźniejszość - tendencje rozwojowe* (Kraków: Książka, 1912), xiii-xvii; 340-356.

<sup>56</sup> Jodko-Narkiewicz, *Objaśnienia*, 181-184. Earlier editions were issued in 1908 and 1913.

yet never hesitating to privilege Poland's strategic and economic needs over the principle of ethnography, most egregiously in his alliance with Petliura.<sup>57</sup>

### **Polish socialist criticisms of the PPS program of separatism**

When Kelles-Krauz and Wasilewski completed their brochures at the outset of the twentieth century, the PPS had already faced close to a decade of harsh criticism from other Polish leftists who rejected the idea that complete separation from Russia was essential to the attainment of socialism in the lands of partitioned Poland. One particularly prolific rival in the immediate aftermath of the Second Congress was Ludwik Kulczycki, a sociologist and leader of *Proletaryat* whose career as a theorist of international law, state formation, and socialism continued until his death in the Second World War. Unlike both the PPS and Rosa Luxemburg's SDKP, Kulczycki, for the most part, was most interested in creating a democratic, constitutional order in Russia rather than pursuing revolution as an immediate goal, and his writings on the possibility of reforming the Russian Empire through the introduction of frameworks for autonomy and federalism demonstrated a striking degree of depth and nuance. While these works elaborating specific models for territorial and political transformation mostly appeared during and after the Revolution of 1905, Kulczycki was already countering the PPS theory of Russian backwardness around 1901, insisting, against Kelles-Krauz, that chances for decentralization had improved since the 1830s because the Kingdom of Poland and the Russian interior had actually converged in important ways over the previous three-quarters of a century.<sup>58</sup> Kulczycki specifically took issue with the PPS portrayal of Russia as barbaric and static, writing that while such an assessment might have been warranted earlier in the

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<sup>57</sup> See Chapter Two.

<sup>58</sup> Ludwik Kulczycki, *W sprawie powstania i innych zagadnień programowo-taktycznych* (Wydawnictwo Polskiej Partii Socjalistycznej "Proletariat", 1901).

nineteenth century, ethnic Russians had largely closed the gap with Poles not only in terms of economic development, but also in the realms of cultural achievements, scientific discoveries, and political thought.<sup>59</sup> This did not mean, of course, that the average ethnically Russian village had reached the same level of affluence as its Polish counterpart, but that the major cities of Russia, such as Moscow and Saint Petersburg, were showing a degree of advancement and vibrancy on par with Warsaw. For this reason, Kulczycki rejected the claim that Polish socialists could not find a common language with their Russian contemporaries and insisted that the all-Russian push for constitutional reform represented a promising current to which Poles should contribute.<sup>60</sup>

Kulczycki, furthermore, took issue with the PPS vision of an armed insurrection as the most promising way to break the Tsarist yoke, stressing that the fights for constitutional rights and labor reform were the most productive battles in which Polish socialists could take part without resorting to weapons. While Kulczycki conceded that revolts may have enjoyed a decent chance of success in the 1830s, he pointed out that the presence of an extensive system of internal surveillance and massive, well equipped, and technologically sophisticated standing armies on the territory of the Russian Empire would render a popular rebellion both impossible to organize and hopelessly doomed to defeat even if it began to unfold.<sup>61</sup> The imperial authorities, moreover, controlled a network of telegraph lines and railroads that would enable them to quickly transfer forces to the Kingdom of Poland, rapidly outweighing even the greatest conceivable numerical strength of a working-class insurrection

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 39-46.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 45-46.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-28.

headed by the PPS or the SDKP. Kulczycki patiently and precisely engaged with specific PPS visions of how peasants and workers could be transformed into citizen-soldiers, concluding that the push for a constitution for all of the Russian Empire constituted the best alternative to revolutions that, in his assessment, would inevitably culminate in bloodshed and defeat.<sup>62</sup> Witold Jodko-Narkiewicz, a frequent PPS commentator on military matters and the author of the specific pamphlets with which Kulczycki took issue, would later revise his ideas for a Polish campaign against Russia after the Revolution of 1905, shifting focus from creating a covert force of working-class guerrillas to aligning the PPS with a major European power, such as Austria-Hungary, in anticipation of a generalized war that would allow for formally trained Polish divisions to fight against Tsarist forces.<sup>63</sup>

Kulczycki continued this point by arguing that even a successful mass mobilization by the PPS would not bring down the Russian Empire because the other peoples of the borderlands, or, at least, their mass-based socialist parties, favored reform and decentralization over violent secession.<sup>64</sup> In particular, Kulczycki was eager to introduce his Polish readers to the cases of Finland and Georgia, both of which were “highly developed” borderlands of the Russian Empire in cultural and political terms that could boast historical traditions of nationhood preceding their incorporation into the Tsarist state. Despite autocratic violations of Finland’s formal autonomy throughout the nineteenth century, Kulczycki observed that the progressive political forces in this especially “civilized” territory generally sought cooperation

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 29-34.

<sup>63</sup> Witold Jodko Narkiewicz, *Kwestya polska wobec zbliżającego się konfliktu Austrii z Rosyą* (Kraków: 1909). See Chapter Two for a discussion of visions of war and national revolution in Piłsudski’s camp.

<sup>64</sup> Kulczycki, *W sprawie powstania*, 45-46.

with Russian democrats and socialists, pursuing self-rule within a renovated Russia.<sup>65</sup> Georgia, meanwhile, caught Kulczycki's attention because of the vibrancy of its Social Democratic movement, which advocated for the abolition of restrictions on non-Russian languages and cultures and the introduction of an all-Russian constitution as well as the creation of Georgian autonomy that would place matters of education, government, and economic organization in local hands. By Kulczycki's estimate, Georgia constituted one of the greatest challenges for the survival of Tsarism, since capitalist development and "civilization" were already flowering in and around Batumi, driving the "proletarianization" of the peasantry and drawing ethnically Russian colonists into the socialist movement alongside their Georgian comrades.<sup>66</sup> Georgia, Kulczycki emphasized, was a mature, "historic" nation with many instances of partition and imperial interference in its past, yet Georgian Social Democrats still identified with the all-Russian standard when it came to choosing a course for the future of their homeland.<sup>67</sup>

Writing in 1904, Kulczycki raised a valid criticism of the PPS program that anticipated the difficulties faced by the proto-Promethean camp in drawing allies to their internationalist project prior to the end of the First World War. While Wasilewski and his confidants had found some success in drawing a handful of Ukrainian socialists from Galicia into a loose alliance with the PPS, finding support among Jewish workers proved to be more difficult, especially in areas of the Kingdom of Poland and the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania in which the Bund, with its

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<sup>65</sup> Idem., *Współczesne prądy umysłowe i polityczne: szkice. Ser. 2* (L'viv: Polskie Towarzystwo Nakładowe, 1904), 80-111.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 128-141.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 135-141.

critical stance on assimilation, predominated.<sup>68</sup> In the autumn of 1904, the PPS sent a delegation to Paris to attend a conference alongside the right-wing National League, headed by Roman Dmowski, as well as Russian Constitutional Democrats and Socialist-Revolutionaries and representatives of the Latvian, Georgian, Armenian, and Finnish opposition movements. After ten days, the gathering produced resolutions calling for the elimination of autocracy and its infringements on Finnish autonomy, the establishment of a democratic system of government based on universal suffrage, and the guarantee of “national self-determination” free from state discrimination.<sup>69</sup> By this point, the PPS had already made its preference for secession abundantly clear in its programmatic statements, yet the dominant inclination at the conference was to ensure the rights of non-Russian nationalities without challenging the territorial integrity of the imperial Russian space. While the Socialist-Revolutionaries favored federalism for the non-Russians, the Kadets, through 1918, opposed the devolution of power on a national basis, preferring the existing gubernias as units for self-rule.<sup>70</sup> Meanwhile, the representatives of the nationalities, including the National League, generally favored autonomy within a reformed Russia, though Dmowski ultimately saw this as a transitional step to eventual Polish independence.<sup>71</sup> Notably absent were either Socialist-Revolutionaries or Social Democrats from Ukraine, though both of these groupings favored some form of autonomy over secession through the end of

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<sup>68</sup> See Joshua D. Zimmerman, *Poles, Jews, and the Politics of Nationality* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004).

<sup>69</sup> Wasilewski, *Zarys*, 147-150.

<sup>70</sup> See the correspondence between the Provisional Government and the Central Rada in *The Russian Provisional Government, 1917: documents*, volume 1, ed. Robert Paul Browder (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1961).

<sup>71</sup> Roman Dmowski, *Niemcy, Rosya i kwestya polska* (L'viv: H. Altenberg, 1908).

1917.<sup>72</sup> Mykola Porsh, the author of the Ukrainian Socialist-Revolutionary brochures on autonomy, criticized the Tsarist state for placing Ukrainians in a condition of economic and educational underdevelopment, though he argued as late as 1917 that a division of powers between the all-Russian government and institutions of Ukrainian autonomy could solve this problem.<sup>73</sup> While Porsh eventually found himself discussing an alliance with Piłsudski's Poland in 1919 to 1920, the road to this situation first led through a painful disillusionment with the Bolsheviks in 1917 to 1918.<sup>74</sup>

While Kulczycki advocated the creation of structures of national autonomy, with an eye to the future federalization of Russia, on the eve of the Revolution of 1905, both *Proletaryat* and the PPS met with vigorous opposition from Rosa Luxemburg, one of the leaders of the SDKPiL who also participated prominently in the German Social Democratic Party (SPD). Luxemburg's sharp criticisms of the PPS program of separatism were based on the idea that the prospect of Polish independence had not only lost its revolutionary significance but constituted a real and serious danger to the unity of the all-Russian Social Democratic struggle. In 1895, the SDKP, as it was still known then, appealed to Polish workers to recognize that a Polish state was completely unnecessary for the overthrow of capitalism and the achievement of socialism, mostly because a future Poland would likely end up in the hands of capitalists, militarists, and the same oppressors who ruled the Russian Empire.<sup>75</sup>

While the PPS vowed to empower peasants and workers so that they would be able to

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<sup>72</sup> Paul Robert Magocsi, *A History of Ukraine: The Land and Its Peoples*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 403.

<sup>73</sup> Mykola Porsh, *Avtonomiia Ukraïny i sotsial'demokratiiia* (Kyiv: "Znattia to sila," 1917).

<sup>74</sup> See Chapter Two.

<sup>75</sup> Luxemburg, *Niepodległa Polska*.

control the destiny of a future Poland, Luxemburg raised a legitimate criticism when she questioned exactly how such a transformation would be conducted in practice, rejecting the proposition that Polish sovereignty would be necessary for the emergence of socialism and insisting upon an increasingly close relationship between proletarians in the former Congress Kingdom and the industrial cities of Russia. Luxemburg not only opposed the PPS line on independent statehood for Poland, but she also rejected any kind of “federalism” along national lines as unnecessary impediments to the growing unification of working class struggles across the Russian imperial space.<sup>76</sup>

At the heart of Luxemburg’s territorial thought lay her strong conviction that the development of capitalism in Poland had first emerged and progressively accelerated precisely because of its connection to the rest of the Russian Empire, which offered seemingly inexhaustible sources of raw materials, a vast labor force, and expansive foreign markets for Polish finished goods.<sup>77</sup> Prior to the middle of the nineteenth century, Luxemburg wrote, Poland and Russia were not tightly integrated into a shared economic fabric, since much of Russia’s might still flowed from the natural economy of the peasant commune in the absence of capitalist relations of production.<sup>78</sup> With encouragement and subsidies from the Tsarist state, however, Russia and its Polish provinces began to develop large-scale industries by the 1870s, driving changes in the organization of labor and resources within the vast empire to the advantage of the bourgeoisie, both in Poland and in European Russia. Yet, the fetters of Tsarism continued to restrict bourgeois aspirations for greater productivity

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<sup>76</sup> *Idem.*, *The National Question*, Chapter 4.

<sup>77</sup> *Idem.*, *The Industrial Development of Poland*, (1898). Obtained at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1898/industrialpoland/index.htm>.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, part 1, sections 1-2.



and output, foreshadowing, in Luxemburg's view, a looming clash between the ambitious propertied capitalists and the archaic institutions of absolutism that prevented them from fully mobilizing Russia's riches.<sup>79</sup> Directly contradicting the crux of the PPS theses on the stunted development of Poland under Russian rule, Luxemburg saw the empire's borderlands increasingly merging with its interior as Polish and Russian capitalists developed symbiotic relations, crossing national lines and coordinating their economic endeavors rather than simply competing with one another.

The growth of the Congress Kingdom as an industrial powerhouse, according to Luxemburg, had taken place simultaneously with its organic integration into the rest of Russia, to which it was now more closely aligned than it was to any of the Polish-speaking lands under German or Austro-Hungarian rule. This alliance of Polish and Russian capital, meanwhile, exposed the impending destruction of Tsarism, whose traditional foundation of agrarian precapitalist relations was, in Luxemburg's view, soon to be overturned by the bourgeoisie, which, she contended, had already staked out a powerful place in directing Russia's foreign policy and internal affairs.<sup>80</sup> Yet, just as the autocratic system faced its own demise at the hands of the very productive forces that it had unleashed, the bourgeoisie of the entire Russian Empire would now have to contend with the growing class of proletarians that it had funneled from the overpopulated villages into the chaotic, brutal crucibles of industry in Moscow, Saint Petersburg, Warsaw, and Łódź. Because the Polish and Russian bourgeois elites had collaboratively engineered an extensive, integrated imperial economy that fused Poland and Russia as never before, Luxemburg maintained that workers and Social

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., part 2, sections 2-3.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., Conclusion.

Democrats should deepen this interconnection on the basis of existing material conditions rather than artificially interrupting it in the name of national interests, which, she held, were strictly subordinate, if not inconsequential, to the class-based agenda of the revolutionary struggle. Half a century of industrial development, in Luxemburg's analysis, had proven the overwhelming tendency of modern capitalism to weld together territories, populations, and resources that had once been separate, producing the physical conditions for a truly internationalist movement of the proletariat to emerge from the foundations laid so hastily by bourgeois greed.<sup>81</sup>

Even so, Luxemburg accepted that the former Congress Kingdom could claim a degree of economic development and cultural distinctiveness not to be found elsewhere in the Russian Empire, meriting the conferral of a participatory framework of "national autonomy," but only insofar as it would further the growth and enrich the intellectual life of the proletariat and the Social Democratic movement.<sup>82</sup> Luxemburg also founded the SDKPiL as a "regional" organ of the all-Russian Social Democracy, justifying its creation on the grounds that the old Congress Kingdom formed a distinctive part of the Russian Empire that needed its own party structure to ensure its proper coordination with the wider movement. Across the border in Germany, however, Luxemburg found no grounds for a separate Polish organization within the SPD, yet she vocally vituperated the imperial German government and the other parties in the *Reichstag* for either silently permitting or directly advancing anti-Polish policies meant to shift the demographic balance and distribution of wealth in favor of Germans in the lands around Danzig and Posen (now Gdańsk and Poznań).<sup>83</sup> In this

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Idem., *The National Question*, Chapter 5.

<sup>83</sup> Idem., *W obronie narodowości* (Poznań: J. Gogowski, 1900), 1-7.

case, Luxemburg argued that the SPD, as a party for the entire German Empire, was the one true supporter of the Polish working classes against both German chauvinists and Polish nationalist opportunists, declaring an unequivocal rejection of nationally based persecution even as she steadfastly refused to see nationality alone as a legitimate basis for federalizing Social Democracy.<sup>84</sup> Luxemburg likely took a similar view of agrarian Galicia, treating the former Congress Kingdom as a territory fit for autonomy not purely because of its national character but, more importantly, because of its economic and developmental distinctiveness within the Russian Empire, to which it remained intimately bound in the final analysis.

Even before her major polemics with Vladimir Lenin, Luxemburg had already earned a reputation in the ranks of the PPS for her allegedly rabid disgust for Polish independence, yet her real difference from Piłsudski and his comrades was rooted not merely in a disagreement about nationalism, but in a more fundamental clash of interpretations of the trajectory of Poland's development under Russian rule. Even compared with Lenin, who published his own meditations on the development of capitalism in Russia in 1899, Luxemburg, in 1898, passionately argued that Russia was, in fact, capable of economic dynamism and was no longer the static "Asiatic" backwater that Marx and the PPS derided, even if the despotic vestiges of Tsarism continued to hamper the achievement of revolutionary socialism and the empire, as a whole, lagged far behind the more compact states of Central and Western Europe.<sup>85</sup> Luxemburg not only faced the secessionist outlook of the PPS, but also had to contend with the right-wing National Democratic movement founded in 1893, whose leading ideologues wrote of a vast sphere of Polish "civilization" encompassing the

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 7-14.

<sup>85</sup> Idem., *The Industrial Development of Poland*.

entirety of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth within its 1772 borders.<sup>86</sup> Committed to defending Polish material interests, the National Democrats sought to expand Poland's "national property" on every front, accepting open conflict with Germans, Russians, Jews, and Belarusian, Ukrainian, and Lithuanian nationalists in the lands stretching to the Dnipro and Dvina Rivers.<sup>87</sup> While the National Democrats, by 1905, preferred a gradual reinstatement of Polish independence with Russian support over an armed uprising, they ultimately represented an "all-Polish" movement that coveted parts of all three partition zones and sought to uphold the economic and cultural hegemony of Poles within that territory.<sup>88</sup>

Considered from this point of view, Luxemburg faced at least two strong opponents throughout the lands of partitioned Poland, one socialist and the other right-wing nationalist, that strove to mobilize Polish workers and peasants behind the idea of an independent Poland cobbled together from the borderlands of multinational empires. Unlike Lenin, who sought to preemptively defend the Bolsheviks against accusations of "great power chauvinism" by endorsing the "right of nations to self-determination," Luxemburg refused to budge on the issue of Poland's resurrection, taking a determined stand against the idea that Poles needed their own state or party to participate in the international revolution. While Lenin fought to keep together a vast, multinational space under pressure from Russian nationalists and borderland separatists, Luxemburg had to develop an approach to preventing Polish toilers from falling under the spell of those who wanted to create separate Polish parties designed

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<sup>86</sup> See Barbara Stoczewska, *Ukraina i ukraińcy w polskiej myśli politycznej: od końca XIX wieku do wybuchu II światowej wojny* (Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza AFM, 2013), 71-94.

<sup>87</sup> The classic text illustrating this outlook is Zygmunt Balicki, *Egoizm narodowy wobec etyki* (L'viv: Nakład Towarzystwa Wydawniczego, 1902).

<sup>88</sup> Stoczewska, *Ukraina i ukraińcy*, 90-94.

to fight for a separate Polish homeland. Luxemburg, however, did not expect national differences to simply dissolve with the coming of socialism, arguing, instead, that the working classes had their best chance of securing the ability to freely develop their own languages and distinctive proletarian cultures by joining Social Democracy, even if bourgeois capitalists dangled the attractive but ultimately corrupted promise of statehood before them.<sup>89</sup> While her rivals in the PPS allegedly revived Marx's earlier endorsements of Polish independence to further their mistaken cause, Luxemburg claimed that the SDKPiL took a fundamentally more rigorous approach to the national struggle by developing a properly Marxist method of social and economic analysis with which to study the maturation of capitalism in the Russian Empire.<sup>90</sup>

While the SDKP and the PPS are most famously remembered for clashing over the "Polish question" in London in 1896, a closer analysis of their ideas and polemics, as well as those of *Proletaryat*, an even earlier member of the International, reveal that their disagreements lay in even deeper questions of the course of capitalist development and the possibility of revolutionary internationalism in the multinational Russian Empire. Constantly entangled in debates throughout the 1890s and into the opening years of the twentieth century, all three organizations would once again clash, both on the printed page and in the streets, with the onset of the revolutionary tumult of 1905 to 1907 in the Russian Empire and, especially, its Polish-speaking lands. This time, the specific question of whether and how to federalize the Russian imperial space emerged as a major point of contention, providing another vantage point from which to examine the territorial imaginations and internationalist visions of Luxemburg, Piłsudski, Kulczycki, and their comrades. While plans for overthrowing

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<sup>89</sup> Luxemburg, *The National Question*, Chapter 2.

<sup>90</sup> Idem., *The Polish Question*.

Tsarism and capitalism already abounded in the 1890s, the issue of proposing specific frameworks for territorial reconstruction came up in earnest during the deliberations on “federalism,” providing a sense of how these figures might have approached a concrete problem of territorial reform if presented with the chance.

### **The Revolution of 1905 and the “federalism” debate**

Soon after the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War in February of 1904, Józef Piłsudski and his confidants in the PPS, among them Witold Jodko-Narkiewicz, embarked upon a transcontinental journey that brought them to Tokyo via Europe, the Atlantic Ocean, North America, and the Pacific.<sup>91</sup> Piłsudski, who had recently overseen the creation of the first working-class “combat organization” (*bojówka*) of the PPS in the former Congress Kingdom, had already waited for more than a decade for Russia to become entangled in a major international war and, by his reasoning, become exposed to a potential uprising in the borderlands. In this case, however, the battlefields were on the other side of the Eurasian landmass from Poland, though the growing numbers of ethnically Polish conscripts captured by the Japanese forces opened the possibility of the formation of a Polish legion aligned with Tokyo. While Piłsudski’s National Democrat rival, Roman Dmowski, eventually persuaded their Japanese interlocutors not to commit to the aims of the PPS, several government ministers in Tokyo nevertheless expressed a keen interest in exacerbating national tensions in the peripheral regions of Russia, having already seriously considered the Caucasus as a potential area for anti-Tsarist agitation.<sup>92</sup> After the establishment of the Soviet Union, Japanese political leaders and military elites would continue to think in broadly Eurasian terms about undermining their vast socialist neighbor, much as the

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<sup>91</sup> Tytus Filipowicz, “Józef Piłsudski w Japonii w roku 1904,” *Świat* 11 (1934).

<sup>92</sup> Hiraoki Kuromiya and Georges Mamoulia, *The Eurasian Triangle: Russia, The Caucasus and Japan, 1904-1945* (Berlin: DeGruyter, 2016).

Prometheans continued to see Siberia, the Far East, in particular Buryatia and Mongolia, and Manchuria as possible weak points in the fabric of Soviet power.<sup>93</sup>

While Piłsudski's Far Eastern experiment ultimately foundered, the deterioration of the economic situation and the growth of political turmoil within the Russian Empire by early 1905 presented another opportunity for the PPS to fight against Tsarist power. The former Congress Kingdom, home to one of the greatest concentrations of industry in the entire Russian Empire, was roiled by mass strikes that periodically exploded into working-class insurrections in the summer of 1905, pitting proletarians, the PPS, and the SDKPiL against Russian police and military forces as well as the National Democrats, who opposed the upheavals.<sup>94</sup> Demands for labor reform frequently coalesced with frustrations over nationally based discrimination in the popular demonstrations, yet the PPS and SDKPiL, as well as *Proletaryat*, soon clashed with one another about what kind of framework of self-rule to pursue for the Congress Kingdom and how to define the future of the Polish labor movement with respect to the wider Russian revolutionary cause. In 1906, the PPS itself underwent a serious internal split when its various councils in the major cities of the Congress Kingdom struggled to reach an agreement about whether Polish workers should fight for independence from Russia, as Piłsudski had always argued, or position themselves as members of an all-Russian revolution.<sup>95</sup>

As a temporary compromise, the PPS resolved to demand the formation of a "constituent assembly" (*konstyтуanta*) to be convened in Warsaw as soon as possible and opened to delegates elected by Poles on the basis of universal suffrage. While the

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<sup>93</sup> Tatiana Linkhoeva, *Revolution Goes East: Imperial Japan and Soviet Communism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020).

<sup>94</sup> Robert Blobaum, *Rewolucja: Russian Poland, 1904-1907* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).

<sup>95</sup> Wasilewski, *Zarys*, 171-175.

future leaders of PPS-*Lewica* argued that such an organ should work towards cooperation with its all-Russian counterpart in Saint Petersburg, Piłsudski's Revolutionary Faction maintained that the Polish "constituent assembly" would be one of three such bodies, with the other two representing Finland and the rest of the Russian Empire on equal footing.<sup>96</sup> When Jodko-Narkiewicz elaborated this view in 1906, however, he insisted that the ultimate aim of the PPS was still the formation of an "independent Polish people's republic," and that the members of the "constituent assembly" would bear the exclusive right of deciding the terms on which Poland would renegotiate or altogether end its relationship with Russia.<sup>97</sup> The basis for the formation of the "constituent assembly," Jodko-Narkiewicz continued, was the principle of "national self-determination," which would also be extended to the different nationalities of the "Russian Republic" in the form of a less extensive "autonomy" than what Poland and Finland would receive.<sup>98</sup> While the socialization of property and the establishment of working-class rule in Poland both emerged as important objectives for the PPS, Jodko-Narkiewicz made few efforts to downplay the enduring centrality of Polish statehood for his wing of the party, which officially underwent a division into PPS-*Lewica* and the Revolutionary Faction in the autumn of 1906. The former grouping, known as the "young" successor to the PPS, counted Maria Koszutska as one of its members and later merged with the non-Bolshevik elements of the SDKPiL to create the Communist Workers' Party of Poland in 1918,

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 173.

<sup>97</sup> Jodko-Narkiewicz, *Konstytuanta w Warszawie a proletaryat polski* (Warszawa: Nowe Życie, 1906).

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 13-15.



just as Piłsudski and the Revolutionary Faction were establishing themselves at the head of the newly formed Second Polish Republic.<sup>99</sup>

Under the arrangement put forth by the PPS in 1906, Poland, Finland, and Russia would not be bound together by a common all-Russian authority based in Saint Petersburg, but would effectively constitute three separate states with their own republican governments whose continuing connection to one another would be determined by the deliberations of their respective “constituent assemblies.” The Polish, Finnish, and Russian republics, in other words, would stand as juridical equals, and their respective “constituent assemblies” would enjoy exclusive jurisdiction over their own territories with no right to intervene in the internal affairs of the other. The appearance of this proposal immediately caught the attention of Rosa Luxemburg and the SDKPiL, who castigated the PPS for attempting to cloak their enduring separatist aspirations in the language of “federalism” and a “constituent assembly” after recognizing that the struggle for independence would find support neither from within the party nor among the working masses. Here, the official SDKPiL response asserted that the PPS proposal might not lead to immediate secession but, in the near future, to some kind of loose “federation” between Poland and Russia in which both states would tensely coexist as formally equal and effectively independent partners, preparing the way for the further devolution of power to the other national minorities of the Russian borderlands.<sup>100</sup>

While the major PPS brochures of 1906 do not appear to have proposed a “federal” model for Poland, Finland, and Russia, the SDKPiL’s vehement rejection of

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<sup>99</sup> Antoni Czubiński, *Komunistyczna Partia Polski (1918-1938): zarys historii* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne, 1988).

<sup>100</sup> *Rzecz o konstytucji i o rządzie tymczasowym* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Czerwonego Sztandaru, 1906), 39-44.

“federations” in general provides a lens into an important part of the grouping’s territorial imagination. According to Rosa Luxemburg and her comrades, “federations” mostly emerged under precapitalist conditions, such as in the early United States of America at the end of the eighteenth century or in the Habsburg Empire or Switzerland in early-modern times.<sup>101</sup> Germany, meanwhile, was officially divided into numerous smaller territories and city-states, yet anybody familiar with the development of capitalism in that part of Europe could tell that a single home market and a centralized labor movement had both overturned any fiction of federation.<sup>102</sup> While the outlines of these federations persisted into the twentieth century, whether in the form of states, cantons, or kingdoms, the publications of the SDKPiL emphasized that they represented mere anachronisms of a largely symbolic nature, since the integrative forces of modern capitalism had often woven these constituent territories into a single economic fabric that effectively functioned as a unified space with its own bourgeoisie, proletariat, and Social Democratic movement. If federations were already sliding into obscurity, then the SDKPiL firmly opposed their introduction in parts of the world that had already grown together through capitalist development, including the expansive Russian imperial space. In the case of the old Congress Kingdom, federalism, much like full independence, would serve the interests of reactionary nationalists with an interest in splitting apart what had already grown together organically by advancing the fiction of a Polish national homeland divorced from the all-Russian networks that had brought it into the industrialized world. Even if Poland broke away, the SKDPiL warned, the much more powerful capitalists in charge of a post-Tsarist Russia would continue to manipulate its politics and economy,

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<sup>101</sup> Luxemburg, *The National Question*, Chapter 4.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

reproducing the kind of relationship that already existed between “democratic” powers such as metropolitan France and their weak, oppressed colonies.<sup>103</sup>

In rejecting both independence and “federation,” the SDKPiL engaged more positively with the possibility of Polish “autonomy” or “regional self-rule” within a constitutional Russia, though the danger that the bourgeoisie of the Congress Kingdom might appropriate such structures to its own ends remained serious. For this reason, the SDKPiL’s rejoinder to the PPS in 1906 warned the working classes that propertied elites would do everything in their power to ensure themselves a preponderance of representation in an autonomous Poland by blocking proletarian participation or limiting the franchise on the basis of wealth. Such a system, allegedly, had already existed for decades in Austrian Galicia, whose democratic political structures and formal “autonomy” and within a larger multinational empire obscured the continuing domination of Polish capitalists and landowners over the region’s workers and peasants.<sup>104</sup> Autonomy, then, needed to carry an unambiguous class character in Poland, lest it become yet another weapon in the arsenal of privileged elites who claimed to rule in the interests of the “nation.” The solution, in the SDKPiL analysis, was to entrust powers with a general proletarian significance to all-Russian organs, meaning that economic, infrastructural, trade, and political issues would be dealt with through central institutions attended by both Polish and Russian workers as well as other members of the all-Russian Social Democracy. Because Poland was organically unified with the rest of Russia, as Luxemburg had argued, the crucial tasks of the proletarian revolution would logically be managed within common frameworks, both within the Social Democratic movement and, wherever possible,

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<sup>103</sup> *Rzecz o konstytuancie*, 42.

<sup>104</sup> Luxemburg, *The National Question*, Chapter 5.

within formal governmental bodies, whether during the period of bourgeois constitutionalism or on the road to socialism.<sup>105</sup>

Polish “autonomy,” meanwhile, would be primarily concerned with organizing national education, protecting the status of the Polish language, and, more generally, ensuring the development of a Polish proletarian culture through mass education and the elevation of the intellectual life of the working classes. For the time being, such a form of autonomy would be “regional” (*krajowy*) rather than “national,” a point that would change in Luxemburg’s writings from 1908, though its primary beneficiaries would be ethnic Poles, who, unlike Jews, already possessed a well developed bourgeois culture ripe for the emergence of a proper, broadly based proletarian culture.<sup>106</sup> Emphatically, Luxemburg would insist, such a system would not be applied mechanistically to every region of the Russian Empire or, for that matter, to any place outside of the Congress Kingdom, since the objective material and cultural foundations for proletarian autonomy simply did not exist to the same extent.<sup>107</sup> Polish “autonomy,” in short, would work to create a mature proletarian culture that could replace bourgeois hegemony, while the heavy machinery of the economy and the organization of the labor movement would be dealt with in a centralized, all-Russian way. This crucial distinction would also figure into the Bolshevik understanding of how to reorganize Russia, particularly in the prewar writings of Stalin and the division of powers within the Soviet Union in the interwar period.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> *Rzecz o konstytuancie*, 20-25.

<sup>106</sup> Luxemburg, *The National Question*, Chapter 5.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> See Chapter Three.

The Revolutionary Faction of the PPS, however, soon countered the accusations of the SDKPiL and, following its split with *Lewica*, returning to the struggle for full independence while clarifying the possible place of all-Russian “federalism” within its program. This time, in a programmatic pamphlet on the revolution in Russia penned in the late summer of 1906 and published in 1907, it was Ignacy Daszyński, one of Luxemburg’s most determined rivals and a close ally of Piłsudski, who sought to lay out his party’s main line on nationalism, internationalism, and the future of the Russian Empire. According to Daszyński, socialist movements must inherently possess a national character because the specific conditions of capitalist development vary widely from one corner of the world to the next, and the presence of nationally based Social Democratic movements across Europe, he argued, attested to the fact that even the internationalist struggle of the proletariat would have to be rooted in individual countries at the end of the day.<sup>109</sup> Once again contradicting Luxemburg, Daszyński asserted that the tendency of capitalist development was to awaken the national consciousness of the oppressed masses in multinational empires, dooming the latter to inevitable fragmentation into nation-states as proletarians began to recognize that their socioeconomic needs and national identities were both being denied under imperial rule.<sup>110</sup> Because the Polish bourgeoisie had failed to win statehood and often collaborated with their occupiers, the fight for independence, Daszyński claimed, had fallen to the proletariat, which could only create a worldwide system of genuine internationalism and just cooperation by first ensuring its own sovereignty and control of the means of production. Reformation along the lines of a federation, Daszyński concluded, would be difficult to achieve in the case of Russia given its geographical

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<sup>109</sup> Ignacy Daszyński, *Polityka proletaryatu: kilka uwag o taktyce rewolucyj w Polsce* (Warszawa: 1907).

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 17-27.

immensity and dizzying diversity, which, he claimed, would make it all but impossible to gather together such a large and varied population within shared political structures capable of meeting their needs.<sup>111</sup> A federation, according to Daszyński, could conceivably serve as a temporary structure for Poland's transition to full independence, a view that inverted the Bolshevik position on federalism as a means of integrating the fragmented Russian imperial space during the early years of the Soviet Union. Even the union between Sweden and Norway, Daszyński observed, had dissolved only one year earlier in 1905, setting a grim precedent for the fates of larger, more complex multinational states such as Russia.<sup>112</sup>

While the PPS and the SDKPiL inveighed against one another throughout the Revolution of 1905, perhaps the greatest victim of their polemics, by the close of 1906, was the idea that the Russian Empire could be reformed as a federal state, preferably with a constitution. However, Ludwik Kulczycki of the *Proletaryat* party soon intervened in the debate, arguing that both the PPS and the SDKPiL had badly misunderstood the defining characteristics of “unions,” “autonomy,” and “federations,” invoking these different concepts in their heated arguments without practicing much rigor or consistency in defining them and placing them in their correct historical contexts.<sup>113</sup> Kulczycki, furthermore, declared that *Proletaryat* was committed to transforming Russia into a federation with a constitution and, eventually, a socialized economy, and he insisted that a clearer understanding of what a federalized Russia would look like could dispel the confusion stirred up over the previous year. In the first place, Kulczycki argued that both the PPS and the SDKPiL wrongly cited

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 28-58.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 54-56.

<sup>113</sup> Michał Warczyński [Ludwik Kulczycki], *Antyfederalizm S.D.K.P.i.L. i federalizm P.P.S.* (Warszawa: Proletaryat, 1906), 3-6.

examples of “unions” as if they were federations, much as Kelles-Krauz had in 1900 when he pointed to relationship between the Kingdom of Poland and the Russian Empire between 1815 and 1830. Luxemburg had also allegedly committed this mistake by characterizing Austria-Hungary as a federation, whereas Kulczycki considered the Habsburg state, like the post-Napoleonic conglomerate of Poland and Russia, to be a union based on a personal agreement among monarchs without much institutional or legal integration between its constituent parts.<sup>114</sup> While the Kingdom of Poland and Austria-Hungary, among other examples, could be invoked as evidence of the failures of unions, Kulczycki rejected the possibility of introducing either of them in a conversation strictly concerned with the merits and weaknesses of federations, since they belonged to a fundamentally different juridical and historical category.<sup>115</sup>

With this point made, Kulczycki posited that the examples of the United States of America, Australia, Switzerland, and Germany all clearly demonstrated that the maturation of capitalism and the presence of federal state structures could be harmoniously interwoven.<sup>116</sup> Here, Kulczycki specifically took issue with Luxemburg’s claim that those polities were only nominally federal because capitalist development had long since welded their constituent territorial units into a single productive sphere. Instead, Kulczycki posited that all of these English- and German-speaking federal states continued to practice a meaningful separation of constitutional powers on a territorial basis without obstructing the growth of capitalism, which had, to the contrary, burgeoned in these places precisely because federalism allowed for a

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 6-11.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid. 11-12.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 5-7.

balance to be struck between a centralized administration and more localized institutions of self-rule and initiative.<sup>117</sup> As human societies grew more complex and developed state structures with the onset of capitalist development, Kulczycki wrote, governments took on the role of collecting taxes, enforcing laws, and mobilizing the resources of the territory under their control, yet no centralized bureaucracy could effectively monitor and manage the affairs of its growing economy and population, necessitating the devolution of powers to regional and local organs. The overarching trajectory of modern capitalism, Kulczycki emphasized, tended decisively towards the accelerating economic and political integration of territory, people, and resources, yet it simultaneously produced an urgent need for increasingly precise and robust mechanisms of organization and distribution on a plurality of sub-national scales, from individual factories and cities to larger provinces and regions. Kulczycki's observations, rooted primarily in the experiences of European states since the seventeenth century, pointed to a layering of interdependent structures of government and economic management driven by, and directly involved in speeding up, the spread of modern capitalism, producing an interconnected world characterized by growing centralization and coordination yet inherently sustained by a proliferating patchwork of localized forms of autonomy.<sup>118</sup>

According to Kulczycki, federalism, as a form of territorial and legal organization, consisted of the alignment of multiple sovereign polities that continued to enjoy broad independence in their internal affairs while submitting to a shared constitution governing their relationships with one another and reserving certain powers, such as military and foreign policy prerogatives, for a central authority. Federalism, in this

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>118</sup> Idem., *Federalizm a polityka socjalistyczna* (Kraków: 1907).



sense, differed from a simple “union” of monarchs because it involved a more elaborate, standardized juridical structure, while it was also distinct from forms of “autonomy” because of the formal equality and internal sovereignty among its constituent members, which differed from the relationship between a supreme central government and an autonomous province with only partial rights over its own affairs.<sup>119</sup> From Kulczycki’s viewpoint, federalism constituted the best model for guaranteeing the working classes of the various nationalities of a composite polity like Russia or Austria-Hungary the ability to continue their path to socialism while ensuring the fulfillment of their diverse cultural needs. A federation, moreover, would respect human cultural diversity and accommodate uneven economic development, providing an overarching framework within which different national communities could interact on the basis of full equality and voluntary association.<sup>120</sup> Rather than dividing the working class movement, as Rosa Luxemburg had argued, federalism, according to Kulczycki, would address the everyday needs of different working-class populations for self-rule as well as replace the burdens of bloated autocratic bureaucracies with greater room for local and regional initiatives without excessive obstruction from central control. A federal polity, in these regards, would exhibit a level of flexibility and plasticity absent in a unitary system, supporting the continuing development of capitalism and, eventually, a transition to socialized ownership of the means of production, which Kulczycki did not consider to be attainable by a violent revolution alone.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 14-17.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 25-30.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 26-28.

While the SDKPiL had limited the possibility of “regional” autonomy to the Kingdom of Poland and the PPS theoretically recognized the right to statehood of every major non-Russian nationality, Kulczycki laid out his own specific proposal for the federalization of the Russian Empire on the basis of the relative levels of socioeconomic development of its different territories. Writing in the immediate aftermath of the Revolution of 1905, Kulczycki argued that imperial Russia, though nominally the property of the Tsar, had never truly been a centralized despotism in practice, since its far-flung lands and peoples had always been presided over by various governors, military commanders, and aristocrats who, in practice, performed the sovereignty of the monarch on the ground.<sup>122</sup> By dispensing with the fiction of Russia as a completely rigid, unitary state, Kulczycki insisted that possibilities for federalization would become more realistic and that the creation of a decentralized, constitutional Russia was within reach. For the time being, however, Kulczycki presented his project primarily in terms of “autonomy,” accepting that the central authority of Saint Petersburg would continue to be a major factor within a renovated Russia that could, in the future, transform itself into a fully federal polity like the United States. Even so, Kulczycki recommended that Russia’s central institutions of elected government should be designed to guarantee that Russians would not hold the absolute majority of seats, even if they narrowly accounted for the greater part of the population.<sup>123</sup>

In Kulczycki’s mind, the diverse peoples of the Russian Empire could not be expected to function within a single framework for autonomy owing to their disparate degrees of collective consciousness and their varying levels of progress in a

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<sup>122</sup> Idem., *Autonomia i federalizm w ustroju państw konstytucyjnych* (L’viv: Polskie Towarzystwo Nakładowe, 1906), 261-298.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 291.

profoundly uneven patchwork of precapitalist and capitalist development, warranting three distinct tiers of self-rule. The first of these would be for “barbaric tribes,” as Kulczycki described the indigenous peoples of the Arctic, Siberia, and the Far East, with Buryatia serving as a specific example. Members of those “tribes” should be admitted to provincial institutions but not yet allowed into central bodies, while their right to practice customary law and administer themselves should be guaranteed so long as they did not conflict with all-Russian statutes, namely the constitution.<sup>124</sup> The second, equally capacious category encompassed nationalities that could claim their own cultural and linguistic distinctiveness yet lacked the preparation and organization for full autonomy, with Ukraine exemplifying this group. Such populations, according to Kulczycki, included the relatively “cultured” inhabitants of the western borderlands and the Caucasus, and should enjoy “economic-cultural autonomy” but not yet complete power over their political existence.<sup>125</sup> This privilege, Kulczycki continued, would belong for the time being to nations exhibiting the third and highest level of development, such as Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Finland, and, in the Caucasus, Georgia, who would be capable of governing themselves most broadly through territorial assemblies (*sejmy*) entitled to manage local and regional affairs.<sup>126</sup> For the moment being, Kulczycki did not provide extensive suggestions for merging multiple gubernias into single national units, though this possibility, under his definition of federalism, would certainly be conceivable for a future stage of Russia’s hypothetical experiment in decentralization. Nations, however, were not the only units that figured into Kulczycki’s writings on federalism, which also devoted considerable space to

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 269-272.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 280-287.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 270-271; 282-284.

municipal self-rule, non-territorial autonomy for geographically dispersed groups, and the exact organization of all-Russian legislative institutions, which he considered to be just as crucial in guaranteeing the continuation of capitalist development.<sup>127</sup>

The revolutionary upheavals of 1905 to 1907 not only witnessed the unprecedented mobilization of the working classes in the Kingdom of Poland, but also provoked a bitter yet fruitful exchange of specific programs for the territorial reconfiguration of the Russian Empire in the writings of Polish socialists and Social Democrats. In the case of the PPS, internal strife between the future Revolutionary and Left factions throughout 1905 and 1906 produced a momentary commitment to pursuing a transitional form of alignment between Poland, Finland, and a separate Russian republic that would allow for a “constituent assembly” in Warsaw to deliberate the question of full secession, a sort of compromise between proponents of Polish involvement in an all-Russian revolution and advocates of complete Polish independence. To justify this position, thinkers from the Revolutionary Faction further elaborated upon their existing critique of the political economy of Tsarism laid out by Piłsudski, Wasilewski, Jodko-Narkiewicz, and Kelles-Krauz, arguing that the maturation of capitalist development intensified the spread of national consciousness and accelerated the tendency of large multinational states to give way to smaller nation-states operated by the working classes on a socialist basis. The SDKPiL, meanwhile, attacked the allegedly disingenuous “federalism” of the PPS as separatism in disguise, and Rosa Luxemburg categorically denounced federations as outdated vestiges of precapitalist times that would be swiftly swept aside by the growth of capitalism wherever they still persisted. Luxemburg and her comrades, however, argued that a culturally oriented form of “regional autonomy” would be suitable for

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 294.

the Congress Kingdom even as its integration with the rest of Russia continued, making clear that the commanding heights of the imperial economy would be managed through central, all-Russian institutions in which workers of all nationalities would jointly participate. Both the PPS and the SDKPiL, however, earned the condemnation of Ludwik Kulczycki from the *Proletaryat* party for allegedly misunderstanding the meaning of federalism and its immense potential for reforming Russia. For Kulczycki, who already proposed a general decentralization of administrative and economic power in Russia, the different non-Russian nationalities would receive self-rule in the form of one of three possible models corresponding to their relative degree of socioeconomic and cultural “development.” This language of “development” allowed Kulczycki to synthesize the economic and ethnic principles in imagining Russia’s eventual federalization, which he considered to be fully compatible with and beneficial to the empire’s continuing progress through capitalism under a democratic, constitutional political system. In all three cases, the models presented by the PPS, SDKPiL, and *Proletaryat* embodied deeper convictions about the direction of economic and social development in the Russian imperial space as well as the possibility of reforming Russia and satisfying the needs of the borderlands.

### **Federalism, autonomy, and the “right of nations to self-determination”**

The Polish-language debates about nationalism, empire, and revolution that emerged in the 1890s and significantly intensified in 1905 to 1907 were continuous with broader discussions in the Russian Social Democratic movement about the future of the multinational Russian state and the correct Marxist approach to organizing a movement of the proletariat across national lines. One colorful commentator on the ideas emanating from the Congress Kingdom was Vladimir Lenin of the Bolshevik faction of the RSDLP, who, in 1903, took the resolutions of the 1896 London

congress of the Second International as the theoretical point of departure for justifying the controversial ninth clause of his party's program, which recognized the "right of nations to self-determination" to the point of secession from the Russian Empire.<sup>128</sup> This point, according to Lenin, stemmed not from any universal agreement with the right of every nation to pursue statehood, an untenable position that he attributed to the PPS, but out of the practical acceptance that nation-states constituted the most "normal," fitting form of territorial and economic organization under bourgeois-democratic capitalism, which Russia was only beginning to experience in certain territories. The growth of nationalist movements across Eurasia and the emergence of nation-states along the peripheries of retreating empires, most notably in the Balkans, provided Lenin with concrete historical proof of the accuracy of his position, which he considered to be the most flexible, all-encompassing Marxist response to the coming of national mobilization and capitalist development within Russia.<sup>129</sup> The Social Democrats, at the end of the day, still reserved the right to assess the qualities of every demand for national self-determination, much as they could endorse or oppose specific forms of social agitation while still defending the general right of the population to gather freely and create its own voluntary organizations.<sup>130</sup>

In recognizing the independent nation-state as the temporary economic and territorial formation most suited to capitalist development, Lenin emphatically rejected programs for the federalization of the Russian Empire along purely national lines, even opposing more limited projects for autonomy. Lenin, much like

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<sup>128</sup> Lenin, "Natsional'nyi vopros v nashei programme," in *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii*, volume 7, 233-242; idem., "O prave natsii na samoopredelenie," section 7, in *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii*, volume 25, 295-299.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., section 2, 263-267.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., section 10, 317-320.

Luxemburg, considered the formation of large, consolidated, centralized states to constitute one of the most important foundations for the organization of a united Social Democratic movement, and he resisted contemporary ideas that would devolve political and economic powers to the various non-Russian nationalities on the basis of their ethnic distinctiveness. According to Lenin, other factors, such as the social and economic landscapes of different regions, should take precedence over national considerations in determining how limited self-rule might be balanced with the overarching centralization of power.<sup>131</sup> The existing structural contours of production, labor, and resources should form the primary basis for any kind of “autonomy,” Lenin argued in 1913, while federalizing the Russian Empire and its Social Democratic movement on a national basis would undermine the already embattled solidarity of the proletariat. Cutting off a major town from its hinterlands in order to lump it together with a nationally based territory, for instance, would wrongly sever existing economic integration in the name of nationalism and set back the advancement of capitalist development where it was already underway.<sup>132</sup> In that same year, Iosif Stalin presented another articulation of this idea when he contended that “regional autonomy,” and not “national autonomy,” could be extended to “crystallized units” such as “Poland, Lithuania, Ukraine, and the Caucasus,” all of which were ethnically and religiously heterogeneous but represented the clearly established building blocks of the Russian economy.<sup>133</sup>

Lenin, however, partly concurred with the Austrian Social Democrats that replacing “archaic” precapitalist structures, such as *uezds* and *gubernias*, with newly

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., “Kriticheskie zametki,” section 6, in *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii*, 143-150.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Stalin, “The National Question in Russia,” in *Marxism and the National Question*.

demarcated units partly based on nationality would be acceptable, even agreeing that creating small but homogeneous and autonomous territories for the different nationalities would work against national discrimination and help intensify economic relations among groups sharing a common language.<sup>134</sup> The point remained, though, that nationality alone could not provide a definitive guide to reorganizing Russia, and any efforts at redrawing administrative boundaries would have to be simultaneously justified by the logic of economic and social integration. Still, Lenin and Stalin placed the greatest emphasis on preserving the unity of the Russian imperial space and uniting workers of all nationalities behind a common front, embracing the principle of the “right of nations to self-determination” primarily to combat the pernicious influences of “great power chauvinism” while allowing for the temporal emergence of nation-states in which the proletariat would grow in power and overthrow the bourgeoisie before flowing back into the all-Russian revolution. What the Bolsheviks presented before 1914, in this sense, was less an exhaustive overview of how they would practically reorganize a revolutionary Russian polity than an exposition of the historical materialist case for accepting the “right of nations to self-determination,” up to and including separatism, as part of a vision of capitalist development in which bourgeois democrats would conquer their nationally homogeneous “home markets” before being crushed by proletarian insurgencies. “Federalism,” by all accounts, remained a concept from which Lenin and Stalin vehemently distanced themselves up through 1918, while “autonomy” might be reserved for distinct territories in which a preponderance of economic, social, and national characteristics warranted a greater degree of self-rule than what would be extended to ordinary provinces.

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<sup>134</sup> Lenin, “Kriticheskie zametki,” section 6, 149.



The general outlines of the Bolshevik assessment of the need to maintain the integrity of large states while resisting tendencies towards federalism or excessive autonomy largely overlapped with Rosa Luxemburg's ideas on nationalism, yet she and Lenin nevertheless became entangled in a bitter feud that began before the Revolution of 1905 and continued until Luxemburg's murder in 1919. Even after Luxemburg's death, her ideas, drastically simplified by Lenin, persisted in the early Soviet Union as examples of the worst incarnation of "national nihilism," particularly during the height of national communism in the Ukrainian SSR during the 1920s.<sup>135</sup> Luxemburg had already clashed with Lenin in 1904 over the question of "centralism" in the structure of the Social Democratic movement, arguing for a more open, democratic relationship between formal parties and the proletariat that would function as a dynamic "dialectic of spontaneity and organization."<sup>136</sup> Four years later, in 1908, Luxemburg penned a hefty pamphlet rejecting Lenin's adoption of "clause nine," otherwise known as the "right of nations to self-determination," as part of the RSDLP program, refusing to incorporate a similar position into the statute of the SDKPiL and insisting upon its unnecessary, potentially harmful consequences for the unity of Social Democracy. While Lenin devoted substantial swathes of his polemics from 1913 to 1914 to disproving these arguments, effectively laying out the pre-1917 Bolshevik stance on nationalism in much greater detail, Luxemburg responded as late as 1918 that the Bolsheviks had badly endangered the revolution in Russia by making concessions to nationalists and national communists in the western borderlands while

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<sup>135</sup> See Chapter Three.

<sup>136</sup> Rosa Luxemburg, *Organizational Questions of the Russian Social Democracy* (1904). Obtained at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1904/questions-rsd/>.

ceding vast, economically crucial territories to the Central Powers.<sup>137</sup> One year later, Luxemburg perished with the German Revolution, yet national communists in the early Soviet Union spent the greater part of the following decade charging that her refusal to endorse “national self-determination” constituted a grave betrayal of true internationalism and, ultimately, a justification for excessive “Great Russian” centralism that denied even basic cultural rights to the peoples of the borderlands.

When examined more closely, however, Luxemburg’s piece from 1908 does not differ from Lenin’s writings as tremendously as the latter would claim, and the principal divergence between them can be located in their opposing assessments of the place of the nation-state under capitalist development. The occasional viciousness of Lenin’s responses, most likely, stemmed not merely from theoretical disagreements but, just as much, from the need to unambiguously defend the Bolshevik commitment to “clause nine” in order to fight for the solidarity of non-Russian workers and distance the faction from “great power chauvinists” who also argued for keeping the empire together, albeit with less revolutionary motives. The stakes for Luxemburg, of course, were also high, since the SDKPiL had to contend with the PPS, the National Democrats, and a host of other parties in the Russian, German, and Austro-Hungarian Empires that were energetically convincing Polish workers and peasants of the necessity of some form of independent statehood. The PPS, in particular, frequently invoked the same principle of “national self-determination” in its publications while making it clear, just as Lenin did, that this carried the connotation of full separation from larger multinational empires. While Lenin and Luxemburg were officially united behind a common all-Russian front, they confronted different challenges when it

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<sup>137</sup> Idem., “The Nationalities Question” in *The Russian Revolution* (1918). Obtained at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1918/russian-revolution/index.htm>.

came to dealing with nationalism that stemmed from the contrasting circumstances prevailing in the territories in which they were most active.

With these tactical considerations in mind, Luxemburg's clash with Lenin was still deeply rooted in a serious disagreement about nation-states, empires, and capitalism. Directly contradicting Lenin's writings from 1903, Luxemburg asserted in 1908 that the overwhelming tendency of capitalist development was not the creation, however temporarily, of compact nation-states, but the sustained amalgamation of peoples and territories into growing, interconnected imperial structures, something that she called "big state formation."<sup>138</sup> While contiguous land empires such as Russia had already been around under precapitalist conditions, Luxemburg looked to the colonial world for compelling proof of her argument, pointing to a profusion of human societies that had been prenatal when they came into contact with European capital but which could transition to a postnational, or non-national, form of development without having to pass through the nation-state.<sup>139</sup> The point, in other words, was that the nation-state did not constitute some universal funnel through which backward peoples would have to flow in order to reach capitalism and later socialism, meaning that Social Democrats, according to Luxemburg, should focus on working within the actual, concrete forms of human social organization around the world rather than theoretically presupposing the primacy of any one of them. Many empires and colonies, Luxemburg continued, had already grown deeply integrated without modern nationalism, making it counterproductive and ultimately incorrect to assume that organically incorporated territories, peoples, and economies would

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<sup>138</sup> Idem., *The National Question*, Chapters 1 and 3.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., Chapters 1 and 2.

inevitably splinter along national lines.<sup>140</sup> Taking the specific case of Poland, just as she had in 1896, Luxemburg claimed that this line of reasoning artificially and prematurely split what capitalism had already welded together. In any case, Luxemburg posed to Lenin the equally important question of who should be trusted to articulate the nation's "will" when it came time to decide what "self-determination" should actually mean. Relying on the ballot box, according to Luxemburg, was not an option, since most Germans, for example, would exercise their "self-determination" by choosing reactionary parties. The Social Democrats, as the allies of the proletarian revolution, would have to blaze the correct Marxist path without wasting time to discern the prevailing opinions in particular national communities.<sup>141</sup>

As for the nation-state itself, Luxemburg, like Lenin, explained its emergence as a formation specific to capitalism in which the bourgeoisie could control a fairly homogeneous, spatially compact "home market," deriving some measure of stability and legitimacy from its linguistic and ethnic affinities with the wider population.<sup>142</sup> Eventually, however, the proletariat would turn against its "own" bourgeoisie, overcoming the system of national production that had spawned it in the first place, yet Luxemburg refused to see the necessity, even in theory, of a separate nation-state to serve as the battleground for this phase of the class struggle for every nationality. In Germany, for instance, workers from the Polish, Danish, and French minorities could enjoy equal status with Germans in the ranks of the SPD, working together to overthrow their oppressors and making use of the cultural and educational benefits of a modern, economically developed nation-state to create their own proletarian

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., Chapter 1.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., Chapter 2.

cultures. Still, Luxemburg insisted that the proletariat, though forged within the nation-state, would by no means be bound to maintain this structure and, in the future, could develop other forms of territorial and economic organization that would better serve the working classes. Nation-states, in any case, displayed a strong historical tendency to conquer weaker neighbors or annex overseas colonies, so Luxemburg did not consider them to be particularly fitting as a structure for a proletarian society because they had never proven themselves conducive to human progress. In other words, nation-states, in Luxemburg's view, would hinder or threaten to corrupt the proletarian struggle just as much as they could advance it, meaning that bypassing the nation-state and its dangerous chauvinism, wherever possible, would be beneficial for the working classes.<sup>143</sup>

Like Lenin, Luxemburg saw scant room for "federations" in the proletarian future, arguing that federal states such as the United States, Switzerland, Germany, and Austria-Hungary had already been effectively transformed into tightly integrated economic fabrics by capitalist development. Federal institutions and structures of local or regional distinctiveness, in such states, ran counter to the logic of "big state formation," belonging to the same parochial, archaic social forces that the "enlightened despots" of the eighteenth century had fought to neutralize and centralize. According to Luxemburg, the idea of "federalism" was in vogue among some socialists and anarchists because of its connotations of free association and the just division of power and resources, yet it had only produced disorder and confusion wherever it had been introduced as the basis for a political system. Specifically, Luxemburg derided a recent gathering of Socialist-Federalists of different nationalities in the Russian Empire that began auspiciously, with a unanimous

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

endorsement of “federalism” as a principle of territorial organization, before plunging into petty fighting over the division of multinational cities and the territorial boundaries between different national homelands. Such deliberations, for Luxemburg, were doomed from the outset, not only because they opened the way for national antagonisms that did not correspond to the direction of the class struggle but also because the logic of “federalism” stood squarely at odds with the integrative tendencies of capitalist development.<sup>144</sup>

Luxemburg, however, insisted that the overarching growth of centralized states and economies was inextricably linked to the formation of an increasingly dense ecology of structures of “local autonomy” tasked with managing issues of welfare, education, infrastructure, and policing, among others, that no single bureaucratic apparatus could possibly handle.<sup>145</sup> Somewhat like Kulczycki, Luxemburg argued that “local autonomy,” as a phenomenon wholly distinct from “federalism,” provided the precisely functioning, constantly multiplying, and powerfully integrative fabric of social structures that underpinned tectonic changes at the national, imperial, and global levels on smaller territorial scales, such as towns, communes, and provinces. Drawing on the example of France in the eighteenth century, Luxemburg pointed out that “local autonomy,” with its inclination towards capitalist growth, not only clashed with entrenched feudal elites but also became a focal point of social antagonisms as those who controlled its machinery worked to limit mass participation through property requirements. One of the objectives of the SPD in Germany, she continued, was to remove all of the remaining barriers to fully democratic participation in the operation of “local autonomy” and cultivate a mass-based practice of self-rule by the

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid., Chapter 3.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., Chapter 4.

proletariat.<sup>146</sup> The proper division of responsibilities between central institutions and bodies of “local autonomy” was still essential for Luxemburg, as the SDKPiL’s remarks on the future shape of self-rule for the Kingdom of Poland had made clear in 1906.

While Lenin and Luxemburg could agree on the need for structures of “local autonomy” at the level of cities and smaller provinces, the question of “regional autonomy” and “national autonomy” set them at odds and was closely related to their disagreements over the inclusion of the “right of nations to self-determination” in the RSDLP program. Criticizing this point, Luxemburg suggested that Lenin revise “point nine” to include not a broad endorsement of “self-determination,” but a list of concrete explanations of what policies he intended to pursue with respect to specific nationalities living within the Russian Empire.<sup>147</sup> Instead, Luxemburg wrote, Lenin had turned “national self-determination” into a “metaphysical” abstraction, failing to practice sufficient analytic rigor in specifying its temporal and territorial boundaries beyond insisting that nation-states could be anticipated to arise across Russia as capitalist development deepened. To make her argument, Luxemburg posited that of all of the peoples of imperial Russia, only the Poles living in the Kingdom of Poland could qualify for “national autonomy” because their exceptional level of industrial development had, in the nineteenth century, produced a mature “bourgeois culture” ready to be overturned by a vibrant Polish “proletarian culture.”<sup>148</sup> Earlier, in 1906, the SDKPiL had called only for Polish “regional autonomy,” yet Luxemburg now took the proposal in a slightly different direction in order to show that the entitlement

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., Chapter 5.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

of a given nationality to a particular form of self-determination, in this case autonomy, arose not from some universal principle but from the prevailing historical circumstances under which that nationality presently lived. Effectively, though, the kind of “national autonomy” to be extended to the Poles would carry a decidedly “regional” character, since Luxemburg argued that only the Polish residents of the old Congress Kingdom should enjoy it, an idea that explicitly excluded the notion of a larger zone of Polish self-rule extending into the eastern borderlands (*kresy wschodnie*).<sup>149</sup>

In Luxemburg’s view, the growth of bourgeois culture, much like capitalism as a whole, carried the seeds of its own undoing, creating institutions of mass schooling and popular mobilization that the proletariat would soon seize for its own liberation.<sup>150</sup> Bourgeois parliaments and party politics, likewise, introduced the possibility of the formation of proletarian movements that would participate in electoral races and occupy political offices while keeping their eyes on the greater goal of overturning the capitalist order.<sup>151</sup> The Poles of the Congress Kingdom, according to Luxemburg, objectively needed structures of national autonomy so that the bourgeois Polish culture could fully grow and prepare the ground for the victory of the proletarian Polish culture. In the end, this “national autonomy” differed in few meaningful regards from the “regional” program put forth two years before, particularly because it continued to focus on matters of cultural development, linguistic freedom, and education that specifically concerned the cultural front, while the fight for the means of production would proceed on an all-Russian scale. Crucially,

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.



Luxemburg concluded that “national autonomy” would mark the “highest stage of bourgeois development” in Poland, meaning that statehood of any kind, as well as some wider federal privileges, remained out of the picture.<sup>152</sup>

Ultimately, Luxemburg saw “national autonomy” as a transitional structure to advance the uniquely developed cultural struggle of the Polish proletariat, rejecting the idea that Lenin’s principle of “national self-determination” to the point of secession would be necessary for the Poles or any of the less historically advanced nationalities. In fact, Luxemburg stressed that the Jews of the Congress Kingdom, as crude “middlemen,” would not need the same institutions as Poles, while the Lithuanians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians of the western borderlands all occupied a level of development well beneath the threshold necessary for any sort of autonomy. At the same time, however, Luxemburg denied the fairly affluent, educated Poles of the borderlands any “national autonomy” similar to what she envisioned for the Congress Kingdom, observing that giving these elites their own self-rule would be inexcusable from a proletarian perspective, as they would simply use these organs to further exploit the peasantry and expand their own wealth.<sup>153</sup> Further east, in the Caucasus, Luxemburg judged that no single group dominated this region as the Poles did in the Congress Kingdom, meaning that broad guarantees of national and social freedoms alongside campaigns for modernization could address the everyday needs of the locals while accelerating their development. The point, Luxemburg reminded her readers, was not to segregate the nationalities or encourage their separation in the future, but to bring them behind a common working-class struggle by guaranteeing their linguistic and cultural freedoms and, where necessary, instituting structures

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

directly conducive to the advancement of proletarian interests, as in Poland.

Luxemburg strongly objected to plans for the decentralization of Russia that called for demarcating national territories on the basis of demographic data, contending that such a “pedantic” approach was totally divorced from material realities and threatened to “cut up what had grown together socially.”<sup>154</sup>

While Luxemburg had more or less laid out the beginnings of a revised “clause nine” for the RSDLP, Lenin, in the spring of 1914, authored a pamphlet that fiercely defended his original formulation, this time by arguing that the specific historical and geographical characteristics of the Russian Empire necessitated the recognition of the “right of nations to self-determination” to the point of secession by Social Democrats. Unlike neighboring Austria-Hungary, another conglomerate state, Russia, in Lenin’s analysis, consisted of a spatially contiguous, “united national center” (*edinyi natsional’nyi tsentr*) populated overwhelmingly by ethnic Russians as well as a plurality of outlying “borderlands” (*okrainy*) inhabited by non-Russian nationalities that collectively accounted for most of the empire’s inhabitants.<sup>155</sup> While Lenin did not outline their exact territorial contours, he emphasized that many of the “borderlands,” most likely meaning those in the west such as Poland, were actually ahead of the ethnically defined Russian “center” in terms of their progress in the “development of capitalism” and their “general level of culture,” meaning that they would likely be the empire’s first areas to spawn bourgeois-nationalist movements committed to securing independent “home markets.” The solution, according to Lenin, was not to crush these separatist inclinations, which represented a temporary necessity in the maturation of capitalism and, by creating an industrial proletariat, would sow

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Lenin, “O prave,” section 3, 267-273.

the seeds of their own unmaking, ultimately leading to the reunification of the imperial Russian space as a tightly integrated socialist polity. At the same time, Lenin explained that the “borderland” nationalities, such as the “Finns, Swedes, Poles, Ukrainians, and Romanians,” often lived in regions neighboring other states in which their compatriots enjoyed wider freedoms, a condition that would further contribute to the spread of secessionist inclinations and the pursuit of capitalist nation-statehood. While the Tsarist regime would attempt to stifle bourgeois-nationalist movements in the interest of preserving the unity of the Russian Empire, Lenin stressed that allowing these fissiparous phenomena of capitalist development to run their course would pave the way to socialism in the long run, ideally bringing the “borderlands” and the “center” back together on a voluntary basis.<sup>156</sup>

What is notable about Lenin’s case for “national self-determination” is its implementation of a geographical, ethnographic, and developmental distinction between Russia’s “borderlands” and “center,” a formulation that actually overlapped to a degree with the categories employed by Piłsudski’s PPS. Unlike Luxemburg, who had described the industrial regions around Moscow and the textile-producing cities of the Kingdom of Poland as vibrantly expanding and increasingly connected, Lenin held that the Russian “center” was actually considerably behind the “borderlands” in developmental terms, though he argued, in sharp contrast to Piłsudski, that the nation-states that might arise from Russia’s breakup represented a transitional form of economic organization on the path to a united socialist state. Luxemburg and Lenin, however, still broadly agreed on the overarching tendency of capitalist development to produce large states that would persist under socialism, and both of them displayed substantial distrust of plans for federation or autonomy in the Russian Empire and

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

elsewhere. Their debate on “national self-determination,” when considered in historical context, marked a continuation of the 1896 polemics between the PPS and the SDKP, with Lenin claiming to agree with Kautsky, his future rival, by upholding the correct position of the Second International against the renegade Poles with whom he repeatedly clashed.

### **Competing visions on the eve of the First World War**

In 1913, as Lenin once again defended his position on “the right of nations to self-determination” against Rosa Luxemburg, the Revolutionary Faction of the PPS, headed by Piłsudski, republished its 1907 program in a thick brochure complete with annotations and explanations written by Witold Jodko-Narkiewicz. This document heavily emphasized the necessity of abolishing private property, enacting legal frameworks for the defense of the working classes, and introducing socialism within an “independent Polish republic” whose frontiers remained unspecified. While some thinkers within the PPS, such as Limanowski and Kelles-Krauz, had outlined federalist models for the territories of the old Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, no references to such structures appeared in the party’s official literature. Piłsudski and his comrades, however, had been intensively preparing for a coming European war across the border from Russia in Austrian Galicia since at least 1908, training a corps of Polish officers in the belief that a disciplined fighting force could spearhead a mass uprising of Poles, and other members of oppressed nationalities, against Tsarism and its successors. With the outbreak of the First World War in the summer of 1914, the Revolutionary Faction plunged into an unprecedented yet uncertain opportunity to participate in remaking the territorial and economic organization of the Russian borderlands, and the grouping’s ideas about how to pursue these transformations significantly evolved in light of what Mark von Hagen has called the “mobilization of

ethnicity” during the war and the revolutions and civil wars that grew from it.<sup>157</sup>

While the Revolutionary Faction had long considered modern nationalism to be a dynamic force capable of destroying Tsarism, they would find, between 1918 and 1921, that controlling and directing it would prove much more complex than they had imagined, particularly in the contested borderlands of Lithuania and East Galicia.

At the same time, the pressures of the First World War on Russia helped to unleash the widespread social unrest and economic shock that abetted Lenin and the Bolsheviks in their growth from a faction of the RSDLP to a major force in the civil wars of 1917 to 1921. Taking command of military forces, governing embattled territories, and declaring a Soviet state also forced Lenin and Stalin to revisit their prewar meditations on federalism, autonomy, and nationalism, which they substantially revised in 1919 before constructing the foundations of the Soviet Union in the early 1920s. Yet already before the creation of a federation of Soviet republics, the Bolsheviks, like their rivals in the Promethean camp, endeavored to weaponize nationalism, seeking to export the October Revolution to both Western Europe and the colonial world through different non-Russian borderlands that appeared as potential paths out of the encirclement that the Red Army confronted in 1919. To this end, the Bolsheviks formed wartime alliances with national communists from across the embattled Russian imperial space, creating fraught ties to revolutionary groupings as diverse as the Ukrainian Communist Party and the Young Bukharians. By the time that the Red Army had claimed what would become the territory of the Soviet Union in 1921, conflicting assumptions about the place of the non-Russians and the balance of powers within a Soviet multinational polity came to the fore as a group of prominent national communists waged an ultimately unsuccessful struggle against

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<sup>157</sup> See Chapter Two.

Stalin to create a loose confederation. The Soviet victory in the struggle for the former imperial Russian borderlands, meanwhile, had spawned a sprawling global ecology of exiled nationalists, some of whom gravitated towards the emerging Promethean movement which, despite being based in Warsaw and Paris, grew into a political and intellectual network spanning Eurasia. As an alternative internationalism opposed not only to Bolshevism but any kind of “Russian despotism,” Prometheism partly claimed its roots in the ideas and organizations laid out by the PPS before 1926, yet its founders, who included Ukrainian, Georgian, and Polish leftists, increasingly entertained right-wing anticommunist visions in the 1930s. Unlike many Italian and German fascists, however, the Prometheans saw the Soviet Union not as the concoction of some “Judeo-Bolshevik” conspiracy, but as the product of a tyrannical, deeply rooted Russian political culture, a concept that some of them would attempt to spread throughout the Atlantic world after 1939.

From the 1890s through the start of the First World War, the intellectual outlines of this clash of internationalisms began to take shape in the territorial visions of the major socialist and Social Democratic parties of the Russian Empire that participated in the Second International. Well before they commanded armies and bands of revolutionaries that fought on battlefields and barricades across the continuum of carnage that swept Eurasia in 1914 to 1922, Pilsudski, Luxemburg, Lenin, and their comrades first confronted one another on the printed page and at international congresses, developing ideas about how their respective programs of revolutionary socialism would be translated into the territorial practice of managing a multinational state in the throes of unrest and fragmentation. Their colliding projects ultimately differed less in terms of squabbles over particular borders and far more in their underlying assumptions about the origins of modern nationalism, the fate of

multinational empires, and the roles to be played by nation-states, federations, and structures of autonomy at the twilight of industrial capitalism and the coming of socialism. Armed with the territorial concepts and frameworks of history that they sharpened in their constant, often acrimonious exchanges, the PPS, the Bolsheviks, and the SDKPiL entered a turbulent and uncertain contest to reshape the fragmented Russian imperial space while drawing a diverse host of non-Russian nationalists from the borderlands into the ranks of their competing internationalist campaigns.

## Chapter Two: Revolutions, Federations, and their Discontents

The origins of Prometheism and the October Revolution between containment and internationalization, 1914-1921

Before they entered Russia's "continuum of crisis," as Peter Holquist describes the stretch of wars and revolutions between 1914 and 1921, both Józef Piłsudski and Vladimir Lenin observed the breakup of the Ottoman Empire's territories in the Balkans in 1912 to 1913, drawing revealingly contrasting conclusions about the meaning of these upheavals for the fate of the multinational Tsarist realm.<sup>1</sup> For Piłsudski, the victory of Bulgarian nationalists over the Ottomans in the First Balkan War proved that a compact nation-state could shatter a larger imperial foe, provided that it commanded a modern army and a disciplined, determined population prepared to sacrifice itself for the collective struggle. Bulgaria's initial triumph seemed to confirm Piłsudski's sense that a small Polish state aligned with Austria-Hungary could contribute to defeating Russia in a generalized military conflict that, in his estimate, would precipitate national uprisings throughout the western borderlands.<sup>2</sup> Lenin, meanwhile, treated the rise of nation-states in the Balkans since the start of the twentieth century as proof that multinational empires, including Russia, could expect "national movements" to arise among their constituent peoples with the maturation of capitalism.<sup>3</sup> Lenin's theory, first articulated in 1903 and elaborated in his polemics with Rosa Luxemburg between 1913 and 1916, held that the propertied classes of the individual nationalities would strive to carve out "home markets," ideally in the form of compact territories united in ethnicity and language, as exclusive spaces for the

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Holquist, *Making War, Forging Revolution: Russia's Continuum of Crisis, 1914-1921* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> Józef Piłsudski, "Z wojny bałkańskiej," in *Pisma*, volume 3, 260-269.

<sup>3</sup> Vladimir Lenin, "Tezisy po natsional'nomu voprosu," in *Polnoe Sobranie Sochineii*, volume 23, 314-322.



development of industry free from foreign interference. By tearing away the “home market” and maximizing its productive potential, however, these capitalists, in Lenin’s mind, would forge the very proletarian masses that would later topple them in a socialist revolution and voluntarily reconstitute Russia as a centralized socialist polity, creating precisely the kind of “great state” (*krupnoe gosudarstvo*) most conducive to socioeconomic development.<sup>4</sup>

In practice, fragmenting the Russian Empire along national lines proved to be a more elusive undertaking than Piłsudski had imagined. While the widespread upheavals of the First World War gave rise to a powerful “mobilization of ethnicity” within Russia, as Mark von Hagen describes the ascent of nationally and class based politics after 1914, the empire did not rapidly cleave along national lines as Piłsudski and his partisans, who declared their allegiance to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, had predicted.<sup>5</sup> Even as the Russian war effort faltered and internal unrest spread, the abdication of Nicholas II and the rise of the Provisional Government in March of 1917 saw the ongoing “mobilization of ethnicity” develop into more assertive attempts at winning degrees of autonomy for the non-Russian nationalities in conjunction with the broader creation of a reformed Russia of equal citizens. Socialists from the peripheries who later aligned themselves with Prometheism, such as the Ukrainian Social Democrats in the camp of Symon Petliura and the Georgian Mensheviks grouped around Noe Ramishvili and Noe Zhordania, conceived of territorial self-rule for their specific homelands and broad social reforms as compatible with membership within an overarching Russian multinational state,

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<sup>4</sup> Idem., “Sotsial’isticheskaia revoliutsiia i pravo natsii na samoopredelenie,” in *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii*, volume 27, 255-258.

<sup>5</sup> Mark von Hagen, “The Great War and the Mobilization of Ethnicity in the Russian Empire,” in *Post-Soviet Political Order: Conflict and State Building*, ed. Barnett Rubin and Jack Snyder (New York: Routledge, 1998), 34-57.

though the distant Provisional Government often resisted the more ambitious efforts at federalization along national lines.<sup>6</sup> Though seemingly peripheral to Piłsudski's project at the time, this fragile, piecemeal federalization of Russia derailed by the October Revolution was ultimately a vital source of internationalist ideas for the post-1926 Promethean movement, particularly within its Parisian branch.

A decisive turn in the “mobilization of ethnicity” that proved key for the fate of Prometheism arrived in the autumn of 1917, when the Bolsheviks seized power in Petrograd, deposing the fledgling Provisional Government and confronting the leaders of nascent borderland polities with ultimatums to submit to Soviet power enforced by the Red Army. While Terry Martin observes that Lenin and Stalin lacked a coherent “nationalities policy” when they emerged as major contenders in the struggle for the former Russian Empire, the Bolsheviks nevertheless channeled some of the dynamic “mobilization of ethnicity” into their revolutionary struggle, whose aim to overthrow capitalist imperialism on a global scale necessitated a march through the borderlands.<sup>7</sup> In one important respect, as Liliana Riga demonstrates, the Bolsheviks appealed to non-Russian leftists from elite backgrounds who were denied chances for advancement under the “old regime” on the basis of nationality, declaring their current of Social Democracy to be an inclusive, *rossiiskii* movement embracing all of the peoples of the Russian Empire and committed to abolishing the double chains of national and social oppression.<sup>8</sup> Stalin had systemically articulated the parameters of

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<sup>6</sup> Balázs Trencsényi and Mónika Baár, *A History of Modern Political Thought in East Central Europe: Volume II: Negotiating Modernity in the 'Short Twentieth Century' and Beyond* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 7-8; Adrian Brisku, *Bittersweet Europe: Albanian and Georgian Discourses on Europe, 1878-2008* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012), 40.

<sup>7</sup> Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 2.

<sup>8</sup> Liliana Riga, *The Bolsheviks and the Russian Empire* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

this project in 1904, proclaiming that Russian Social Democrats rejected the narrow, *russkii* limits of Russian chauvinism in favor of a *rossiiskii* program that would bring progressive forces from around the empire into a common fraternal organization.<sup>9</sup>

Just as significantly, a diverse cohort of national communists who joined forces with the Bolsheviks in 1917 saw possibilities for forging distinct paths to world revolution through their own homelands, going beyond the straightforward elimination of Tsarist repressions and envisioning borderland Bolshevism and its promise of “national self-determination” as a weapon for the internationalization of the October Revolution. Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev, most notably, argued that the creation of a vibrant Soviet Tatarstan would signal to the colonized peoples of the world that “Easterners” could overcome Euro-American domination on their own terms.<sup>10</sup>

Several comparable proposals appeared in the pages of the Bolshevik journal *Zhizn' natsional'nostei* (*The Life of the Nationalities*) between 1918 and 1920, outlining plans to export the revolutionary movement beyond Russia's frontiers by awakening cross-border national ties in places as diverse as Belarus, Ukraine, Central Asia, Mongolia, and Tibet.<sup>11</sup> As the prospects for a world revolution died down at the start of the 1920s, however, borderland Bolsheviks like Sultan-Galiev faced the challenge of creating a federal structure for the Soviet Union and found themselves at odds with Stalin, who had always maintained that the construction of socialism took precedence over national issues and that a Soviet federation of national republics constituted only

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<sup>9</sup> Iosif Stalin, “Kak ponimaet sotsial-demokratiia natsional'nyi vopros?,” in *Sochineniia*, volume 1, 32-55.

<sup>10</sup> Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev, “Pis'mo v redaktsiiu [gazety ‘Koiash’],” in *Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev: stat'i, vystupleniia, dokumenty* (Kazan': Tatarskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1992), ed. I.G. Gizzatullin and D.R. Sharafutdinov, 47-49; Sultan-Galiev, “Avtobiograficheskii ocherk ‘Kto ia?': Pis'mo chlenam Tsentral'noi kontrol'noi komissii, kopiia - I.V. Stalinu i L.D. Trotskomu. 23 maia 1923g.,” in *Izbrannye trudy*, 446-447; 473-479.

<sup>11</sup> Examples from *Zhizn' natsional'nostei* include Afandiyev's article on Turkestan in nr. 41 (1919) and Sultan-Galiev's famous “Sotsial'naia revoliutsiia i Vostok” in nr. 39 (1919).

a transitory structure on the road to “socialist unitarism.”<sup>12</sup> The creation of a multinational system exposed competing interpretations of the Leninist principle of “national self-determination” and opened Stalin and his majority in the Bolshevik Party to accusations of excessive “centralism” and even the restoration of Tsarist “chauvinism” and “colonialism” from Sultan-Galiev and the “opposition” at the Twelfth Party Congress in 1923.<sup>13</sup>

Similar complications arose between the theory and practice of weaponized nationalism in Piłsudski’s camp, proving especially critical in undermining the already limited chances for success of their plan for the lands and peoples between the Baltic and Black Seas. In their polemical tracts and party programs, Piłsudski and his comrades in the PPS consistently demanded full independence for the borderland peoples within their respective ethnographic territories, envisioning a concerted movement for the secession of the peripheries as essential to the unmaking of Tsarism and, later on, Soviet power.<sup>14</sup> The argument that ethnic boundaries and political frontiers should coincide, after all, formed one of the main avenues of assault against the legitimacy of multinational polities constructed from “conquest,” particularly Russia and the Soviet Union, that the Prometheans inherited from the PPS. Nevertheless, Piłsudski and his camp seldom encountered trouble in finding exceptions to this principle when it came to their own plans for restructuring the lands between the Baltic and Black Seas, especially those that had belonged to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth at the time of its first partition in 1772.

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<sup>12</sup> Stalin uses this term in “Protiv federalizma,” *Sochineniia*, volume 3, 23-31.

<sup>13</sup> *Dvenadtsatyi s’ezd RKP(b). 17-25 aprelia 1923 g. Stenograficheskii otchet* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1968), 570-580.

<sup>14</sup> Wasilewski, *We wspólnem jarzmie*, 38-39; Jodko-Narkiewicz, *Objaśnienia*, 181-184.

Though Piłsudski had long declared that the struggle against Russian hegemony must be predicated upon a union “of the free with the free, of equals with equals,” his armies occupied much of the old Commonwealth at gunpoint between November of 1918 and August of 1920, crushing nationalists in Lithuania and western Ukraine before facing the Red Army.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, Piłsudski and his allies from the PPS identified themselves in earnest as proponents of a “federation” encompassing the peoples of the Commonwealth, yet the political structures that they briefly managed to erect were widely condemned as “imperialist” not only by Bolshevik propagandists, but first and foremost by the self-proclaimed representatives of the non-Poles forcibly integrated into them.<sup>16</sup> This characterization was arguably most justified in the case of the Commonwealth’s former Ukrainian territories, where the principle of self-determination along ethnic borders was flagrantly violated and Polish strategic objectives took clear precedence over the independence of Ukraine.<sup>17</sup>

While Piłsudski is widely known for his “federal” idea, the substantive content of this geopolitical model, upon closer examination, was still very much in flux and dependent on matters of military strategy as late as 1920, as Krzysztof Grygajtis shows, and emerging ideas about its internal borders and foreign frontiers, whether in Lithuania, Belarus, or Ukraine, often ran roughshod over the principle of national sovereignty within ethnic boundaries.<sup>18</sup> Even the writings of Leon Wasilewski from the wartime years reveal that future Polish Prometheans were still working through a tangle of possible borders in figuring out the shape of a future “federation,”

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<sup>15</sup> Lech Wyszczelski, *Wojna o kresy wschodnie (1918-1921)* (Warszawa: Bellona, 2011).

<sup>16</sup> Andrzej Nowak, “Józef Piłsudski: a Federalist or an Imperialist?,” in *History and Geopolitics: A Contest for Eastern Europe* (Warsaw: Polish Institute of International Affairs, 2008), 169-186.

<sup>17</sup> See Michael Palij, *The Ukrainian-Polish Defensive Alliance, 1919-1921: An Aspect of the Ukrainian Revolution* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 1995).

<sup>18</sup> Grygajtis, *Polskie idee federacyjne*, 551-555.

considering the historical contours of the Commonwealth, the religious and “civilizational” divides between Catholic and Orthodox populations, and the strategic needs of an independent Poland as more important than the ethnographic map.

Although the concept of a Polish-led “federation” overlapping with the area of the Commonwealth in 1772 had long been alive among Polish political thinkers, including Bolesław Limanowski in the PPS, it was far from fit for implementation in 1918 or even 1920, and the formal alliances that Piłsudski forged with fellow leaders such as Petliura were extraordinarily lopsided and more “imperial” than “federal.”

Piłsudski’s “federal” thought soon clashed with that of Stalin, who started to theorize a Soviet “federation” in 1917 primarily as a temporary means of reuniting the borderlands with the industrial core of “central Russia” and internationalizing the revolution through the borderlands.<sup>19</sup> The Polish-Soviet competition for the western borderlands in 1918 to 1921, when viewed through this lens, appears less as the confrontation of two clearly articulated federal models and more as the entanglement of emerging federal ideas, beset by tensions and contradictions, within a wider struggle between Piłsudski’s campaign to contain “Russian” power and the Bolshevik drive to internationalize the October Revolution. It was also the opening act in what became a longer “cold war” of Promethean and Soviet internationalisms, to borrow from Jan Jacek Bruski, that extended by other means into the interwar years before merging into the post-1945 global Cold War.<sup>20</sup> The failure of Piłsudski’s vision of an encircled Russia or even a Polish-dominated Eastern Europe to congeal by 1921 derived not so much from the strength of the Bolshevik project, which, Stalin

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<sup>19</sup> Stalin, “Politika Sovetskoi vlasti po natsional’nomu voprosu v Rossii,” in *Sochineniia*, volume 4, 351-363.

<sup>20</sup> Jan Jacek Bruski, *Między prometeizmem a realpolitik: II Rzeczpospolita wobec Ukrainy sowieckiej 1921-1926* (Kraków: Towarzystwo Wydawnicze “Historia Iagellonica,” 2010).

conceded in 1923, had suffered “deep wounds” and was in desperate need of “recovery,” as from its own inability to integrate or at least placate the hostile forces of ethnic nationalism that proved to be its undoing, as Timothy Snyder has shown.<sup>21</sup>

### **The anatomy of a national revolution**

Well before the outbreak of the First World War, visions of “armed struggle” (*walka zbrojna*) against the Tsarist state figured prominently into how Józef Piłsudski and his close confederates in the Polish Socialist Party (PPS) envisioned Poland’s separation from the Russian Empire, though their sense of how and where this “struggle” would unfold and who would wage it evolved significantly between the 1890s and 1914. Some kind of insurrection, Piłsudski and his comrades broadly argued, was necessary because the entrenched guardians of Russia’s autocratic political culture would never permit the meaningful devolution of power to the captive “borderlands,” forcibly holding them in the thrall of St. Petersburg while artificially suppressing their “natural” developmental tendencies. Only an uncompromising movement fusing national emancipation with working-class liberation, in Piłsudski’s view, could deliver the ethnically non-Russian working masses from Tsarist domination by splintering the empire into nation-states run by the local peasants and proletarians, ostensibly with the benevolent aid of groupings such as the PPS. While the immediate objective of such a rebellion was the overthrow of Tsarism, the more sustained and equally complex ordeals of actually arming, disciplining, and mobilizing the “people” (*lud*) demanded significant planning and contemplation, not least because they would pose profound and lasting implications for the architecture of authority and the organization of production in and between these newly sovereign countries. These challenges were further complicated by the

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<sup>21</sup> Timothy Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Lithuania, Ukraine, Belarus, 1569-1999* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

thorny tangle of unresolved territorial and socioeconomic disputes among Polish, Lithuanian, Belarusian, Ukrainian, and Jewish activists in the so-called “western borderlands,” a region that Piłsudski liked to envision as an organic community of peoples rooted in the traditions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

While Piłsudski and his associates sensed a dynamic, intimate, and mutually constitutive relationship between war, revolution, and the formation of post-imperial nations and federations from early on, it was only through a succession of experiments in defining who the “people” were and harnessing their potent yet unruly radicalism that the PPS, according to Leon Wasilewski, turned towards a new “military orientation” in the decade between the Revolution of 1905 and the First World War.<sup>22</sup> Though Piłsudski’s post-1906 Revolutionary Faction of the PPS is best known for heading the Polish Legions that fought against Tsarist forces under Austrian and later German leadership on the Eastern Front between 1914 and 1917, the decision to create uniformed military cadres in Galicia arrived only in the wake of the bloody suppression of the Revolution of 1905 in Russian-ruled Poland.<sup>23</sup> Although Piłsudski’s preoccupation with “armed struggle” set him apart at the time from his reform-minded Ukrainian, Tatar, Caucasian, and Central Asian contemporaries who joined Prometheism after 1926, it was precisely the period of militarization that minted the cohort of military officers, namely Edmund Charaszkiwicz, Tadeusz Schaetzel, Tadeusz Hołówko, and Henryk Józewski, who wove the networks and manned the institutions that formed the movement’s backbone.<sup>24</sup> Militarization, meanwhile, represented an intellectually formative phenomenon that generated

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<sup>22</sup> Leon Wasilewski, *Zarys dziejów Polskiej Partii Socjalistycznej w związku z historią socjalizmu polskiego w trzech zaborach i na emigracji* (Warszawa: Nowe Życie, 1925), 114-123.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Charaszkiwicz, “Referat”



historically informed ideas about how to incite national revolutions against Tsarism and later Soviet power, turning the Revolutionary Faction into a living laboratory for the theory and practice of weaponized nationalism that provided a key foundation for Prometheism in the interwar period.

Before the PPS entered its decisive phase of militarization after 1904, Piłsudski notably emphasized in his key publications from the mid-1890s that the intensification of broader historical processes and structural transformations, chief among them industrialization, class struggle, and the spread of proletarian consciousness, would be responsible for driving Poland's secession from the Russian Empire. If the failed insurrections of 1830 to 1831 and 1863 to 1864 had been led by elite officers and nobles who struggled to gain the sustained backing of the peasantry, Piłsudski now wagered on the Polish "proletariat" as the rapidly expanding and increasingly militant force whose rising demands for socioeconomic emancipation and national liberation would tear the former Congress Kingdom away from Tsarist rule, ideally taking with it the rest of the old Commonwealth lands to the west of the Dvina and Dnipro Rivers.<sup>25</sup> According to Piłsudski, the Congress Kingdom's advanced level of capitalist development, embodied in the burgeoning manufacturing centers of Warsaw and Łódź, had spawned a mature and increasingly self-directed class of laborers whose historical destiny lay in the establishment of a "Democratic Republic of Poland, by the proletariat and for the proletariat."<sup>26</sup> By contrast, Piłsudski argued that "Russia proper" (*Rosja właściwa*) was deeply backward and overwhelmingly inhabited by peasants cowed into complete submission to the Tsar, while the emergence of "true socialism" as a mass-based phenomenon was barely

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<sup>25</sup> Piłsudski, "Zadania praktyczne rewolucji w zaborze rosyjskim," in *Pisma*, volume 3, 5-17.

<sup>26</sup> Idem., "Walka z rządem," in *Pisma*, volume 1, 118.

taking hold even in major cities such as Moscow and St. Petersburg.<sup>27</sup> The organic, spontaneous socialism of the Polish proletariat, Piłsudski contended, formed the easternmost outpost of a pan-European ecology of working-class movements and faced the momentous challenge of smashing not only bourgeois liberalism but also Tsarism, which promised to deploy its entire arsenal of secret police units and uniformed gendarmes to pacify its western borderlands.<sup>28</sup>

Caught between the vibrant Congress Kingdom and benighted “Russia proper,” in Piłsudski’s mental geography, were the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania and “Ruthenia,” or Right-Bank Ukraine, areas that he described in 1894 as still largely agricultural yet thoroughly steeped in the democratic traditions of the Commonwealth and demonstrating the early signs of proper “class differentiation.”<sup>29</sup> Here, Piłsudski broadened his definition of who could belong to the revolutionary front headed by the “proletariat,” including the artisans and craftsmen (*rzemieślnicy*) of the provincial towns of the Grand Duchy and “Ruthenia” under the rubric of the oppressed, a maneuver that would soon open the PPS to allegations of “petty bourgeois” and “social-patriotic” deviations from Rosa Luxemburg and Vladimir Lenin, among others.<sup>30</sup> What mattered more to Piłsudski than maintaining a consistent, sociologically rigorous understanding of the “proletariat,” however, was ensuring that the lands between the Baltic and Black Seas would become closely united once Tsarism had been overthrown, a project, in his mind, that could best be achieved if the PPS established itself as an attractive beacon of European socialism as far afield as

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<sup>27</sup> Idem., “Rosja,” in *Pisma*, volume 1, 84.

<sup>28</sup> Idem., “Stosunek do rewolucjonistów rosyjskich,” in *Pisma*, volume 1, 42-43.

<sup>29</sup> Piłsudski, “Rosja,” 86-87.

<sup>30</sup> See Chapter One for Lenin and Luxemburg’s criticisms.

Vilnius, Minsk, and Kyiv. The Polish language, Piłsudski wrote in 1894, should become the universal “tongue of socialism” in the borderlands, not only uniting Lithuanians, Belarusians, Ukrainians, and Jews but, more ambitiously, reaching “Russia proper” and stimulating the formation of a genuinely democratic workers’ movement that could unmake the bloodthirsty despotism of the Tsars.<sup>31</sup> In the meantime, however, Piłsudski judged that Russian socialists could at best play a “helping role” in the coming collision between the dynamic Polish proletariat and the forces of Tsarism, a world-historical showdown that would be primarily centered on the Congress Kingdom.<sup>32</sup>

In one of his earliest articles, Piłsudski characterized the PPS as the “most perfect weapon” in the hands of the “proletariat,” emphasizing that the increasingly autonomous and conscious workers would provide the creative impetus in the struggle against capitalism and Tsarism while the party elites, many of whom were of noble or intellectual background, would closely support their aspirations.<sup>33</sup> At the time that this piece appeared in 1894, the PPS had yet to outline an explicit strategy for the coming insurrection that would liberate Poland, while Piłsudski himself was in the process of developing a taxonomy of the various forms of working-class resistance and rebellion that appeared in the cities and towns of the Congress Kingdom. While the PPS was hardly an unproblematic “weapon” of the workers, it was nevertheless the case that Piłsudski and his comrades were still assembling an understanding of the types of proletarian unruliness that they hoped to someday harness and sharpen into a weapon of revolutionary struggle. Writing in 1895, Piłsudski praised “our brothers in

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<sup>31</sup> Piłsudski, “Na posterunku,” in *Pisma*, volume 1, 95.

<sup>32</sup> Idem., “Rosja,” 89.

<sup>33</sup> Idem., “Czym jest P.P.S. ?,” in *Pisma*, volume 1, 107.

Białystok” for organizing a major industrial strike that was violently crushed, yet he simultaneously advised his readers that the time for a truly generalized uprising led by “a million workers, with weapons in hand” was conceivable in theory but still beyond the realm of possibility.<sup>34</sup> By 1899, however, Piłsudski claimed that the workers of the Congress Kingdom had reached an important milestone by staging mass “manifestations” (*manifestacje*) in the industrial districts of Warsaw and the coal mines of the Dąbrowa Basin, demonstrating overtly anti-government sentiments that combined socioeconomic frustrations with political radicalism.<sup>35</sup> Alongside strikes and the circulation of subversive literature, Piłsudski considered the “manifestation” to constitute the most innovative and disruptive “weapon” in the revolutionary “arsenal” because it embodied the willingness of the Polish proletariat to rally in large concentrations and aggressively defy the power of the state.<sup>36</sup> This latest development, he argued, placed the workers on the threshold of full preparedness for the impending crisis in which collective cohesion would be essential in outlasting the Tsarist regime and its bourgeois collaborators.<sup>37</sup>

The first such calamity that resounded with Piłsudski and his allies in the PPS leadership began to unfold along the northeastern edge of the Eurasian landmass in February of 1904, when Russian and Japanese warships clashed in the opening episode of a conflict that would bring Tsarist forces a succession of major defeats by the middle of 1905. Even before the tide of the Russo-Japanese War began to turn in Japan’s favor, Piłsudski, accompanied by Tytus Filipowicz, set out for Tokyo via

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<sup>34</sup> Idem., “Walka z rządem,” 116; 119.

<sup>35</sup> Idem., “Po manifestacjach majowych,” in *Pisma*, volume 1, 257.

<sup>36</sup> Idem., “Nowy okres,” in *Pisma*, volume 1, 276.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

Western Europe and North America, with a daylong stop in Hawaii, with the goal of brokering an agreement with the Japanese government under which the PPS would receive material support with which to form a fifth column against Russia between the Black and Baltic Seas.<sup>38</sup> Importantly, Piłsudski and his confidants submitted a memorandum to the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs in which they explicitly contended that Russia's ethnic and religious heterogeneity presented manifold opportunities for stirring unrest behind Tsarist lines and accelerating the breakdown of the vast empire along national divisions. While this document proposed that Japan could encourage separatism among the nearby Yakuts, Buryats, and other "Asian tribes" of Siberia and the Far East, its principal focus was on the western borderlands and the Caucasus, where most of Russia's clearly defined "historical nations" were supposedly concentrated.<sup>39</sup> Finland, Georgia, and Armenia all belonged to this select category, yet Piłsudski emphasized Poland's singularly significant role as the largest, most determined, and best organized nation that enjoyed the greatest chance of toppling, or at least undermining, Tsarist authority in the borderlands.<sup>40</sup> Here, Piłsudski contended that Poles alone could launch a sustained, "open struggle" against the Tsarist state while mobilizing the neighboring "non-historical nations" of the old Commonwealth behind a common front, effectively injecting the disruptive energy of national mobilization into peoples who lacked their own mass-based movements.<sup>41</sup>

Many of these same ideas had appeared in Leon Wasilewski's programmatic brochure on the "national question" published in 1901, yet it was Piłsudski's voyage

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<sup>38</sup> Tytus Filipowicz, "Józef Piłsudski w Japonii w roku 1904," *Świat* 11 (1934); 3-4.

<sup>39</sup> "Memoriał złożony ministerstwu spraw zagranicznych w Tokio," in *Pisma*, volume 2, 249-251.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

to Tokyo that precipitated their formulation as a concrete program for the weaponization of nationalism in conjunction with a major international war. Russia's partition along national lines, Piłsudski wrote, was the ultimate geopolitical objective of the PPS, though he assured his Japanese interlocutors that he would be willing to pursue the more modest goal of replacing Tsarism with a constitutional order and forming an alliance with Russian progressives if strategists in Tokyo were wary of plunging Eurasia into such a radical reorganization.<sup>42</sup> During his negotiations with Japanese officials, Piłsudski also recommended forming ethnically Polish legions in the Far East from captured Russian conscripts, though his National Democratic rival, Roman Dmowski, soon arrived to Tokyo to discredit this more manageable project along with the ambitious program of Japanese sponsorship for Polish revolutionaries in the western borderlands.<sup>43</sup> While Piłsudski ultimately left Japan with only modest promises of material assistance, the idea of weakening Russia by provoking unrest in the borderlands had already been circulating among military and political elites in Tokyo, who, as Georges Mamoulia and Hiroaki Kuromiya show, took an interest in the geographically distant yet ethnically complex and potentially restive Caucasus from the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War.<sup>44</sup> Though a similar fascination with Poland and the "western borderlands" was also likely present in these same circles, the possibility of Japanese patronage for the PPS and the cause of Polish independence, as Piłsudski himself conceded, faced serious ideological and strategic

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 252-254; 258.

<sup>43</sup> Waclaw Jędrzejewicz, *Piłsudski, a Life for Poland* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1990 [1982]), 35.

<sup>44</sup> Hiraoki Kuromiya and Georges Mamoulia, *Russia, The Caucasus and Japan, 1904-1945* (Berlin, Degruyter, 2016).

impediments that made such a Eurasian connection exceptionally challenging to foster in practice.<sup>45</sup>

While Piłsudski's mission to Tokyo proved unsuccessful, the growing economic strains and political fallout of Russia's faltering war effort in the Far East only further aggravated the already severe structural consequences of a major global recession that had placed the working classes of the Congress Kingdom in a position of worsening material privation and occupational insecurity since the turn of the century.<sup>46</sup> The resulting revolutionary upheavals of 1905 witnessed the rapid, paralyzing spread of mass strikes and violent street battles between proletarians and the police in Warsaw, Łódź, the Dąbrowa Basin, and the numerous smaller industrial cities between them, prompting Tsarist officials to deploy regular military units that forcefully stifled the largest rebellions by the end of the year.<sup>47</sup> The Combat Organization (*Organizacja Bojowa*) of the PPS, originally founded as a conspiratorial partisan formation in the spring of 1904, gained some of its earliest and most formative experience in waging asymmetrical warfare in urban environments during this period, carrying out assassinations, bombings, robberies, and armed "self-defense" operations in support of the industrial workforce.<sup>48</sup> Though hostilities smoldered until 1907, the most serious disturbances were been brutally suppressed within the first year, while profound, lasting fissures in the landscape of Polish mass politics came into sharper relief as the major parties of the Congress Kingdom struggled to direct the unfolding unrest. The PPS had not only clashed with its main right-wing rival, the National

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<sup>45</sup> "Memoriał," 255-257.

<sup>46</sup> For a detailed history, see Robert Blobaum, *Rewolucja: Russian Poland, 1904-1907* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Piłsudski, "O rewolucji 1905 roku," in *Pisma*, volume 3, 148-150.

Democratic movement, but also suffered an internal split in 1906 between Piłsudski's Revolutionary Faction and the Left Faction that gravitated towards Rosa Luxemburg's Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania. The so-called "young" (*młodzi*) activists of the Left Faction, some of whom joined the Polish Communist Workers' Party in 1918, stressed the importance of integrating with the all-Russian Social Democratic cause and pursuing socialism within a reformed, multinational state, simultaneously objecting to the allegedly cavalier, excessive use of the Combat Organization by Piłsudski and his "old" (*starzy*) comrades in pursuit of Polish independence.<sup>49</sup>

If Polish socialists, Social Democrats, and National Democrats had often mingled or switched affiliations before 1905, as in the notable cases of Leon Wasilewski and Stanisław Grabski, the outpouring of chaos into the streets certainly hardened the divisions between these major currents and exposed the underlying incongruities in their understandings of how to wield revolutionary violence and mobilize the working classes.<sup>50</sup> For Piłsudski and his Revolutionary Faction, the split with the Left Faction coupled with the collapse of the uprisings in the Congress Kingdom spurred a decisive turn towards a "military orientation" that sought to transform the party's fighting forces from a covert network of operatives trained in the use of small arms into a more rigorously disciplined and formally regimented army of soldiers and officers capable of standing toe to toe with Tsarist forces in the event of a generalized international war in Central and Eastern Europe. The logic of militarization that first took shape between 1906 and 1908, moreover, stressed the importance of

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<sup>49</sup> Teodor Shanin, *Russia, 1905-07: The Roots of Otherness: Volume 2: Revolution as a Moment of Truth* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), 68-70; also see Brian Porter, *When Nationalism Began to Hate: Imagining Modern Politics in Nineteenth-Century Poland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*



incorporating all strata of Polish society into the “active struggle” for sovereignty, meaning that the vast majority of plainclothes, unarmed civilians living under Russian rule would need to be trained as partisans who would secretly prepare the groundwork for the construction of a Polish state and army before a major conflict actually erupted. While the foundations for an army of national liberation could be legally assembled across the border in Austrian Galicia, it was still the Congress Kingdom, in Piłsudski’s view, that would be the decisive battleground and the most crucial terrain on which Tsarism would have to be smashed with the cooperation of as much of the general population as possible.<sup>51</sup>

Piłsudski’s ruminations on military mobilization began to appear in print as early as 1906, when the recent confrontations between Tsarist troops and militant Polish workers in the Congress Kingdom convinced him that Poles had entered the fray with a great deal of “moral” energy but ultimately lacked the technical skills and readiness for war that they needed to overcome their Russian rivals.<sup>52</sup> No matter how large or disruptive they became, strikes, Piłsudski now wrote, were insufficient on their own if Tsarism were to be seriously challenged, partly because the working classes, though experienced in fighting against the police, were quick to panic and disperse once the heavy machinery of the regular army came down upon them.<sup>53</sup> The issue, according to Piłsudski, was that clashes with soldiers constituted a relatively unfamiliar and deeply terrifying kind of encounter with state power for the Polish proletariat, which needed not only the weapons and tactics to fight effectively from a technical standpoint but also a thorough training in the psychology of warfare that would dispel the

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<sup>51</sup> Piłsudski, “Geografia militarna Królestwa polskiego,” in *Pisma*, volume 3, 37-50.

<sup>52</sup> Idem., “Zadania praktyczne,” 7-11.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 11-12.

intimidating air of immortality enjoyed by the enemy. Though some Polish workers and peasants already possessed this specialized knowledge from time served as conscripts, Piłsudski considered the ability of the PPS to spread propaganda in the Tsarist barracks to be limited and insisted upon the creation of a separate “insurrectionary army” that could fully exploit the vulnerability of Russian forces whenever they were forced to fight in tightly confined areas inhabited by hostile nationalities.<sup>54</sup> The underlying point for Piłsudski was that the restless and rebellious “crowd,” though perfectly effective in “anti-police” operations and capable of waging short-term struggles in the streets, needed to be tempered into a formally schooled, reliably disciplined force that the Revolutionary Faction could fashion into a weapon in the fight for Polish statehood.<sup>55</sup>

In 1908, Piłsudski, Kazimierz Sosnkowski, Władysław Sikorski, and other proponents of Polish independence with prior military training assembled the Riflemen’s Association (*Związek Strzelecki*) and the Union for Active Struggle (*Związek Walki Czynnej*) in Austrian Galicia, creating the institutions that would train several thousand members of Poland’s future officer corps by 1914. Combined with the wartime Polish Military Organization (*Polska Organizacja Wojskowa*), these Galician groupings fielded the soldiers, spies, and diplomats who established connections with borderland nationalists as far afield as Ukraine and the Caucasus during the Russian civil wars before joining the post-1918 Second Division of the Polish General Staff, the foremost hub of the Promethean world network. Such centers of military preparation, according to Piłsudski, were essential because the Tsarist state still possessed vast mechanisms of coercion and violence that continued

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 15-17.

<sup>55</sup> Idem., “Historia Organizacji Bojowej P.P.S.,” in *Pisma*, volume 3, 26-28.

to function with devastating force in spite of the regime's "moral" bankruptcy, a consideration, he wrote in 1908, that many of the revolutionaries of 1905 had neglected to fully take into account.<sup>56</sup> While the uniformed officers produced in Galicia would form only a small portion of Poland's overall fighting power, Piłsudski insisted that they would exert an influence disproportionate to their limited numbers by broadly disseminating technical skills and spreading an ethos of readiness for combat and sacrifice throughout Polish society in general, especially over the border in the Congress Kingdom where the much more daunting challenge of cultivating a clandestine army of partisans remained to be overcome.<sup>57</sup> The ultimate point of this mass-based, ideally universal preparation, Piłsudski proclaimed in 1910, was to ensure that a future conflagration in Russia's western borderlands could be rapidly converted into the construction of a functioning, independent Polish state led by a widely recognized government with a capable army, a solid territorial base, and the ability to mobilize economic and infrastructural resources, an ambitious goal that proceeded beyond the limits of the "armed manifestations" of 1905 to 1907.<sup>58</sup> Avoiding a repetition of the January Uprising of 1863 to 1864, Piłsudski also stressed, would require a tightly centralized and technically competent leadership that would not allow the insurrection to deteriorate into an incoherent patchwork of "armed manifestations."<sup>59</sup>

What this form of "militarization" necessitated was nothing less than the transformation of Poland, and especially the Congress Kingdom, into an armed camp

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<sup>56</sup> Idem., "Zadania praktyczne," 14-15.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 17-21.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>59</sup> "Zarys historii militarnej powstania styczniowego," in *Pisma*, volume 3, 90-95.

of citizen-soldiers who would internalize the rhythms of war while maintaining a facade of peace and, at the right moment, opening all possible channels of movement and focal points of power to the uniformed Galician army. In practical terms, the Revolutionary Faction and the organizers of the Riflemen's Association and the Union of Armed Struggle distributed not only propaganda literature throughout the Congress Kingdom, but also published detailed handbooks outlining Russian infantry tactics as well as the technical details of how to load and discharge firearms and even artillery pieces that Polish rebels would likely encounter in the field. Piłsudski himself outlined several key publications in 1908 that would acquaint Polish readers with basic information on military training and the use of weapons in order to harness and maximize the nation's "physical power" (*sila fizyczna*) while reinforcing its "spiritual power" (*sila duchowa*) by offering accessible expositions of the inner workings of armies in order to ease popular fears of clashing with soldiers.<sup>60</sup> Though Piłsudski conceded that such a program would be difficult to realize under the prevailing circumstances, he theorized that an independent Poland enjoyed a considerable chance of arising from a coming clash between Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Russia. The cumbersome, largely unreformed Tsarist army, he argued, would struggle to defend a hostile, ethnically alien territory such as the Congress Kingdom from advancing armies manned by Poles, who would enjoy an important advantage in terms of morale and receive vital support from the local population.<sup>61</sup> German and Austrian forces, Piłsudski predicted in 1910, could easily transform the Congress Kingdom into an indefensible salient by entering the territory to the east of the Wisła River, cutting off Warsaw from the rest of Russia while pushing Tsarist armies back

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<sup>60</sup> Idem., "Zadania praktyczne," 14.

<sup>61</sup> Idem., "Historia," 23-24.

as far as the Dniro and Dvina Rivers, where they would find the support of local Polish minorities, if not the rest of the inhabitants of the former Commonwealth.<sup>62</sup>

In the final years leading up to the outbreak of the First World War, Piłsudski cited conflicts such as the Boer Wars of 1899 to 1902 and the Balkan Wars of 1912 to 1913 in order to demonstrate that a relatively small yet well organized and thoroughly disciplined fighting force stood a serious chance of dealing a powerful blow to a much vaster imperial rival.<sup>63</sup> Witold Jodko-Narkiewicz, one of Piłsudski's close collaborators and a leading figure in the Revolutionary Faction and the Galician paramilitary units, argued in 1909 that the dynamic, mobilizing power of modern wars was intimately linked to the fates of projects of national unification, as the German and Italian experiences showed, while defeated societies, such as Austria-Hungary in 1867 and France in 1871 following their losses to Prussia, turned calamities into opportunities for crucial social and political reforms.<sup>64</sup> The conspicuous outlier in this trend, Jodko claimed, was Russia, which suffered costly disasters in the Crimean War of 1853 to 1856 and the Russo-Japanese War of 1904 to 1905 yet resisted any fundamental renovations to the Tsarist state, which lumbered into the twentieth century as an outwardly imposing yet increasingly dysfunctional and disorganized colossus. While Jodko regretted that the PPS had failed to convert the revolutionary upheavals of 1905 to 1907 into a struggle for statehood, he had since grown optimistic that waxing tensions between Austria-Hungary and Russia would place Europe's next major war squarely on the territory of partitioned Poland, ideally reproducing the conditions that had allowed for Napoleon's revolutionary yet ill-fated march on

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<sup>62</sup> Idem., "Geografia," 40-43.

<sup>63</sup> Idem., "Zadania praktyczne," 20.

<sup>64</sup> Witold Jodko Narkiewicz, *Kwestya polska wobec zbliżającego się konfliktu Austrii z Rosyą* (Kraków: 1909).

Moscow nearly a century earlier. This time, Jodko prophesied that the coming clash of empires would inflame underlying national discontents in Russia's western borderlands and spark massive rebellions against Tsarist rule, transforming non-Russian peasants and workers into determined soldiers.<sup>65</sup>

However extensively the Revolutionary Faction may have prepared for a major European conflict involving Russia after 1905, the First World War ushered in dramatic geopolitical changes in the western borderlands that contradicted some of Jodko-Narkiewicz's key predictions while placing the struggle for Polish independence in a difficult position. When hostilities between the Central Powers and Russia began, the former Congress Kingdom, which constituted a strategically vital salient surrounded from the north, west, and south by Austrian and German territories, became a major theater of armed conflict, suffering extensive civilian casualties and economic devastation. Seeking to garner support from the cross-border Polish populations occupying their embattled peripheries, the governments of Russia and the Central Powers issued competing statements promising political concessions to Poland once the war was over. By the end of 1915, however, Russian forces had withdrawn further east, leaving the Congress Kingdom under the control of German forces and seemingly confirming Jodko-Narkiewicz's idea that a major war would create propitious circumstances for the restoration of Polish independence. The reality, however, grew more complicated as the Russian war effort collapsed and German leaders sought to reorganize the occupied western borderlands into an enlarged *Mitteleuropa* of client states beholden to the strategic and economic needs of Berlin. The idea of *Mitteleuropa* had most famously been elaborated in 1915 by Friedrich Naumann, a Protestant pastor and delegate to the German *Reichstag*, who envisioned

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 8-17.

the incorporation of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and their gains from the ongoing war into an integrated economic and political space under the leadership of Berlin.<sup>66</sup> Though home to a patchwork of peoples demonstrating contrasting levels of civilization and development when compared with the dominant “north Germans,” Naumann argued that forging *Mitteleuropa* would weld together these disparate nationalities into a common “type” organized around a shared mode of production and political culture. As Germany’s military and political leaders found themselves in possession of an expanding swathe of the Russian Empire stretching between the Baltic and Black Seas, the loose idea of *Mitteleuropa* provided a possible model according to which the labor and resources of the western borderlands could be harnessed to power the war effort, which had grown increasingly costly on the Western Front.<sup>67</sup>

In November of 1916, a small, landlocked Kingdom of Poland officially became one of the first units in this pro-German *Mitteleuropa*, occupying a strategically vulnerable patch of territory around Warsaw and completely dependent upon Berlin in everything but name. Piłsudski and Jodko-Narkiewicz celebrated this development as a blow to Russia’s historical dominance in this part of Poland, supporting the continuing deployment of the Polish Legions alongside Austrian troops and, until 1918, arguing in favor of closer cooperation with Germany in dismembering the Russian Empire.<sup>68</sup> In one sense, the creation of the Kingdom of Poland seemed to echo Napoleon’s formation of the Grand Duchy of Warsaw just over a century earlier, confirming Jodko-Narkiewicz’s idea that a new Napoleonic campaign through the

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<sup>66</sup> Friedrich Naumann, *Mitteleuropa* (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1915), 1-32.

<sup>67</sup> Jörg Brechtefeld, “The Imperial ‘Mitteleuropa’, 1914-45,” *Mitteleuropa and German Politics: 1848 to the Present* (Berlin: Springer Verlag, 1996), 39-57.

<sup>68</sup> Jodko-Narkiewicz, *Jak tworzyć wojsko polskie* (Warszawa: “Rząd i Wojsko,” 1917), 6-7.

heart of Russia's Polish lands would bring independence. However, the borders and geopolitical might of the Kingdom of Poland fell far short of what the Revolutionary Faction's leading minds desired, as the wartime writings of Leon Wasilewski show. In 1917, Wasilewski published a pamphlet outlining the future eastern borders of an independent Poland in which he contended that all of Austrian Galicia, the western half of Belarus with Minsk as its "outpost," and sizeable sections of Right-Bank Ukraine and Lithuania should come under Polish rule out of historical precedent and strategic necessity. On Galicia, Wasilewski rebuffed Ukrainian claims to the region by arguing that it exhibited an overall tendency towards "Polonization" in its culture and demography, though the Ukrainian national movement should still enjoy freedom within a democratic Poland. Further north, beyond the Zbruch River, it was the murky frontier between Catholic and Orthodox "civilizations" that should form Poland's boundary, meaning that ethnically mixed borderlands with economically dominant Polish minorities as well as the predominantly Uniate parts of Belarus would go to Warsaw. Wasilewski concluded that the remaining Lithuanian, Belarusian, and Ukrainian lands would now face a choice "between Poland and Russia," with the former representing their only realistic chance of "survival."<sup>69</sup>

Wasilewski's designs for Poland's eastward expansion not only subordinated the principle of national independence within ethnographic borders to the needs of the Polish state, but they also anticipated Piłsudski's own treatment of "historic Lithuania" and Ukraine two years later while partly foreshadowing the actual post-1921 borders of the Second Polish Republic. For the time being, however, dreams of Polish grandeur arising from a defeated Russia remained constrained by the German reconfiguration of the occupied borderlands, which held little space for the territorial

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<sup>69</sup> Wasilewski, *O wschodnią granicę państwa polskiego* (Warszawa: "Nakład Notatek Politycznych", 1917), 16.



growth of the Kingdom of Poland and, by the spring of 1918, had extended to include Belarusian and Ukrainian states that encompassed significant parts of what Wasilewski claimed for Poland. Piłsudski, meanwhile, grew increasingly frustrated throughout the first half of 1917 over what he decried as the creeping “annexation” of his forces by German commanders, proclaiming to the Temporary Council of State in Warsaw that the autonomy of the army, and with it Poland’s sovereignty, was being severely eroded. While Piłsudski and his close circle of officers were removed from their posts and imprisoned by their German superiors in July of 1917 for refusing to agree to an oath of loyalty to Kaiser Wilhelm, the transnational network of the Polish Military Organization continued to straddle the Eastern Front and operate far beyond the borders of the Kingdom of Poland, building the networks that brought embattled borderland nationalists to the Second Polish Republic and into the future Promethean fold after 1918.

### **Revolution, autonomy, and Russia’s federalist moment**

In the minds of Piłsudski and his comrades in the Revolutionary Faction of the Polish Socialist Party, the territorial integrity of the imperial Russian space would not survive the impending demise of the autocratic regime that had historically assembled and maintained it by force. At best, Ignacy Daszyński argued in 1908, a fleeting period of decentralization might briefly preserve a post-Tsarist Russia in the form of a federation as its mosaic of peoples splintered into sovereign nation-states that would renegotiate their mutual relations on a fully voluntary basis.<sup>70</sup> Far more likely, in Piłsudski’s view, was the violent breakup of Russia along national lines, particularly in the “western borderlands” inherited from the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, where a dynamic mode of industrial development coupled with an

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<sup>70</sup> See Chapter One for a discussion of Daszyński’s pamphlet.

enduring tradition of republican political culture allegedly drove an irreconcilable divergence from the backward, despotic heartlands of “Russia proper.”<sup>71</sup> Leon Wasilewski extended this line of reasoning further afield to the Caucasus and even Central Asia, insisting that the heavy yoke of “Russification” weighed intolerably on the shoulders of all of the Tsar’s non-Russian subjects, whose surest path to freedom lay in a concerted struggle for the complete dismemberment of the empire.<sup>72</sup>

After the revolutionary tumult of 1905 to 1907, Piłsudski and his comrades increasingly theorized that a major conflict pitting Germany and Austria-Hungary against Russia would fracture the latter’s borderlands and give rise to new nation-states, yet the link between war and national mobilization proved to be more complex and less combustible once the fighting actually commenced. As Mark von Hagen and Eric Lohr show, the politics of national identity in Russia, and above all along its embattled peripheries, became significantly more charged and contentious in 1914 as Nicholas II and his commanders wagered on a xenophobic, aggressive brand of Russian nationalism in an attempt to rally the “people” (*narod*) while designating entire “enemy” or “alien” groups, namely Germans and Jews, for expropriation and deportation.<sup>73</sup> The empire, which historically relied on a multicultural elite defined by dynastic loyalty, became increasingly “nationalized” as national allegiances acquired a palpably greater existential weight, especially within mobile populations of soldiers, refugees, and deportees living close to the front lines, though this did not mean that peasants were straightforwardly transformed into Russians, Ukrainians, and Tatars on

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<sup>71</sup> Piłsudski, “Rosja.”

<sup>72</sup> Wasilewski, *We wspólnym jarzmie. O narodowościach przez carat uciskanych* (London: Wydawnictwo Polskiej Partii Socjalistycznej, 1901).

<sup>73</sup> Eric Lohr, *Nationalizing the Russian Empire The Campaign against Enemy Aliens during World War I* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 2003); von Hagen, “The Mobilization of Ethnicity.”

a general scale. Instead, von Hagen illustrates that the proliferation of “councils” and “assemblies” claiming to represent entire nationalities following Nicholas’s abdication in March of 1917 was rooted in the dislocation and mobilization of more than two years of sustained warfare, which broadened the ambitions and imaginations of the nationalist elites who were often just beginning the difficult work of nationalizing their own proclaimed compatriots, for whom a tangle of ties of estate, class, religion, region, and locality continued to matter.<sup>74</sup>

While a growing cast of these self-proclaimed national authorities, among them many of the future Promethean emigrations, indeed declared their full separation from Russia between late 1917 and 1918, the turn to nation-statehood most often arose from frustrated efforts at reorganizing the old empire into a democratic, decentralized polity. Though traditionally elided or reduced to a dress rehearsal for secession in both Promethean publications and nationalist historiographies, the tumultuous stretch between the February and October revolutions of 1917 in fact formed a period of intense intellectual ferment and partial attempts at political and administrative reorganization in which Russia’s national movements constructed an uneven and incomplete yet vibrant patchwork of autonomies and authorities linked to ambitious ideas of multinational coexistence on an all-Russian scale.<sup>75</sup> Ushered in by the demise of Romanov rule and the emergence of a shaky Provisional Government in Petrograd that proclaimed a “Russian state” of equal citizens in March, this fragile experiment achieved much less in the way of standardization and overarching agreement than it did in drawing out a diversity of interpretations of how to understand and ultimately structure the relationships between nationality, territory, and economic production,

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> For an excellent overview, see Rex A. Wade, “The nationalities: identity and opportunity,” in *The Russian Revolution, 1917*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Cambridge, UK: 2017 [2005]), 144-169.

three of the weighty concepts with which advocates of decentralization frequently dealt.<sup>76</sup>

The concept of a territorial federation drawn up along national lines proved both attractive and contentious, inspiring impassioned arguments from activists who saw it as the only structure capable of unleashing vigorous national “development” in the cultural and economic spheres as well as from opponents who insisted that Russia already constituted a coherent fabric that national autonomy would only segment and interrupt.<sup>77</sup> A crucial question in this regard was that of whether modern, mass-based nations were themselves the crystallized formations of time, space, and population through which modern capitalist and later socialist “development” would primarily unfold or, instead, if nations simply represented one of many superstructural manifestations of underlying class relations that the toiling masses would eventually shed on their way to a post-national world. While the escalation of hostilities between the Bolsheviks and the monarchist White movement after November of 1917 increasingly crowded out the reformist borderland governments, these deliberations about national autonomy continued within the Soviet Union and the Communist Party of Poland, where national communists from the left wings of the Ukrainian Central Rada and the Belarusian Hramada attempted to find a home, as well as in emigre networks such as the Promethean movement, which was open to anti-Bolshevik activists of almost any non-communist stripe.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> For another excellent perspective, see Ivan Sablin and Alexander Semyonov, “Autonomy and Decentralization in the Global Imperial Crisis: The Russian Empire and the Soviet Union in 1905–1924,” *Modern Intellectual History* 17.2 (2020); 543-560.

<sup>77</sup> On the origins of these federalist ideas, see von Hagen, “Federalisms and Pan-movements: Re-imagining Empire,” in *Russian Empire: Space, People, Power, 1700-1930*, ed. Jane Burbank, von Hagen, and Anatolyi Remnev (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 494-510.

<sup>78</sup> See Chapters Four and Five on these currents.

Contrary to Piłsudski's longstanding prophecy, the revolutionary upheavals that unseated Russia's autocracy erupted not in the borderlands but in the imperial capital of Petrograd, where the mounting political and socioeconomic strains of a faltering war effort combusted into working-class uprisings supported by local soldiers in early March of 1917. Following Nicholas's abdication on 15 March, a Provisional Government headed by Prince Georgy L'vov declared itself to be the supreme authority of a post-Tsarist Russia of "the people," introducing a slate of freedoms of expression and assembly while abolishing discriminatory distinctions based on class, estate, religion, and nationality.<sup>79</sup> While these measures nominally created a community of equal citizens from the Tsar's sundry subjects, in no small part with the aim of securing popular support for the ongoing war, the Provisional Government's reach remained severely limited even within Petrograd, where the same workers, soldiers, sailors, and socialist activists who had toppled Nicholas commanded a formidable municipal soviet, or council, connected to a growing network of organs of labor autonomy throughout the rest of Russia. At the same time, the Provisional Government's principal basis for legitimacy lay not in the explicit mandate of "the people" but in the promise that it would guide the troubled country to the free and fair elections that would, in turn, decide the composition of a Constituent Assembly charged with devising a lasting constitution and political system. For the time being, the Provisional Government consisted of L'vov's liberal reformists from the Constitutional Democratic (Kadet) Party, a leading opposition grouping in the State Duma, as well as the more widely popular Russian Socialist Revolutionaries headed by Viktor Chernov and Iulii Martov's moderate Menshevik ("minoritarian") wing of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party, whose Bolsheviks, under Vladimir Lenin,

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<sup>79</sup> "The First Declaration of the Provisional Government," in *The Russian Provisional Government, 1917: documents*, volume 1, 154-155.

rejected cooperation with “bourgeois” parliamentarians.<sup>80</sup> As it weathered successive military defeats and working-class revolts in the spring and summer of 1917, the Provisional Government experienced considerable turnover in its membership, shifting further to the left and in favor of the Socialist Revolutionaries, who would eventually win the largest portion of the seats in the Constituent Assembly in November.<sup>81</sup>

While the Provisional Government never implemented a systemic policy on national autonomy during its turbulent tenure, deferring to the future Constituent Assembly on this complex and controversial issue, its constituent parties nevertheless developed a range of conflicting interpretations of how nationality, territory, and production should be structured in a reformed Russia. In March of 1917, the Kadets insisted that the cultural and political needs of non-Russians could be fully accommodated within the existing system of gubernias (governorates), uyezds (counties), and urban municipalities, provided that elections to these organs took place according to fair and uniform standards set by the Provisional Government as well as in observance of the full equality of all citizens irrespective of nationality.<sup>82</sup> Notably, the Kadets rebuffed calls for the amalgamation of these administrative units into larger territories on the basis of ethnography, writing during the struggle over Ukrainian self-rule in the summer of 1917 that such a practice would undermine Russia’s socioeconomic and infrastructural coherence, which had been achieved through gradual, organic processes of “development” that always crossed national

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<sup>80</sup> Wade, *The Russian Revolution*, 48.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 170-205.

<sup>82</sup> “The Kadet Policy on the National Question,” in *The Russian Provisional Government*, volume 1, 317-318.

lines.<sup>83</sup> Though deployed in defense of a much different ideal of all-Russian unity, the Kadet line of argumentation superficially resembled that of the Bolsheviks, who contended until early 1918 that nationally based federalism, whether on a territorial or extraterritorial basis, would artificially and harmfully segment the networks of roads, railways, factories, labor, and natural resources that represented a cohesive and increasingly centralized whole.

This did not mean, however, that the Kadets and the early Provisional Government that they led were averse to carrying out pragmatic or politically exigent revisions to Russia's administrative architecture on a case by case basis, as they did in Finland and Poland in March of 1917. With the end of Romanov rule, Finland's unique dynastic union with Russia officially ended, leading the Provisional Government to recognize the former's "independence" within a renegotiated constitutional treaty that reserved decisions regarding war and foreign policy for Petrograd.<sup>84</sup> Later, at the end of March, the Provisional Government undertook its own experiment in weaponizing nationalism by embracing the creation of an "independent" postwar Poland that would arise upon the "territories in which Poles form the majority of the population," an expression that would have encompassed the formerly Russian-ruled Congress Kingdom as well as portions of eastern Germany and Austrian Galicia and Silesia.<sup>85</sup> All of these lands, however, were under the rule or occupation of the Central Powers, which controlled the vast majority of Europe's Poles since the "great retreat" of Tsarist forces from the Congress Kingdom in 1915, which laid the groundwork for the formation of a German-oriented Kingdom of

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<sup>83</sup> Wade, "Identity and opportunity," 151-153.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 153-155.

<sup>85</sup> *Odezwa Rosyjskiego Rządu Tymczasowego do Polaków* (1917). Obtained at <https://fbc.pionier.net.pl/details/nnlwSps>.

Poland in November of 1916. Responding to the Provisional Government's proclamation, the Temporary Council of State in Warsaw, which was closely aligned with Berlin, expressed its approval of Russia's recognition of Polish sovereignty yet argued that the arrangement offered by Petrograd was glaringly incomplete because it offered no concrete concessions to the other peoples situated "in between" Poland and Russia.<sup>86</sup> This reference, at a minimum, encompassed the Ukrainian, Belarusian, and Lithuanian populations concentrated along the Dnipro and Dvina Rivers that eventually joined a German-led *Mitteleuropa* after the Central Powers cemented their hegemony over Russia's "western borderlands" at Brest-Litovsk in February and March of 1918. A similar line of criticism was taken up in the pro-Piłsudski press of Galicia and the Congress Kingdom, which maligned the Provisional Government for denying non-Russians full sovereignty and continuing Tsarist policies in an outwardly more humane, constitutional guise. Even Ludwik Kulczycki, a longstanding proponent of constitutional reform and federalization in Russia who had sharply criticized Piłsudski at the time of the Revolution of 1905, now contended that Poland's political future was tied not to Petrograd but Vienna.<sup>87</sup>

Within the intellectual landscape of the Provisional Government, the Kadets' developmentally informed opposition to nationally based federalization ran starkly against the grain of the reasoning of the Russian Socialist Revolutionaries and the Russian Mensheviks, two more socially radical groupings that also predominated in the workers', peasants', soldiers', and sailors' soviets across Russia. While the Mensheviks issued broad statements in favor of autonomy for the non-Russians in the

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<sup>86</sup> "The Answer of the Temporary Council of State in Warsaw to the Provisional Government's Proclamation to the Poles," in *The Russian Provisional Government*, volume 1, 326-327.

<sup>87</sup> Grzegorz Zackiewicz, "Rewolucja lutowa i jej konsekwencje w propagandzie środowisk lewicy niepodległościowej w Królestwie Polskim w 1917 roku," *Res Historica* 47 (2019); 225-243; Ludwik Kulczycki, *Austria a Polska* (Kraków: Centralne Biuro Wydawnictw N.K.N., 1916).



spring of 1917, it was, by far, the Russian Socialist Revolutionaries who had most elaborately and consistently advocated for federalization along national lines as a historical and developmental necessity in the struggle for a socialist Russia.<sup>88</sup> Since their formal inception in 1902, the Socialist Revolutionaries envisioned the urban proletariat as the dynamic vanguard in the fight for the socialization of property and the liberation of the toiling population, yet they also insisted that the ethnically Russian peasantry, with its indigenous traditions of communal landholding, was capable of radicalization and would play a central role in expropriating the parasitic stratum of landowners and capitalists who held the countryside in their thrall.<sup>89</sup> Rooted in the ideas of the populist *narodniki* of the nineteenth century, this vision of agrarian revolution also posited that Russia's specific historical and material circumstances might enable the peasant-proletarian alliance to embark on forms of socioeconomic development that diverged from the paths taken by industrializing societies in Western Europe and ultimately create a distinct form of socialism. While inspired by Marxist understandings of class struggle and historical materialism, as the work of leading theorist Viktor Chernov showed, the Socialist Revolutionaries, somewhat like the Polish Socialist Party, insisted upon the possibility of national roads to a pluralistic socialist future and were willing to embrace certain groups, such as smallholding peasants, that the Bolsheviks derided as petty-bourgeois or reactionary.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Walter A. Kemp, *Nationalism and Communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union: A Basic Contradiction* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), 229.

<sup>89</sup> Elizabeth White, "SRs as Russian Revolutionaries," in *The Socialist Alternative to Bolshevik Russia: The Socialist Revolutionary Party, 1921-39* (New York: 2010), 7-18.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

Crucially, the Socialist Revolutionaries demonstrated a striking consistency in extending the logic of their argument for a specifically Russian road to socialism to the situations of the various nationalities of the empire, asserting in programmatic documents printed as early as two years before the party's formal creation that the non-Russian peasants and workers should enjoy a capacious form of cultural and administrative autonomy within a thoroughly federalized Russia.<sup>91</sup> The reasoning behind this position, in the first place, was that Russia was a fundamentally “multinational state” in which non-Russians, and non-Russian toilers in particular, contended with a combination of spiritual oppression and material exploitation that would have to be not only removed but also replaced with a system that positively empowered them to pursue the vigorous “development” (*razvitiie*) of their national language, culture, and economic life.<sup>92</sup> By 1903, the Socialist Revolutionaries contended that individual national languages constituted the “mighty instrument” by which not only Russians but also Finns, Latvians, Lithuanians, Ukrainians, Poles, Jews, and the Caucasian nationalities would achieve “cultural development” and reach socialism, a “universally human” mode of social organization that, in practice, could best be understood and realized on a broad scale through national channels.<sup>93</sup> In other words, the Socialist Revolutionaries wrote in these foundational pieces, the road to a truly “internationalist” socialism lay not in the fabrication of some abstract “cosmopolitanism” devoid of national qualities, a worthless task best left to the

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<sup>91</sup> “Nashi zadachi (Osnovnye polozheniia programmy Soiuzsotsialistov-revoliutsionerov,” in *Partiia sotsialistov-revoliutsionerov*, volume 1, 52-62.

<sup>92</sup> “Natsional'noe poraboshchenie i revoliutsionnyi sotsializm,” in *Partiia sotsialistov-revoliutsionerov*, volume 1, 108-109.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

“bourgeoisie,” but by working through the existing material and cultural forms of national life accessible to the vast majority of Russia’s inhabitants.

While this formulation seems to anticipate the later Bolshevik claim that proletarian culture should be “national in form” but “socialist in content,” the Socialist Revolutionaries did not emphasize the eventual convergence of Russia’s peoples into a single, post-national mass, nor did they attempt to dictate a normative model of development that the non-Russians should feel obliged to adopt, beyond, at least, the general ideal of worker-peasant liberation. In fact, the early Socialist Revolutionaries declared themselves to be ardent opponents of the “assimilation” of oppressed nationalities into dominant ones, positing that the genuine “resurrection” of a downtrodden people required the formation of a robust, progressive, native intelligentsia capable of organizing the popular education and mobilization of the working classes.<sup>94</sup> This vision also included Russia’s Jews, who, like other spatially dispersed groups and local minorities living on the territory of larger nationalities, would benefit from “national-cultural” or “national-personal” autonomy, forming a legally recognized assembly of self-identifying individuals grouped together regardless of their geographical distribution.<sup>95</sup> One article from 1903, furthermore, envisioned a “federated” Russia in which the establishment of a patchwork of autonomous territories with broad control over their internal affairs would take place on the basis of ethnographic geography, embodying the socialist principle of “national self-determination” while eliminating feelings of resentment or antagonism between nationalities that had been turned against one another under Tsarism.<sup>96</sup> While the

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 109-110.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 110-111.

Socialist Revolutionaries claimed to represent ethnically Russian workers and peasants, the implication of this proposed framework was that the other nationalities were entitled to capitalist and, ultimately, socialist development on their own terms so long as the overarching integrity of a revolutionary Russia would be respected. As descendants of the *narodniki*, the Socialist Revolutionaries seemed to appreciate that the majority of Polish, Ukrainian, or Finnish workers and peasants lived in material and cultural conditions distinct from those of the Russians, who appear in these proposals as one fraternal people among others rather than a leading nation or a model for the others.

These sketches of the relationships between nationality, territory, and socialist production developed into even more specific proposals for the federalization of Russia following the February Revolution, particularly at the Third Congress of the Party of Socialist Revolutionaries that took place in late May and early June of 1917. Mark Vishniak, a jurist of Jewish background, proposed the creation of a decentralized Russian “republic of provinces and communes, both urban and rural” that could eventually “evolve” into a “democratic federative republic” in which an already extensive system of provincial and local self-rule by the revolutionary working classes would incorporate nationally defined regions with broad internal autonomy.<sup>97</sup> For Vishniak, Russia’s republican government would feature a unicameral assembly directly elected by the workers and peasants, who would themselves decide many of the state’s policies and resolve disagreements at all administrative levels through referendums, creating a system fundamentally rooted in the “power of the people.” Close cooperation between the executive and legislative

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<sup>97</sup>“Protokoly Tret’ego s’ezda partii sotsialistov-revoliutsionerov (25 maia-4 iunia 1917g.). Prilozheniia: Osnovnye printsipy gosudarstvennogo ustroistva (Tezisy po dokladu M.V. Vishniaka). Respublika, avtonomiia, federatsiia,” in *Partiia sotsialistov-revoliutsionerov*, volume 3, part 1, 611-613.

organs of the federal government would be insured by a common responsibility to serve the “people,” while Vishniak insisted that a “prime minister” beholden to the elected assembly should serve as the official head of the government rather than a strong “president” on the American model. This Russia, in Vishniak’s direct borrowing from German and English, would constitute a “Bundesstaat” or “federation” in which the relationship linking the autonomous units and the central government would resemble that of “Canada or the Boer republics with present-day Great Britain, Croatia - with Hungary, the Australian states (colonies) - to the Australian federation, and so forth.”<sup>98</sup>

Nadezhda Briullova-Shaskol’skaia, one of Vishniak’s comrades, went further in explaining that the Socialist Revolutionary understanding of the nation was not the “strictly state-based” notion of the “bourgeoisie” but an idea that envisioned Russia’s “oppressed nations” as the dynamic, vibrant organisms through which “world culture” and “internationalism” took on concrete incarnations entitled to their own material and spiritual development along socialist lines.<sup>99</sup> According to Shaskol’skaia, Russia’s nationalities could best be served through a composite system of territorial and national-personal autonomy as well as a proportional share of the federal budget with which the workers and peasants could manage their needs. It was Vishniak and Shaskol’skaia’s theses, in part, that informed the resolutions of the Congress, which voted in favor of a mixed structure of national autonomy in which the elected “assembly” of each nationality would determine the specific kind of self-rule within which to organize its affairs and pursue socialist development while receiving a place

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> “Protokoly Tret’ego s’ezda partii sotsialistov-revoliutsionerov (25 maia-4 iunia 1917g.). Prilozheniia: Tezisy k dokladu tov. Shaskol’koi po natsional’nomu voprosu, in *Partiia sotsialistov-revoliutsionerov*, volume 3, part 1, 614.

within a nationally federalized “Russian Socialist International.”<sup>100</sup> Much as they had before 1917, the Socialist Revolutionaries emphasized the principle that the “universally human content” of the “development of nations” could not be decoupled from the spectrum of specific “national forms” in which it became tangible and living, arguing that only broad autonomy and federation could properly accommodate “national self-determination” as an essential condition for the liberation of the masses. Once again, the “element of nationality” appeared “not as an end in and of itself, but as a mighty historical lever” by which the workers and peasants of Russia could discover a meaningful revolutionary socialism rooted in their reality, breaking the “civil peace” between the toilers and exploiters of each individual nation while promoting an internationalist, working-class alliance that would radically reconfigure the organization of production. One month later in July, the First All-Russian Congress of Soviets issued its own general endorsement of the devolution of “regional” autonomy to “organs that are national in character” as an essential step in rallying workers of different nationalities behind the project of forging a united “revolutionary Russia,” a position that reflected the ideological influences of the Socialist Revolutionaries and Mensheviks at this massive gathering of workers, peasants, soldiers, and sailors.<sup>101</sup>

### **Ukraine as a laboratory for internationalist and federalist ideas in 1917**

By the summer of 1917, Petrograd’s circles of Socialist Revolutionary thinkers brimmed with plans for the future federalization of Russia by the Constituent Assembly, yet it was in the ethnically non-Russian borderlands that handfuls of

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<sup>100</sup> “Protokoly Tret’ego s’ezda partii sotsialistov-revoliutsionerov (25 maia-4 iunია 1917g.). Rezoliutsii, priiatye na Tret’em s’ezde partii sotsialistov-revoliutsionerov: Natsional’nyi vopros, in *Partiia sotsialistov-revoliutsionerov*, volume 3, part 1, 603-604.

<sup>101</sup> “Soviet Resolution on the National Question,” in *The Russian Provisional Government*, 318-319.

nationally minded activists actually embarked upon the challenging endeavor of mobilizing mass-based movements and organizing embryonic national authorities on the ground. One of the most vibrant laboratories for the theory and practice of national autonomy and federalization after the February Revolution was Russia's seventh-largest city of Kyiv, where the Ukrainian Central Rada not only issued a declaration of territorial self-rule for Ukrainians in June but also hosted a "Congress of the Enslaved Nations of Russia" in September that drew some eighty-four delegates representing twelve non-Ukrainian nationalities and an even wider range of political groupings.<sup>102</sup> Formed in March in the basement of Kyiv's Pedagogical Museum, the Rada was initially headed by the moderate Society of Ukrainian Progressives but soon expanded to include intellectuals of a more radical orientation, namely the Ukrainian Socialist Revolutionaries, with their focus on uplifting the peasantry, and the Ukrainian Social Democrats, who emphasized the importance of the nascent ethnically Ukrainian proletariat in leading the twin struggles for national liberation and social emancipation. Like their Russian counterparts, these two parties would grow increasingly mired in factional conflicts over questions of agrarian reform and property redistribution by late 1917 and, from January of 1918, the crucial decision of whether a newly independent Ukrainian state should orient itself towards a capitalist Europe increasingly exhausted by war or join the fold of an emerging Soviet state tangled in its own internecine bloodletting.<sup>103</sup>

For the time being, Mykhailo Hrushevs'kyi, a populist historian and member of the "center" faction of the Socialist Revolutionaries, served as the Rada's first and longest sitting President, promoting the socialization of land on behalf of the

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<sup>102</sup> *Z'izd Ponevolenykh Narodiv*, ed. O.P. Reyent and B.I. Andrusyshyn (Kyiv: Natsional'na Akademiia Nauk Ukrainy, 1994).

<sup>103</sup> Subtelny, *Ukraine: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 4<sup>th</sup> ed., 354.

peasantry as well as the establishment of territorial autonomy for Ukraine and, later in the summer, national-personal autonomy for its minorities within a democratic, federated Russia. When Hrushevs'kyi explained the work of the Rada to a diverse audience of borderland nationalists on the opening day of the Congress of the Enslaved Nations of Russia, he presented Kyiv as a longstanding “center of federative ideas” and invoked the legacy of Mykola Kostomarov, one of the most important nineteenth-century proponents of a Ukrainian national revival within a pan-Slavic federation of free and equal nations.<sup>104</sup> Kostomarov, who belonged to the secret Brotherhood of Saints Cyril and Methodius in the 1840s, had combined Christian theology and Romantic nationalist ideas in his narrative of the suppression of the seventeenth-century Cossack Hetmanate by an indulgent Poland and a despotic Russia lorded over by “Germans” and “Tatars.” While the genuine liberty and egalitarianism of the Hetmanate may have temporarily perished, Kostomarov envisioned the messianic return of an “independent Ukraine” from its premature “grave,” a force that would create a voluntary “Slavic Union” in which the Poles and Russians would shed the burdens of autocracy and injustice and return to the lost state of tranquility, fraternity, and Christian piety that the Slavs had once known. As Mark von Hagen argues, Kostomarov belonged to a wider milieu of nineteenth-century reformist thinkers who challenged the dynastic dominance of the Tsars by imagining the Russian Empire as a decentralized federation of nations and regions in which the toiling masses would be released from political and socioeconomic exploitation. Hrushevs'kyi also appealed to the ideas of Mykhailo Drahomanov, an agrarian socialist active in the late nineteenth century who, as von Hagen writes, promoted an

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<sup>104</sup> *Z'izd Ponevolenykh Narodiv*, 29.



autonomous Ukraine composed of smaller, self-governing districts that would fit into a broader “Slavic Union” as well as a pan-European federation.<sup>105</sup>

These earlier alternatives to “Muscovite or Petrine centralism,” as von Hagen suggests in closing, laid some of the conceptual groundwork for the territorial and socioeconomic policies of Hrushevs’kyi’s Rada, whose Socialist Revolutionary and Social Democratic leaders argued that the struggle for Ukrainian autonomy within a federated Russia and the fight for the socialist emancipation of the Ukrainian “working people” were mutually constitutive, if not fundamentally inseparable endeavors.<sup>106</sup> The nexus between federalism and socialism, in the context of the Rada’s intellectual landscape, most often emerged from the argument that excessive centralization, embodied both in Tsarist autocracy and in the concentration of capital in the hands of a small minority of landowners and bourgeois elites, alienated workers and peasants from the fruits of their labor while stifling the developmental progress and productive potential of Ukraine.<sup>107</sup> Since Russia’s Ukrainians were overwhelmingly peasants, with an emerging proletarian stratum, the kind of federalism sought by the Rada would place the political, cultural, and economic management of an ethnographically defined Ukrainian territory in the hands of a popularly chosen government in Kyiv, overcoming, in theory, the dual, interlocking burdens of class oppression and national marginalization.<sup>108</sup>

Separatist ideas, of course, were also available to both the Ukrainian Social Democrats and Ukrainian Socialist Revolutionaries, some of whom had spent their

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<sup>105</sup> von Hagen, “Federalisms and Pan-movements,” 505.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 505-506; *Z’izd Ponevolenykh Narodiv*, 49-50.

<sup>107</sup> Stephen Velychenko, *State-Building in Revolutionary Ukraine: A Comparative Study of Governments and Bureaucrats, 1917-1922* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 52-65.

<sup>108</sup> On Hrushevs’kyi’s concept of the ethnographic nation, see Łukasz Adamski, *Nacjonalista postępowy. Mychajło Hruszewski i jego poglądy na Polskę i Polaków* (Warszawa: 2011).

student years as members of Mykola Mikhnovs'kyi's militantly secessionist Revolutionary Ukrainian Party, yet autonomy and federalism represented the predominant goals of Ukrainian national activists at least until the beginning of Russia's civil wars in late 1917.<sup>109</sup> As early as 1905, the Ukrainian Social Democrats proclaimed that Ukraine's progress towards industrialization and the formation of a class-conscious proletariat had been stunted by "national oppression," while the broad centralizing and standardizing tendencies of modern capitalism did not consign local self-rule to obsolescence but actually made "economic... and political decentralization" all the more necessary for nations, as complex social formations with their "individual economic, domestic, cultural, and psychological" properties, to lead a "free existence and free development." The most fitting form of "cultural and political self-determination," the resolution continued, would establish Ukraine as an autonomous territorial unit through the "decentralization of lawmaking, administration, and judicial affairs," removing artificial barriers to the intensification of the class struggle while breaking down animosity between workers of "oppressor... and oppressed nations" and ensuring that Ukraine's "productive energies" could be harnessed in accordance with local needs.<sup>110</sup>

In a pamphlet that first appeared in 1906 before being expanded and reprinted at least once in 1917, Mykola Porsh, a Ukrainian Social Democrat and economist by training, continued this line of reasoning, contending that the economic and cultural consequences of "national oppression" were intimately entangled and needed to be confronted as manifestations of the same overarching problem. Oppressed nations like Ukraine, Porsh argued, were not only gravely alienated from their own productive

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<sup>109</sup> John-Paul Himka, "Young Radicals and Independent Statehood: The Idea of a Ukrainian Nation-State, 1890-1895," *Slavic Review* 41.2 (Summer, 1982); 219-235.

<sup>110</sup> Mykola Porsh, *Avtonomiia Ukraïny i sotsial'demokratiia* (Kyiv: 1917), 77.

energies, which the propertied classes of the dominant nations configured to benefit themselves, but were equally prevented from employing the machinery of the state to pursue higher forms of cultural development and political autonomy that would enable them to collectively challenge an unequal division of labor and power.<sup>111</sup> Notably, Porsh did not mention Russia outright but often concentrated instead on Austrian Galicia, writing that the local Polish elites had transformed the province's autonomy into a means of self-enrichment by which to suppress the cultural and economic needs of the Ukrainian peasant population living to the east of the San River. In coupling culture and production in his assessment of "national oppression," Porsh stressed that Ukraine was not merely an ethnographically defined space but a distinct and dynamic economic unit in its own right, contending that a shared mode of production characterized the coherence of a nation as much as language or folk traditions.<sup>112</sup> In other words, nations were rooted in territory not merely by virtue of occupying land but, just as importantly, by cultivating it, something that Porsh knew was especially true in the case of Ukraine, whose predominantly agrarian mode of production employed the vast majority of Ukrainian peasants in farming their homeland. Although Porsh was a Social Democrat, this argument for the ethnographic and economic coherence of a Ukrainian national space also prominently appeared in the reasoning of Socialist Revolutionaries such as Hrushevs'kyi, who defined "Ukraine" as the territory on which the majority of the local peasants spoke a language identifiable as Ukrainian.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 1-13.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 14-37.

<sup>113</sup> Adamski, *Nacjonalista postępowy*.

The antidote to “national oppression” in multinational empires such as Russia and Austria-Hungary, in Porsh’s mind, entailed not only the adoption of a constitutional, democratic order but also the implementation of a federal system that granted broad autonomy to individual nationalities. While Porsh saw a territorial form of autonomy as perfectly suited to the needs of Ukrainians, he remarked that nationalities lacking a unifying mode of production would best be served by national-personal autonomy, claiming, for instance, that Russia’s Jews shared a common language and culture yet differed regionally in their specific form of economic life.<sup>114</sup> Within Russia, Porsh insisted that Ukrainians must be granted full control over their “folk economy” (*narodne khoziastvo*) and given the institutions and resources to undertake intensive cultural development that would mend the widespread illiteracy, poverty, and backwardness that the domination of the Russian autocracy and bourgeoisie had inflicted upon them.<sup>115</sup> All of Russia’s predominantly Ukrainian gubernias, according to Porsh, should be placed under the administration of a democratically elected national assembly (*seim*) charged with managing the internal affairs of this territory, above all by pursuing the development of the local economy through land redistribution and agrarian reforms, handling matters of finance and credit, maintaining public buildings and improving transportation infrastructure, regulating labor, issuing local laws, and introducing universal opportunities for education and cultural advancement, among other prerogatives.<sup>116</sup> Individual districts and municipalities, meanwhile, would enjoy the right to merge with one another in the interest of intra-Ukrainian economic integration, a goal that Porsh considered to be

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<sup>114</sup> Porsh, 47-55.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 47-50.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 53-66.

paramount in the struggle to mobilize Ukraine's creative powers. Meanwhile, Porsh imagined a relatively limited role for the all-Russian federal government, entrusting it with international affairs, such as the conclusion of treaties and the declaration of war and peace, the management of the military, and the responsibilities of maintaining federal roads, railways, telegraph lines, and postal routes while mediating between autonomous territories in the event of conflicts. The federal authorities, in Porsh's model, would also oversee the budget and pass general statutes on civil rights, labor rights, and financial activity, though their ability to introduce laws on "civil, trade, and criminal" matters would be limited to the passage of "foundational" or "basic" legislation that the assemblies of Ukraine and the other autonomous regions would be able to independently expand upon.<sup>117</sup>

The necessity of nationally based federalization, for Porsh, lay primarily in its alleged ability to transform multinational states stultified by excessive centralization into far more productive, efficient, and just polities whose constituent nationalities would freely develop their economies and cultures, interacting with one another on a voluntary basis rather than suffering from the destructive interference of one nation's bourgeoisie. Federalization, moreover, would remove the national enmities hampering workers and peasants from uniting behind a common socialist front, allowing them, in turn, to challenge the power of propertied elites and ultimately take complete responsibility for the organization of their country's productive resources.<sup>118</sup> One important piece of evidence supporting this prognosis, according to Porsh, lay in the case of the British Empire, which had lost the United States of America in the late eighteenth century by denying the local colonists the ability to govern themselves and

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 67-74.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 7-10.

inflaming separatist sentiments across the Atlantic. While the United States subsequently went on to become a mighty capitalist power whose federal system of government proved uniquely conducive to economic development, Porsh claimed that British imperial administrators soon realized their error and granted greater latitude to their remaining dominions, such as Canada, proving the salutary effects of decentralization for a sprawling empire.<sup>119</sup> In Europe, Porsh pointed to Germany as a paragon of the benefits of federalism, treating Austria-Hungary as an unfinished project while including as an appendix the resolutions of the 1899 Brünn Congress of the Austrian Social Democrats, who had called for the reorganization of the empire as a territorial federation structured along national lines.<sup>120</sup> The point for Porsh, significantly, was not to overcome the economic and cultural distinctiveness of nations through some program of convergence or homogenization but, instead, to maximize the productive power of that plurality by enabling autonomous socialist territories to harness their full economic potential while engaging in trade and mutual support on a fraternal basis.<sup>121</sup>

In April of 1917, one month after the inception of the Central Rada, Porsh's Ukrainian Social-Democratic Labor Party adopted a resolution declaring the federalization of Russia and the implementation of Ukrainian territorial autonomy to be the best solution for the challenge of eliminating the remaining barriers to the socioeconomic and cultural development of the Ukrainian working classes.<sup>122</sup> Around the same time, the Ukrainian Socialist Revolutionary Party issued the inaugural

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 68-71.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 75-76.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 67-71.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 77.

number of its newspaper *Borot'ba* (*Struggle*), which announced that the liberation of the peasants and workers through comprehensive social reforms could only function in tandem with the creation of Ukrainian autonomy within a “Russian Federation,” citing Switzerland, Germany, “Austria,” the United States, New Zealand, South Africa, Canada, and Australia as abundant evidence that such a territorial system would work in practice.<sup>123</sup> Hrushevs'kyi, who had already written brochures in favor of Ukrainian autonomy since the Revolution of 1905, now published a piece whose developmental arguments largely overlapped with those at the heart of Porsh's tract, stressing that all of Russia would have to be thoroughly decentralized if Ukraine were to become truly safe from a resurgent form of neo-Tsarist despotism.<sup>124</sup> Notably, Hrushevs'kyi also called for Ukraine to enjoy control over its own military units, a demand that Porsh had omitted, and emphasized that Ukraine's autonomy would have to be especially broad, stopping just short of full statehood, and accompanied by similar structures of self-rule for the other nationalities of Russia if it were to survive in the long run.<sup>125</sup>

In the heady wake of the February Revolution, Hrushevs'kyi's speeches in central Kyiv could draw crowds of more than 100,000 workers, peasants, soldiers, and students, many of whom also participated in electing formal delegations to the Central Rada over the course of 1917.<sup>126</sup> The challenge of transforming the Rada into the definitive authority in the nine predominantly Ukrainian gubernias of southwestern Russia, however, was a much more challenging matter, both because modern national

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<sup>123</sup> I. Maevs'kyi, “Pro avtonomiiu i federatsiiu,” *Borot'ba* 1 (1917); 2.

<sup>124</sup> Mykailo Hrushevs'kyi, *Iakoï avtonomii i federatsiiu khoche Ukraïna* (Vienna: Soiuz vyzvolennia Ukraïny, 1917), 3-5.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-20.

<sup>126</sup> Paul Kubicek, *The History of Ukraine* (Westport: Greenwood, 2008), 79-85.

identities were still fluid and very much in formation throughout the countryside while the Provisional Government in Petrograd was hardly eager to share its already uncertain hold on power with potential rivals in the borderlands. In June, the Rada formally declared that it intended to introduce national autonomy for Ukrainians while cooperating with the other groups inhabiting “our land,” stressing that the Provisional Government had refused to lend its support to these pursuits even though they expressly respected the integrity of the Russian state.<sup>127</sup> The following month, after crises in Petrograd precipitated a shift in the composition of the Provisional Government that replaced many of the centrist Kadets with more left-leaning Socialist Revolutionaries, Minister-Chairman Aleksandr Kerensky struck a deal with the Rada that limited the latter’s territorial jurisdiction to the five gubernias of Kyiv, Podolia, Volhynia, Chernihiv, and Poltava while delaying the formal declaration of Ukraine’s administrative structure until the formation of the Constituent Assembly. The Provisional Government also reserved the right to vet members of the Rada’s central organs, a measure that provoked protests yet ultimately left the Ukrainian Socialist Revolutionaries and Ukrainian Social Democrats in power and, as scholars have remarked, signaled one of the first formal acts by which a Russian regime of any form had recognized the legitimacy of an organ of national autonomy.<sup>128</sup> Over the summer of 1917, the Rada also made substantial progress in constructing a ministry of national-personal autonomy for Ukraine’s Jewish community while gathering a handful of progressive Poles and Russians, though the notion of Ukraine’s territorial unity alienated both Polish conservatives, who viewed the Dnipro as the southeastern

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<sup>127</sup> *Universal Ukraïns’koï Tsentral’noï Rady do ukraïns’koho narodu, na Ukraïny i po-za Ukraïnoi u sushchoho* (Kyiv: 1917). Obtained at [https://mtt.in.ua/slovnyk\\_universaly-tsentralnoyi-rady/](https://mtt.in.ua/slovnyk_universaly-tsentralnoyi-rady/).

<sup>128</sup> Gordon M. Hahn, *Ukraine Over the Edge: Russia, the West and the “New Cold War”* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2018), 31-32.



boundary of their homeland and civilization, and local Russian socialists for whom the federalization of the old empire threatened to divide the “all-Russian” revolution.<sup>129</sup>

Even if the work of constructing an autonomous Ukraine advanced slowly, Hrushevs'kyi demonstrated in late September of 1917 that the idea of broad national autonomy within a federalized, democratic Russia resounded with fellow intellectuals and revolutionaries from nearly every corner of the country and a broad range of liberal and socialist ideological orientations. From 21 to 28 September, Kyiv's Pedagogical Museum, the site of the Rada's first meetings in March, hosted a Congress of the Enslaved Nations of Russia that attracted not only Ukrainians but also delegations of Russians, Belarusians, Poles, Jews, Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanians, Cossacks, Georgians, Moldovans, Tatars, and self-described “Turks” from the Caucasus and Central Asia while reportedly receiving written greetings from Buriat and Yakut activists, among many others.<sup>130</sup> The timing of this gathering was key, as Kerensky's Provisional Government, following Lavr Kornilov's unsuccessful counterrevolutionary coup, had officially declared a Russian Republic in place of the former Russian Empire one week earlier yet had not announced concrete plans for decentralization along national lines. Following Hrushevs'kyi's opening address, each national cohort at the Congress had the chance to report on the situation in its homeland and present its specific demands of the Provisional Government, which were synthesized into a thirteen-point resolution formally adopted on the final day.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> George Liber, “Ukrainian Nationalism and the 1918 law on national-personal autonomy,” *Nationalities Papers*, 15 (1987); 22-42.

<sup>130</sup> *Z'ïzd Ponevolenykh Narodiv*, 67.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

The overarching thesis of the Congress was that excessive centralization had been the source of the Russian Empire's problems and continued to haunt the country under the Provisional Government, necessitating the redefinition of Russia as a "democratic federal republic" in which every non-Russian nationality would be automatically entitled, at the very least, to national-personal autonomy. The more numerous, spatially concentrated nationalities would receive at least one autonomous federal region with its own Constituent Assembly, while the main languages of each region would gain official status within the local schools, religious institutions, and courts as well as within Russia as a whole, though Russian would still serve as a common tongue in official matters concerning multiple nationalities. At the highest level, the Congress voted to form a Council of Peoples (*rada narodiv*) based in Kyiv, where each of Russia's nationalities would be entitled to four seats and two votes irrespective of population, while a Council of Nationalities (*rada natsional'nostei*) would permanently observe and advise the Provisional Government in Petrograd and ensure the just treatment of the non-Russian population in state affairs. Importantly, the Congress also insisted that the Provisional Government should promote the equality of nations on a global scale, especially in its dealings with other world powers in determining the contours of a postwar peace, which, the delegates argued, should embrace the principle of "full national self-determination," incorporate the voices of smaller peoples, and refrain from dividing individual nationalities between multiple countries. More specific resolutions called upon the Provisional Government to quickly recognize the unity and right to sovereignty of Lithuania and Latvia within their ethnographic territories, which were under at least partial German occupation, while another, far more controversial point called for the rapid "nationalization" of the armed forces of the Russian Republic through their transfer to the authority of the

different “revolutionary-democratic organs” in the borderlands, including bodies of Cossack autonomy. Not only would these proposals restructure the architecture of the Russian state, but they would also enshrine nationality as the guiding principle for its organization, not only on a local level but also in the highest institutions of government, one of which would earn Kyiv the designation of an effective federal capital.<sup>132</sup>

Despite their dizzying diversity of nationalities, languages, and ideologies, the Congress’s participants seem to have substantially differed on just a handful of points, most notably in the case of Muslim delegates who objected to a Zionist attempt at claiming Jewish territorial autonomy in Palestine, where, the former noted, Arabs still outnumbered Jews by a factor of seven to one.<sup>133</sup> Even more significantly, the delegation of the “Russian nation,” which included one Jew and a self-identifying Russian of Ukrainian heritage, were all members of Kyiv’s branch of the Russian Socialist Revolutionaries and expressed their heartfelt endorsement of the Congress’s pursuit of a decentralized state system that would prioritize the needs of the non-Russian nationalities.<sup>134</sup> The Lithuanians, however, expressed their strong preference for full independence, while the six Poles present at the Congress, among them members of the various factions of the Polish Socialist Party, formally abstained from “active participation” in the Congress and took on an “advisory” role because they categorically believed that only independent statehood could provide a nation with the possibility of full development and freedom from cultural and class oppression.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 49-57.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 40-41.

One representative of PPS-*Lewica* presented a statement of support for the creation of a Ukrainian state completely sovereign from any kind of Russia, noting, somewhat diplomatically, that he and the wider PPS regarded Ukraine's present path towards autonomy as a temporary, transitional step on the way to complete liberation.<sup>136</sup> While the Lithuanians and Poles starkly stood in the minority at the Congress on this crucial point, their embrace of independence would quickly spread to many of their fellow delegates over the year between the Bolshevik seizure of power in the October Revolution and the conclusion of the First World War in November of 1918. Some of the Congress's major groupings, including the Ukrainian Social Democrats, the Azeri *Müsavat* party, and the Georgian Social Democrats, and even specific delegates such as the Volga Tatar liberal Ayas İshaki, would later contribute to the interwar Promethean movement, which Piłsudski and his comrades in the Revolutionary Faction of the PPS engineered to shatter the Soviet Union along its national fault lines.<sup>137</sup>

For the time being, however, the pursuit of national autonomy within a democratic, federalized Russia had won the day, yet the apparent unanimity of the Congress concealed important nuances in how exactly its different participants understood the concrete implementation of this resolution. The Georgian Social Democrats, who sent one delegate to Kyiv, had debated the question of balancing economic and ethnographic considerations in the reconfiguration of the South Caucasus since before the Revolution of 1905, with Noe Zhordania, a future emigre and ideologue in the Parisian Promethean milieu, envisioned the creation of territorial autonomy for the entire region and a nested system of national-personal autonomy to

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<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 56-57.

<sup>137</sup> See Chapter Four on these figures and their contributions to Prometheism.

support cultural development for the proletariat, which also included Russians, Jews, Armenians, and Azeris, while promoting working-class unity. It is important to note, as Stephen F. Jones does, that the geographical placement of groupings like Zhordania's in ethnically non-Russian borderlands did not automatically make them into supporters of radical decentralization, a cause that the Georgian Social Democrats, prior to the escalation of Bolshevik challenges and the deterioration of conditions along the front lines in the spring of 1918, generally regarded as an impediment to the strengthening of productive ties with the rest of Russia.<sup>138</sup>

While ideas of socialist internationalism likely provided a sense of common purpose for many of the Congress's participants, who represented various Social Democratic and Socialist Revolutionary parties, pan-national visions were also present among those gathered in Kyiv, particularly among the self-described "Turks" (*tiurki*) hailing from the South Caucasus and Central Asia. Separate from the delegation of "Tatars" (*tatary*), the "Turks" included Shafi-bek Rustambekov, a prominent member of Mammad Amin Rasulzadeh's moderately pan-Turkic M $\ddot{u}$ savat Party, which had shaped the positions on Russia's federalization and the implementation of national autonomy at the All-Russian Congress of Muslims that met in Moscow in May of 1917.<sup>139</sup> Rasulzadeh had successfully advocated a combination of national-personal autonomy, oriented towards broadening educational opportunities for dispersed groups such as the Volga Tatars, and territorial autonomy carrying the more comprehensive right to determine local laws, which would apply in

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<sup>138</sup> Stephen F. Jones, *Socialism in Georgian Colors: The European Road to Social Democracy, 1883-1917* (Cambridge, M.A.: 2005). 67-68; 266.

<sup>139</sup> Il'ia Gerasimov, Marina Mogil'ner, and Sergei Glebov, *Novaia imperskaia istoriia Severnoi Evrazii, Chast' 2: Balansirovanie imperskoi situatsii: XVIII-XX vv.*, ed. Il'ia Gerasimov (Kazan': "Ab Imperio", 2017), 598-600.

the cases of spatially concentrated peoples, including the Azeris.<sup>140</sup> The overarching framework for these systems of self-rule, as the Mūsavat Party's First Congress declared in the autumn, would be a democratic Russian federation whose constituent nationalities would benefit from broad decentralization and the ability to control their own administrative organs, educational systems, cultural institutions, and courts while determining how to redistribute land and regulate labor.<sup>141</sup> The Mūsavat program described the “nation” (*natsiia*), an “organic” community transcending class divisions and united by “language, religion, traditions, literature, culture, history, and customs” that “lives, thinks, and has its own goals and ambitions.” While the Mūsavat Party claimed that “Turks” formed a coherent “nation” in these regards, the program emphasized that autonomy would, in practice, belong to individual Turkic territories and extraterritorial communities, while pan-Turkism would form a voluntary project aimed at promoting cultural cooperation among these lands and peoples.<sup>142</sup>

For Rasulzadeh, a modernizing pan-Turkism tailored to a world of nations would supplant allegedly archaic ideas of pan-Islamism, though the Muslims of Russia, in the Mūsavat view, would be entitled to choose their own “Mufti” for the resolution of religious issues.<sup>143</sup> In this vein, the Mūsavat Party claimed that “universal human civilization is the sum of the cultural conquests of its individual nations,” characterizing the “national state” as the “rational and normal” mode of organization yet insisting that a properly “cultured state” (*kul'turnoe gosudarstvo*) could be

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<sup>140</sup> Jamil Hasanli, *Foreign Policy of the Republic of Azerbaijan: The Difficult Road to Western Integration, 1918-1920* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 11-16.

<sup>141</sup> *Programma Tiurkskoi Demokraticheskoi Partii Federalistov “Musavat” (priniataia v 1917 godu 26 oktiabria na pervom partiinom s'ezde v Baku). Perevod s tiurkskogo. Baku, 1919.* Obtained at [https://www.ourbaku.com/index.php/Программа\\_Тюркской\\_ДП\\_Федералистов\\_«Мусават»](https://www.ourbaku.com/index.php/Программа_Тюркской_ДП_Федералистов_«Мусават»).

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

achieved in the form of a “federation” with ample “autonomy” for its inhabitants.<sup>144</sup> The Mūsavat Party, notably, did not explicitly outline what powers would belong to the all-Russian federal government, something that Porsh was sure to do in all of his pieces for the Ukrainian Social-Democratic Labor Party, and created the strong impression, more in the style of Hrushevs’kyi’s pamphlets, that the Azeris and their fellow Turks would aim to achieve forms of autonomy that approximated the architecture of the “national state” as closely as possible without crossing the boundary of secession. Notably, following its Second Congress in 1919, the Mūsavat Party’s theses on nationhood, pan-Turkism, Islam, “civilization,” and the “national state” remained largely unchanged, while references to Russia and federalism disappeared or were replaced with outright demands for independence.<sup>145</sup> As a key figure in the Promethean movement after 1926, Rasulzadeh continued to emphasize the primacy of nation-statehood as the normative form of polity for the “captive nations” of the Soviet Union, participating, in the 1930s, in drawing up plans for a loose, post-Soviet “Caucasian Confederation” in which Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and the North Caucasus would cooperate as fully sovereign countries.<sup>146</sup>

The ambitious resolutions of the Congress of the Enslaved Nations of Russia captured the striking geographical and intellectual reach of ideas of federation and autonomy as alternatives to both Tsarist autocracy and the allegedly growing centralization of the Provisional Government, embodying, for a brilliant yet fleeting moment in 1917, the spirit of an inchoate movement to restructure the world’s largest

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

*Programma Tiurkskoi demokraticheskoi partii federalistov “Musavat”, priniataia na ee II s’ezde (1919 g.)*. Original archival identifier: RGVA,f.461-k,op.2,d.78, 1.102-114. Obtained at <https://islamperspectives.org/rpi/items/show/10783>.

<sup>146</sup> For more on Rasulzadeh’s ideas, see Chapter Four.

contiguous polity. Much like the former empire whose fabric it promised to reshape, federalism, in the minds of its visionaries, provided a capacious and flexible paradigm by which to order time and space in ways that would not only accommodate Russia's vast human diversity but also maximize the latent creative and productive powers of its peoples by providing them with genuine structures for internationalist cooperation. Federalism and autonomy, for most of those at the Congress, were not only spatial formations but chronotypes ideally suited to the intensification of capitalist development and the eventual attainment of socialism, giving the so-called "universally human," as the Russian Socialist Revolutionaries wrote, concrete incarnations rooted in the specific cultural and productive conditions of individual nations and, above all, their toiling masses.<sup>147</sup> Furthermore, federalism and autonomy presented the means by which to materially and juridically reconfigure the unequal relations of power inherent in the supposedly corrosive hegemony of the Tsarist state and, in some analyses, the dominant Russian bourgeoisie, theoretically exorcising both class and national inequality from the former empire while retaining its borders and enabling its inhabitants to claim forms of creativity and collective consciousness from which they had been artificially alienated. Though often linked to revolutionary projects of social reconfiguration and class struggle, federalism and autonomy, for many Social Democrats and Socialist Revolutionaries alike, actually represented a thoroughly tested form of territorial and temporal organization that had sustained explosive industrial growth in Germany and the United States in the past and, in the case of Russia, appeared as passages to modernity and "civilization" in all of their national manifestations.<sup>148</sup> Federalism and autonomy, moreover, were not just

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<sup>147</sup> On chronotypes and nationalism, see Brian Porter, *When Nationalism Began to Hate: Imagining Modern Politics in Nineteenth-Century Poland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>148</sup> Porsh, *Avtonomiia*, 69-74.



temporary forms paving the way to nation-statehood, as the Polish delegates had argued in Kyiv, but were positively embraced by Russians and non-Russians alike, suggesting that the tentative alliance brought together by the Ukrainian Central Rada may have stood a chance of creating something more permanent in the way of a post-Tsarist Russia out of the turbulence of the February Revolution.

It is necessary to qualify these observations by noting that the actual introduction of federalism and national autonomy in a post-Tsarist Russia was extremely limited by the eve of the October Revolution, with the Provisional Government declaring a Russian Republic in September yet leaving the question of decentralization along national lines to the Constituent Assembly.<sup>149</sup> Individual, self-declared national authorities, such as the Ukrainian Central Rada, made notable progress in officially drawing up the terms of territorial autonomy and providing attractive structures of national-personal autonomy for some of their minorities, yet nationality, though injected with an unprecedented urgency since the start of the First World War, was far from constituting the clear or dominant form of collective identity for most of Russia's workers, peasants, and nomads in 1917.<sup>150</sup> While the Russian Socialist Revolutionaries served as a potentially powerful ally in the struggle to reorder Russia and won more than forty percent of the seats in the Constituent Assembly in November, Elizabeth White cautions against overestimating their strength, noting that internal factional disputes and frequent vacillations over major policy decisions undermined the grouping's ability to effectively rival the far more centralized Bolsheviks once the latter decided to overthrow the Provisional Government and

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<sup>149</sup> "The Proclamation of a Republic," in *The Russian Provisional Government*, volume 3, 1657-1658.

<sup>150</sup> Wade, *The Russian Revolution*, 144-150; Alexei Miller, *The Ukrainian Question: Russian Empire and Nationalism in the 19th Century* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2003).

plunge Russia into civil war.<sup>151</sup> While the civil war years of 1917 to 1922 compelled nearly all of the delegates present in Kyiv in September to pursue secession as autonomy became increasingly untenable, the idea of a federated Russia found a new and surprising incarnation in the Bolshevik paradigm of “socialist federalism” that was introduced as a means by which to eventually achieve “socialist unitarism.”<sup>152</sup> In addition to providing a foundation for the organization of the future Soviet Union, this project simultaneously motivated uprooted borderland nationalists to seek alternative, anti-Bolshevik internationalisms, including Józef Piłsudski’s drive to contain what he saw as Russia’s resurgence in 1918 to 1921 as well as the post-1926 Promethean movement.

### **The Bolshevik turn to federalism and weaponized nationalism**

When the Bolsheviks seized power in Petrograd in November of 1917, they issued a “Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia” proclaiming that every “people” (*narod*) of the former Tsarist empire now enjoyed not only complete equality and an entitlement to unimpeded “development” but, crucially, the “right to self-determination to the point of separation and the formation of an independent state.” Signed by Iosif Stalin, the People’s Commissar of Nationality Affairs, and Vladimir Lenin, the “Declaration” emphasized that the February Revolution had replaced the naked brutality of autocracy with the reign of the “Kadet bourgeoisie” that had treated non-Russians with distrust and propagated empty slogans of “freedom” and “equality” without any commitment to liberating oppressed peoples. The leaders

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<sup>151</sup> See Elizabeth White, *The Socialist Alternative to Bolshevik Russia: The Socialist Revolutionary Party, 1921-1939* (New York: Routledge, 2010); Scott Baldwin Smith, *Captives of Revolution: The Socialist Revolutionaries and the Bolshevik Dictatorship, 1918-1923* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011).

<sup>152</sup> Stalin, “Vystupleniia na III Vserossiiskom s’ezde Sovetov rabochikh, soldatskikh i krest’ianskikh deputatov 10-18 ianvaria 1918 g,” in *Sochineniia*, volume 4, 416-417.

of the October Revolution, by contrast, would promote a genuine “understanding” among “worker-peasant peoples” by releasing the latter from any obligation to remain within a multinational Russia against their will.<sup>153</sup> For Lenin, however, the “right of nations to self-determination” was not a sacred principle but a transitional formulation specific to the period of modern capitalist development, which, he had argued since 1903, challenged the territorial unity of composite states such as Russia due to the tendency of bourgeois nationalists to tear away their own nation-states in the interest of securing compact, loyal “home markets” united in language and ethnicity.<sup>154</sup> Lenin, in 1914, stressed that the “borderlands” (*okrainy*) of Russia, such as Poland, were more socioeconomically advanced and “cultured” than the empire’s ethnically Russian “national center,” making it likely, based on the recent fragmentation of the Balkans and the rise of national movements across “Asia,” that Russia would have to contend with the rising challenge of bourgeois-capitalist separatism in the near future.<sup>155</sup>

Instead of crushing these breakaway currents, however, Lenin insisted upon letting them run their course and accelerate the maturation of capitalism, which, in turn, would generate an increasingly large and unruly proletariat in each nation-state that would overthrow its “own” bourgeoisie and, in the end, strive for reunification within a socialist Russia defined by a system of tight political and economic integration.<sup>156</sup> The “unitary” nature of socialist statehood, as Stalin described it throughout 1917, arose from the allegedly existing economic integration of the far-

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<sup>153</sup> Lenin and Stalin, “Deklaratsiia prav narodov Rossii,” <http://www.hist.msu.ru/ER/Etext/DEKRET/peoples.htm>.

<sup>154</sup> Lenin, “Sotsial’isticheskaia revoliutsiia i pravo natsii na samoopredelenie,” in *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii*, volume 27, 255-258.

<sup>155</sup> Idem., “O prave natsii na samoopredelenie,” in *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii*, volume 25, 255-320.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

flung territories of the late Russian Empire, for which the devolution of powers along the lines of a “United States of Russia,” as one Russian Socialist Revolutionary put it, would prove regressive and sever the material links connecting proletarians of different nationalities.<sup>157</sup> From the eve of the First World War, Stalin had emerged as one of the Bolsheviks’ most forceful opponents of “federalism,” denouncing both the decentralization of party organs and state administrations along national lines as essentially inimical to the continuation of Russia’s progress through capitalism and, eventually, socialism. Stalin also insisted in 1913 that nationhood and territory could not be decoupled through the creation of national-personal autonomy, a popular model within the Jewish Bund, because members of a single nationality would begin to identify with compatriots residing in distant parts of Russia instead of forming closer ties with fellow workers of different nationalities living and toiling alongside them.<sup>158</sup> The solution in a socialist Russia, Stalin wrote, was to declare the general equality of nations while allowing “regional autonomy” for all of the workers concentrated in clearly “crystallized” productive territories such as Ukraine, the Caucasus, and the Urals, rather than along ethnographic lines.<sup>159</sup>

It was this theoretical trajectory of the unmaking and reintegration of Russia that likely underpinned Lenin and Stalin’s logic in authoring the “Declaration,” though the added benefit of improving the image of the Bolsheviks in the eyes of tens of millions of non-Russians, including those under the occupation of an industrialized Germany, would have also figured into their calculations. Lenin himself had witnessed over the past several months that so-called “bourgeois-democratic” regimes, such as the

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<sup>157</sup> Stalin, “Protiv federalizma,” *Sochineniia*, volume 3, 23-31.

<sup>158</sup> Idem., *Marxism and the National Question* (1913).

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

Ukrainian Central Rada, were indeed taking shape throughout the “borderlands” and demanding national autonomy from Petrograd, a development that would have tentatively confirmed his prediction about Russia’s impending, though ultimately passing, division along national lines. Yet contrary to Lenin’s reasoning, the leaders of the Rada and many of their socialist counterparts in other regions believed, in November of 1917, that autonomy within a federated Russia was still preferable to full separatism, not only for the purpose of securing cultural freedoms but also in order to facilitate the development of national economies over the long term. In response to mounting Bolshevik aggression and the destabilizing breakdown of the nearby front, the Rada announced in its Third Universal on 20 November that it was creating an “autonomous” Ukrainian People’s Republic that would encompass nine predominantly Ukrainian gubernias within a “future federated Russia.” When the Russian Constituent Assembly finally convened for a single session that lasted from the afternoon of 18 January into the early hours of the following morning, Chernov and the Russian Socialist Revolutionaries passed a resolution that defined Russia as a “democratic federal republic” formed on the basis of a “brotherhood... of equal nations,” achieving an apparent victory for the programs drawn up in the spring of 1917.<sup>160</sup> The Bolsheviks, however, forcibly dissolved the Constituent Assembly on 19 January, deepening Russia’s political crisis and interrupting the work of the Socialist Revolutionaries, who had won the largest share of the vote back in November.<sup>161</sup>

When they shuttered the Constituent Assembly, the Bolsheviks, as Jeffrey Kahn, Ivan Sablin, Alexander Semyonov have argued, seem to have appropriated some of the federalist ideas of the Socialist Revolutionaries when they introduced substantial

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<sup>160</sup> *Vserossiiskoe Uchreditel’noe sobranie. Stenograficheskii otchet*, ed. T.K. Khorunzhaia (Kyiv: Arbis, 1991), 9-11.

<sup>161</sup> Wade, *The Russian Revolution*, 254-281.

innovations to their program for transforming Russia into a “unitary” socialist society at the Third Congress of Soviets one week later.<sup>162</sup> Referencing the Ukrainian Central Rada, which had declared its independence on 22 January as Bolshevik forces seized Kharkiv and set their sights on Kyiv, Stalin declared on 28 January that the mounting tensions between the Soviet authorities in Petrograd and the “borderlands” (*okrainy*) had arisen not from “questions of a national character” but because of a fundamental struggle for “power” in which “bourgeois-nationalist governments” resisted the rising tide of revolution.<sup>163</sup> The “bourgeois-chauvinistic circles of Ukraine,” according to Stalin, had appropriated the slogan of national self-determination to further their “class-imperialist goals,” meaning that the Bolsheviks, as the truest proponents of this ideal, would have to aggressively advance a paradigm of “self-determination not of the bourgeoisie, but of the toiling masses of a given nation.” What this meant in practice, Stalin continued, was that the Bolsheviks would create a “Federation of Soviet Republics,” headed by the Council of Soviets and underpinned by a “voluntary union of the peoples of Russia,” in which “republics” (*respubliki*) would be formed from smaller “regions” (*oblasti*) “distinguished by their certain way of life and national composition.”<sup>164</sup>

While Stalin retained economic geography as a major consideration in Bolshevik practices of governance, his theses introduced nationality as a key basis for territorial demarcation and, in theory, decentralization, simultaneously contending that the spread of Soviet power to the “borderlands” would not simply reverse or suppress “bourgeois-nationalist” polities but transform them into properly socialist ones.

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<sup>162</sup> Sablin and Semyonov, “Decentralization and Autonomy”; Jeffrey Kahn, *Federalism, Democratization, and the Rule of Law in Russia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 71.

<sup>163</sup> Stalin, “Vystuplenie.”

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*

Importantly, though, this turn to nationality as a foundation for a Soviet federation was not so much a radical break from the earlier ideas of Lenin and Stalin as much as it served to bridge an important gap in their developmental argument in favor of the adoption of the principle of “national self-determination to the point of secession.” Before the October Revolution, Lenin had claimed that Russia might splinter along national lines before reemerging in an even more “unitary” form, yet he had not explained the precise mechanism by which breakaway states would actually reunite into one socialist country, indicating that it would be in the shared interest of the proletarians of different nationalities to do so.<sup>165</sup> As Stalin explained in an interview with *Pravda* in April of 1918, “socialist federalism” was to form the “transitional” means by which the shards of the old, brutally coercive “Tsarist unitarism” would regroup and, transformed by Soviet power, meld into a harmonious “socialist unitarism,” a developmental link that had not been present in his earlier writings.<sup>166</sup> Each federal republic, Stalin emphasized, would be defined not only by its “geographical position” in the “borderlands” but equally by its “economic wholeness, certain way of life, and national composition,” citing “Ukraine, Crimea, Poland, Transcaucasia, Turkestan, the Central Volga, and the Kirgiz region” as examples of the “historically distinct” parts of the “union of nations.”<sup>167</sup> While the idea of creating ethnically heterogeneous yet economically coherent regions such as “Transcaucasia” echoed some of Stalin’s arguments for “regional autonomy” from 1913, he now entertained the possibility that the Georgians, Armenians, and Azeris might elect to

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<sup>165</sup> Lenin, “Sotsial’isticheskaia revoliutsiia i pravo natsii na samoopredelenie,” 255-258.

<sup>166</sup> Stalin, “Organizatsiia Rossiiskoi Federativnoi Respubliki: Beseda s sotrudnikom gazety ‘Pravda’,” in *Sochineniia*, volume 3, 66-73.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*

form separate territories, a position from which he would later retreat in the early 1920s.<sup>168</sup>

The overarching objective, however, was to outgrow “socialist federalism” and forge “socialist unitarism,” carving out a developmental trajectory that would loosely resemble the transformation of the United States from a decentralized, agrarian “confederation” into an integrated, effectively unitary country, only the Soviet model would depart from “Western federalism” in its socialist mode of production and historical-materialist approach to defining the boundaries of its constituent territories.<sup>169</sup> Stalin’s reasoning here was perhaps most closely in line with Lenin’s pamphlet on “national self-determination” from 1913, which argued that Russian Social Democrats should draw new administrative borders chiefly in order to maximize the developmental potential of individual regions, a goal that would sometimes entail the consolidation of ethnic groups within the same territory given the importance of a common language for the growth of modern capitalism.<sup>170</sup> In 1918, however, Lenin and Stalin went further than these prewar proposals and granted nationality a prominent place in the territorial structure of the early Soviet state, a decision, as Terry Martin and Ronald Suny both note, that was at least partly a reaction to the “mobilization” of national politics described by Mark von Hagen and the proliferation of organs of national autonomy throughout the “borderlands.”<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Stalin, *Marxism and the National Question*.

<sup>169</sup> Idem., “Vystuplenie”

<sup>170</sup> Lenin, “Kriticheskie zametki po natsional’nomu voprosu,” in *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii*, volume 24, 143-150.

<sup>171</sup> Terry Martin, “An Affirmative Action Empire: The Soviet Union as the Highest Form of Imperialism,” in *A State of Nations* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 67-92; Ronald Grigor Suny, “Nationalism and the Russian Revolution: From Anti-Imperialism to a Soviet Empire,” <https://networks.h-net.org/node/3911/discussions/1118710/left-and-nationalism-monthly-series-%E2%80%9Cnationalism-and-russian>.



Stalin, moreover, emphasized in January of 1918 that the Soviet state was not simply a “union of cities” detached from prevailing realities in the countryside, as some of its detractors reportedly claimed, but a revolutionary form of sovereignty that would extend across all of Russia and incorporate all of its inhabitants.<sup>172</sup>

As the civil wars proceeded, the host of nationalities represented in the territorial structure of the Soviet federalist experiment expanded considerably beyond the several major groups mentioned by Stalin in early 1918, encompassing smaller peoples such as the Chuvash and Bashkirs while prompting resistance from Bolsheviks such as Nikolai Bukharin and Georgy Piatakov who criticized Lenin and Stalin for making excessive concessions to nationalism and undermining the achievement of a unifying proletarian internationalism.<sup>173</sup> Rosa Luxemburg lent her voice to the chorus of “internationalist” opposition to Lenin, Stalin, and their fellow “nation-builders,” as Martin describes them, arguing that the Bolshevik recognition of a distinct Ukrainian Soviet authority in 1918 had only generated additional hindrances to the unification of working-class energies in the major industrial cities of the former southwestern Russian Empire, proving that the “right of nations to self-determination” only undermined the construction of socialism on a world scale by miring it in unnecessary local divisions.<sup>174</sup> Karl Grasis, a vocal critic of the allegedly excessive turn to nationality as a basis for drawing up Soviet administrative boundaries, questioned the approval of a unified Tatar-Bashkir Republic in the spring of 1918, claiming that the majority of the population of this unit would not actually belong to the titular nationalities and that its territorial contours would prevent the integration of

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<sup>172</sup> Stalin, “Beseda.”

<sup>173</sup> See Francine Hirsch, “The National Idea versus Economic Expediency,” in *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 2008).

<sup>174</sup> Luxemburg, “The Nationalities Question,” in *The Russian Revolution* (1918).

a greater “Volga-Ural” economic region of tremendous importance on a “general-Russian” level. By 1922, the struggle to balance “economic expediency” with the “national idea,” as Francine Hirsch shows, was still unfolding, and the journal of the People’s Commissariat of Nationalities, *The Life of the Nationalities (Zhizn’ natsional’nostei)*, hosted exchanges between comrades who advocated the reorganization of the Soviet space into large, ethnically composite economic regions and those, such as one Chuvash Bolshevik, who insisted that even the smallest and most supposedly backward nationalities should receive spatially compact homelands conducive to their collective social development. In 1921, one contributor suggested, in the way of a possible synthesis, that creating economic regions was acceptable so long as it amalgamated, and never partitioned, nationally defined territories, though Lenin and Stalin’s decision the following year privileged the principle of nationality in demarcating both the four major union republics and the autonomous republics nested within them.<sup>175</sup>

Prior to 1914, Lenin’s writings on “national self-determination” had suggested that the “borderlands” might lead the way in Russia’s socialist revolution, the reality, in November of 1917, was that Soviet power was proclaimed in Petrograd and needed a narrative with which to legitimize its subsequent outward spread as something other than Russian imperialism in a new form, as many non-Russian opponents described Bolshevism during the civil war years. Between 1918 and 1921, Stalin himself frequently wrote about the necessity of a close and consensual alliance between the “center,” the “central regions,” or “central Russia,” on one hand, and the “borderlands,” on the other, describing the former as the historically progressive driving force behind the ongoing revolution while characterizing the latter as a vital

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<sup>175</sup> *Zhizn’ natsional’nostei* 25 (1921).

source of labor and raw materials for the Russian proletariat.<sup>176</sup> This inversion of Lenin's earlier vision of the divide between the "backward" reaches of the Russian "national center" and the more developed "borderlands" persisted beyond the formal foundation of the Soviet Union in 1922, when Stalin, in 1923, presented the ethnically Russian proletariat as the "most cultured" element in the country and the productive powerhouse that would provide the poorer nations oppressed under Tsarism with the guidance and material assistance to reach socialism.<sup>177</sup> Much like the new paradigm of federalism introduced in 1918, the language of a "center"- "borderlands" dynamic combined geographies of ethnography, production, and political power that did not always neatly align yet proved adaptable as the Bolsheviks imagined the overlapping developmental architectures of the Russian Empire and the early Soviet state.

The Bolsheviks, of course, had never originally intended for the spatial scope of the October Revolution to be constrained by the boundaries of the former Russian Empire, imagining their uprising as an exercise in exploiting the structural weaknesses of global capitalism by striking at one of its weak, semi-colonial outposts in the hope of sparking a world revolution.<sup>178</sup> While the industrial heartlands of Central and Western Europe represented the foremost destination for the internationalization of Soviet power after 1917, the Bolsheviks, facing the collapse of revolutions in Germany and Hungary in 1919, increasingly looked to extend their grip over the colonial "East" in order to starve the developed economies of the "West" of their critical reserves of cheap labor and raw materials, a strategy worked out most

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<sup>176</sup> Stalin, Stalin, "Oktiabr'skii perevorot i natsional'nyi vopros," "Politika Sovetskoi vlasti po natsional'nomu voprosu v Rossii," in *Sochineniia*, volume 4, 155-167; 351-363.

<sup>177</sup> Idem., "Doklad o natsional'nykh momentakh v partiinom i gosudarstvennom stroitel'stve na XII s'ezde RKP(b) 23 apreliia 1923 g.," in *Sochineniia*, volume 5, 236-263.

<sup>178</sup> Alexander Pantsov, *The Bolsheviks and the Chinese Revolution 1919-1927* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 9-15.

elaborately by the Tatar Bolshevik Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev in the pages of *Zhizn' natsional'nostei* in 1919.<sup>179</sup> While the “East,” for theorists such as Sultan-Galiev, was more a category of economic and developmental geography encompassing lands and peoples either fully or partly under European and American domination, the most immediate interests of the Bolsheviks lay in territories contiguous with the former Russian Empire, such as the crumbling Ottoman Empire, Iran, Afghanistan, British India, China, and Japanese-ruled Korea. Crucially, all of the roads to both the “East” and the “West” first led through the ethnically non-Russian borderlands of the old Tsarist realm that the Bolsheviks were scrambling to incorporate into their “fraternal” federation as they struggled to break out of an encirclement in “central Russia” during the decisive winter of 1918 to 1919.<sup>180</sup> While the Red Army faced formidable though often poorly coordinated White formations along the Pontic Steppe to the south, in the Arctic to the north, and beyond the Urals in the east, the westward route into Europe was straddled by a chaotic patchwork of evacuating German troops and emerging “bourgeois-nationalist” authorities, among them the Polish government of Józef Piłsudski, who had just been released from imprisonment in Germany and was resuming his project of shattering Russia, “whether Red or White.”<sup>181</sup>

When Stalin had first incorporated nationality into the Soviet system of territorial administration in January of 1918, the eastward advance of the Central Powers had brought the Baltic countries, Belarus, and most of Ukraine under German hegemony, an arrangement that the Bolsheviks officially recognized at Brest-Litovsk by

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<sup>179</sup> Sultan-Galiev, “Sotsia’naia revoliutsiia i Vostok,” *Zhizn' natsional'nostei* 38, 39, 42 (1919).

<sup>180</sup> Stalin, “Rech’ pri oktrytii II Vserossiiskogo s’ezda kommunisticheskikh organizatsii narodov Vostoka 22 noiabria 1919 g.,” in *Sochineniia*, volume 4, 279-280. Also see *To See the Dawn: Baku, 1920-First Congress of the Peoples of the East (Communist International in Lenin's Time)*, ed. John Riddell and Ma’amud Shirvani (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1993).

<sup>181</sup> Jochen Böhrer, “How to Mobilize the Polish Nation,” in *Civil War in Central Europe, 1918-1921: The Reconstruction of Poland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 33-58.

relinquishing their claim to most of Russia's "western borderlands."<sup>182</sup> With the end of the First World War in November, however, this critical territory was once again open to revolutionary radicalization, though the Bolsheviks had to contend with the disorganized remnants of Germany's outer *Mitteleuropa* if they intended to reach Warsaw and eventually Berlin. A key theoretical part of the Bolshevik strategy, in bid to outflank the "bourgeois nationalists" allegedly in the camp of the capitalist powers, was to attempt to weaponize nationalism by combining the socioeconomic "liberation" of local workers and peasants with the creation of nationally defined Soviet authorities as the Red Army pressed westward. Though extraordinarily messy and often ineffective in practice, this idea found a high-ranking proponent in the form of Alexei Rykov, who, at the Eighth Party Congress in March of 1919, advocated appropriating and remaking the slogans of the "bourgeois nationalists" in order to preemptively undermine their legitimacy and rally the ethnically non-Russian masses behind the Soviet banner.<sup>183</sup> Starting around the close of 1918, *Zhizn' natsional'nostei* overflowed with calls to export the revolution westward through the devastated borderlands, not only by force but through alliances with existing communist circles in Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine, and Poland. Polish Bolsheviks, such as Julian Marchlewski and Feliks Kon, singled out Piłsudski as the most dangerous imperialist agent bent on rolling back Soviet lines, eventually forming a Polish Revolutionary Committee when the Red Army was approaching Warsaw in the summer of 1920.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> For an excellent treatment of nationality and revolutionary ideas at Brest-Litovsk, see Borislav Chernev, *Twilight of Empire: The Brest-Litovsk Conference and the Remaking of East-Central Europe, 1917-1918* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017).

<sup>183</sup> Excerpts from the minutes of the Eighth Party Congress in *Zhizn' natsional'nostei* 12 (1919).

<sup>184</sup> Articles on the necessity of spreading revolution through the western borderlands in order to reach the rest of Europe first appear in *Zhizn' natsional'nostei* 2, 5, 7 (1918).

While the Bolshevik theorists of the People's Commissariat for Nationalities understood that the fight to break into the "West" would involve mobilizing the nationalities between the Baltic and Black Seas, Lenin and Stalin, as Terry Martin points out, were cognizant that both the Party and the Red Army were still largely Russian in ethnicity, not only in "central Russia" but also in their major urban strongholds in the "borderlands."<sup>185</sup> While Stalin had proclaimed his intent to supplant "bourgeois nationalism" with "socialist federalism," the results of Bolshevik policies, on the ground, seem to have appeared to at least some ethnically non-Russian leftists, including local Bolsheviks, as a reassertion of the dominance of the Russian center over its temporarily lost colonies rather than an act of national and economic emancipation. In January of 1919, Vasyl' Shakhrai, an ethnically Ukrainian Bolshevik from Poltava, and his Jewish comrade Serhii Mazlakh penned a brochure that excoriated the ethnically Russian Bolsheviks in Ekaterinoslav (today's Dnipro) for their tendency to subordinate Soviet Ukraine to the central government in Moscow rather than allowing the ethnically Ukrainian workers and peasants to freely manage their own domestic affairs through an independent state and communist party.<sup>186</sup> The problem, according to Shakhrai and Mazlakh, stemmed from the wholly insufficient implementation, in practice, of Lenin's cardinal principle of the "right of nations to self-determination," which, they emphasized, entitled nations to full secession from Russia.<sup>187</sup> Shakhrai and Mazlakh argued that Ukraine, from the time of the Central Rada's formation in March of 1917 to the creation of Pavlo Skoropads'kyi's Hetmanate in April of 1918 and the ongoing activity of the Directory led by

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<sup>185</sup> Martin, "An Affirmative Action Empire," 70-72.

<sup>186</sup> Vasyl' Shakhrai and Serhii Mazlakh, *Do khvyli. Shcho diyet'sia na Ukraini i z Ukrainoiu* (Saratov: 1919), 99-101.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 33-35.

Volodymyr Vynnychenko, had clearly become a completely sovereign state and a unified economic territory whose native Ukrainian working classes now strove to create their own form of Ukrainian Soviet sovereignty in a close and voluntary union with “Russia.”<sup>188</sup>

For Shakhrai and Mazlakh, the “internationalism” of the Ekaterinoslav Bolsheviks, who allegedly ran roughshod over “national self-determination” in a crude and forceful attempt to restore the unity of the old Russian Empire by cobbling together its former parts, fundamentally contradicted the real tendency of capitalist and socialist development to produce crystallized, socioeconomically modern nations while simultaneously integrating the global economy in the form of a fraternal patchwork of independent countries.<sup>189</sup> The stakes of the situation in Ukraine, Shakhrai and Mazlakh wrote, were especially great because the rising Soviet system, with its roots in Leninism, had yet to prove its genuine superiority over the bankrupt facade of Wilsonian internationalism that the victorious Americans had draped over their monstrous war machine as they set out to conquer the world for capitalist imperialism in 1917.<sup>190</sup> Leaving the last word to Lenin, Shakhrai and Mazlakh stressed that the Bolsheviks faced the unavoidable choice between creating an independent Ukraine within a voluntary union of Soviet nations and resurrecting the rotten colony of “Southern Russia” as part of a new Russian Empire in socialist garb.<sup>191</sup> While Shakhrai perished in battle against the Whites later on in 1919, Mazlakh remained a Bolshevik and lived to participate in the Ukrainization

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 25-30.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 41-43.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 4-5; 100-101.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 100-101.

campaigns of Mykola Skrypnyk, a Kyiv Bolshevik and rival of the Ekaterinoslav group, during the 1920s.<sup>192</sup>

Importantly, though, the Soviet forms of Ukrainian statehood formalized in 1922 were insufficient for another group of Ukrainian leftists associated with Vynnychenko who, after serving in the Central Rada and the Directorate, left the Ukrainian Social Democratic Labor Party in 1920 and formed the Ukrainian Communist Party, which opposed the Bolsheviks for allegedly imposing a renewed Russian imperialism upon an occupied Ukraine until its disbandment by the Communist International in 1925.<sup>193</sup> Meanwhile, while the revolutionary campaign towards the “West” was decisively reversed at Warsaw in August of 1920, it continued by other means following the formal demarcation of the Polish-Soviet border in March of 1921, which did little to prevent the Bolsheviks in neighboring Belarus and Ukraine from funding and arming communist movements in Poland’s eastern borderlands. Although Piłsudski had found local allies in Symon Petliura and Stanisław Bułak-Bałachowicz on the battlefield in 1920, the Polish government’s reach in western Belarus and western Ukraine was generally weak, allowing pro-Soviet forces, in many rural areas with weakly formed national identities and a paucity of more moderate indigenous political parties, to win the support of peasants and prepare for uprisings and revolutions that would unite Poland’s borderlands with the Soviet Union.<sup>194</sup>

As the Red Army pressed westward towards Warsaw and L’viv in early August of 1920, the Second Congress of the Komintern resolved that Western Europe’s capitalist strongholds could be effectively destabilized and plunged into proletarian

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<sup>192</sup> James Earnest Mace, *Communism and the Dilemmas of National Liberation: National Communism in Soviet Ukraine, 1918-1933* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, 1983), 43-45.

<sup>193</sup> See Chapter Three for coverage of the UKP.

<sup>194</sup> See Chapter Five on cross-border communist movements after 1921.



revolution if the Bolsheviks and their allies succeeded in fomenting large-scale unrest throughout their economically vital colonial possessions in Asia and Africa.<sup>195</sup> This scenario had already taken shape in the pages of *Zhizn' natsional'nostei* since late 1918 and early 1919, when Tatar Bolsheviks such as Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev and Mullanur Vakhitov had argued that the directest path to the overthrow of Western capitalism led through the “East,” specifically via the predominantly Turkic, Muslim territories of Tatarstan and Bashkiria, where the recent victory of Red Army units staffed by locals had proven that “Easterners” could liberate themselves from the yoke of capitalist imperialism.<sup>196</sup> According to Sultan-Galiev, Tatarstan was the most industrialized and proletarian of the predominantly Muslim parts of the former Russian Empire and therefore bore a unique historical mission to not only demolish the vestiges of Tsarism at home but also spread the socialist revolution abroad by creating communist institutions and armed formations that would campaign throughout the “East” and absorb freedom fighters of other nationalities.<sup>197</sup> Perhaps the truest incarnation of Sultan-Galiev’s vision to emerge during the civil wars was the Muslim Communist Organization (MCO) formed by him, Vakhitov, and the Turkish communist Mustafa Suphi, who claimed at the end of 1918 to have created a network encompassing some “10,000” local circles of ethnically non-Russian workers in “Turkestan, Bashkiria, Tatarstan, Kirgizia, and the North Caucasus” along with emigres from “Turkey, Persia, Azerbaijan, Bukhara, and Georgia.” The MCO’s goal, Suphi claimed, was to strive for a close union between the toilers of the colonial “East” and the militant workers of the “West,” an objective, Sultan-Galiev later commented,

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<sup>195</sup> “Lenin’s Preliminary Draft Theses on the National and Colonial Questions,” in *Selected Works, Volume III* (Moscow: 1970), 432-437.

<sup>196</sup> *Zhizn' natsional'nostei* 9 (1918); 8 (1919).

<sup>197</sup> See Chapter Three for an examination of Sultan-Galiev’s ideas.

that had already been achieved within the expanding Soviet space through the Bolshevik alliance of Russian proletarians with formerly “colonized” subjects of the Tsar.<sup>198</sup> Other “Eastern” Bolsheviks, such as his Azeri comrade Sultan Majid Afandiev, made the case that other Soviet territories such as Turkestan could provide geographical access to Iran and South Asia, while still others wrote that the Buddhists of the former Russian Empire, ostensibly the Kalmyks, Tuvans, and Buriats, could forge their own path southward through Mongolia.<sup>199</sup>

The logic of Sultan-Galiev’s interpretation of Tatarstan’s world-historic mission overlapped considerably with the intellectual underpinnings of what Terry Martin describes as the post-1922 Soviet “Piedmont principle,” which envisioned borderland republics such as Ukraine and Belarus as territories that could exploit cross-border ethnic ties with minorities in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Romania in the interest of spreading Soviet influence abroad. While the exercise of the “Piedmont principle” between 1922 and 1939 focused more on covert infiltration and support for underground communist movements across established frontiers, the “mobilization of ethnicity” in Sultan-Galiev’s civil war heyday, to use von Hagen’s term, took place in a much more chaotic and fluid environment in which the frontiers of Soviet power were still unbound by any international agreements and the embattled imperial Russian space appeared as a springboard and staging ground for expansive ideas of world revolution. In contrast to later years, the Komintern of 1919 to 1922 often considered it possible that “Eastern” peasants, though allegedly lacking a strong class consciousness, could nevertheless be organized into soviets and led by the small yet radicalized proletarian elements in their countries, following a route to socialist

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<sup>198</sup> *Zhizn’ natsional’nostei* 8 (1919).

<sup>199</sup> *Zhizn’ natsional’nostei* 33, 41 (1919).

development that bypassed “Western” capitalism and remade colonial societies on the model of places such as Tatarstan.<sup>200</sup> Importantly, the creation of the Soviet Union in late 1922 as a state with formalized external frontiers and binding peace agreements meant that the international revolutionary frontier in both the “West” and the “East” was no longer as open as it had been to the kind of struggle waged by Sultan-Galiev, whose downfall and ejection from the Party in 1923 stemmed considerably from his frustration with the allegedly insufficient dedication of senior Bolsheviks to the anticolonial cause and the incorporation of Tatarstan into the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic as a mere autonomous republic, and not a full union republic. Demobilizing ethnicity, to build on von Hagen’s formulation, also proved controversial in the early Soviet Union following the civil wars, and Sultan-Galiev, though by far in the minority among non-Russian Bolsheviks, was not entirely alone when he criticized the post-1922 federal system as a return to the centralization and imperialism of the Tsarist order.<sup>201</sup>

### **“Federation” or “empire”? Pilsudski’s policies in East-Central Europe**

At the time of his arrest and imprisonment in the German Empire in the summer of 1917, Józef Piłsudski had been agitating for the dismemberment of the Russian Empire along national lines at a time in which relatively optimistic plans for the creation of a post-Tsarist federation of autonomous peoples still outweighed separatist tendencies, which had generally been the case ever since the inception of the Polish Socialist Party in 1892. For the ethnically and ideologically diverse group of activists, intellectuals, and revolutionaries who gathered in Kyiv in September of 1917 at the invitation of the Ukrainian Central Rada, the dynamic, mobilizing power of modern

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<sup>200</sup> “Lenin’s Preliminary Draft Theses,” 436-437; Pantsov, *The Bolsheviks*, 42.

<sup>201</sup> Sultan-Galiev’s disillusionment with the Bolsheviks after 1922 is discussed in Chapter Three.

nationalism and class politics would reinvigorate and restructure an excessively centralized Russia rather than splintering or destroying it. Only the representatives of the PPS, at the time, insisted otherwise, arguing that total independence from Russia alone could guarantee an unimpeded path to national development for Ukraine, making federalism, at best, a transitional structure. Yet by the time that Piłsudski, with the mandate of the Western Allies, emerged from imprisonment in the Magdeburg Fortress in November of 1918 to head the government and military of the embryonic Second Polish Republic, the situation in the Russian borderlands had shifted significantly and secession no longer represented a marginal position. The Ukrainian Social Democrats and Socialist Revolutionaries, the Georgian Social Democrats, and the Azeri Müsavat Party, along with most of the other participants at the Kyiv conference, had declared the separation of their autonomous authorities from Russia in the first half of 1918, largely in response to the coercive pressure of the Bolsheviks and the Whites along with the decline and emigration of Chernov's Socialist Revolutionaries, who had been sympathetic interlocutors to non-Russian proponents of federation since the February Revolution.

Secession, however, meant not only leaving Russia but also searching for new, positive frameworks within which to make sense of nationality and class, pursuits that led borderland governments into exile as they sought recognition for their breakaway states in Europe and North America. In search of international legitimacy, delegations from the borderlands appealed to the Western Allies at Versailles in 1919 to 1920 before lobbying the League of Nations, efforts that were undermined from the start by the tendency of British, French, and American leaders, including Woodrow Wilson, to prefer the restoration of a Russian Provisional Government that would retain its

prewar borders.<sup>202</sup> The major exceptions to this principle concerned only the westernmost territories such as Poland, which, for Wilson, would be restricted to the same ethnographically defined space that L'vov and his colleagues had sketched out in their "Proclamation to the Poles" in late March of 1917, a principle that Piłsudski, by early 1919, openly refused to accept as his forces pressed eastward to enforce an aggressive policy of containment and, ideally, rollback against both Denikin's White forces in Ukraine and the advancing Red Army, a possibility that Georges Clemenceau came to favor in his advocacy for the creation of a *cordon sanitaire* with which to halt the Bolsheviks.

Piłsudski, for the time being, commanded one of the largest such bulwarks against the internationalization of the October Revolution between the Baltic and Black Seas, a position that brought displaced nationalists to Poland, if only for the sake of traveling further to destinations such as Czechoslovakia, Austria, Germany, and France. Even before Poland's formal emergence in November, close allies of Piłsudski, such as Tytus Filipowicz and Leon Wasilewski, had spent 1918 forming official ties with newly independent nation-states such as Finland and Georgia, continuing these diplomatic efforts throughout the Polish-Soviet War.<sup>203</sup> Meanwhile, members of Poland's Lipka Tatar community mobilized their ties to other Turkic and Muslim national leaders across the imperial Russian space, most notably in Crimea, Azerbaijan, and the Volga region. Traditionally employed as cavalymen in the times of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Lipka Tatar elites were dispersed across the Russian Empire in the course of the nineteenth century and had officially participated

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<sup>202</sup> See Chapter Four for a brief discussion of these campaigns.

<sup>203</sup> For biographies of key organizers of Prometheism, see Charaszkiewicz, "Referat," in *Dokumenty*, 68-76.

in all-Russian Islamic organizations since the Revolution of 1905.<sup>204</sup> Maciej-bey Sulkiewicz, a high-ranking Lipka Tatar soldier in the Russian imperial army, even served as the Prime Minister of the Crimean People's Republic in 1918 before relocating to Azerbaijan, where he headed the military effort against the Red Army until his execution by the Bolsheviks in 1920.<sup>205</sup> Despite Sulkiewicz's death, Aleksander Achmatowicz, another prominent Lipka Tatar, worked with the Crimean Tatar activist Jafar Seydamet to gain international recognition for the Crimean People's Republic, even pushing for the establishment of a Polish "protectorate" over the peninsula under the aegis of the recently formed League of Nations.<sup>206</sup> While these mobile Lipka Tatar intermediaries could not secure the independence of the borderland nation-states with which they had formed a tangle of personal and political connections, they continued their service to the Promethean cause in the interwar period, hosting anti-Soviet emigres from across Eurasia and publishing multilingual journals that drew contributions from other members of the movement, most notably Seydamet and Abdullah Zihni from Crimea and Ayas Ishaki from the Volga region.<sup>207</sup> In the case of the Lipka Tatars, transnational diasporic networks forged within the Russian Empire provided the connections between leading Prometheans and interwar Poland, providing what Włodzimierz Bączkowski described as a gateway to the world of the Eurasian steppe.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> Leon Najman Mirza Kryczyński, "Tatarzy polscy a Wschód muzułmański," in *Rocznik Tatarski* 2 (1935); 75-80.

<sup>205</sup> Arslan-Bej, "Generał Maciej Sulkiewicz (1865-1920)," in *Rocznik Tatarski* 1 (1932); 247-255.

<sup>206</sup> "List Dżafera Sejdameta do Min. Achmatowicza," in *Rocznik Tatarski* 1 (1932); 286-287.

<sup>207</sup> Ali Miśkiewicz, "Tatarzy łącznikiem Polski z muzułmańskim Wschodem," in *Tatarzy polscy 1918-1939* (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1990), 139-147.

<sup>208</sup> Włodzimierz Bączkowski, "Wschód a Polska," in *Wschód* 2-4 (1934), 17-18.

According to Charaszkiewicz, these engagements with the borderlands during the Russian civil wars helped to establish interwar Poland as a popular destination for anti-Soviet emigres and set precedents for the Promethean movement, including many of the personal relationships that brought exiles from across Eurasia to Warsaw and Wilno.<sup>209</sup> The practice of anti-Soviet containment, however, proved to be much more laden with contradictions and complications in the former eastern territories of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, where Piłsudski actually commanded boots on the ground and, through the end of 1920, played a direct role in molding the geopolitical architecture and economic landscape of the region. Writing to Ignacy Jan Paderewski in 1919, Piłsudski explicitly declared himself to be in favor of a “federation” encompassing the old Commonwealth, and there are few legitimate reasons, as Jochen Böehler argues, to doubt that his desires for cooperation among Poles, Lithuanians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians were insincere or cynical.<sup>210</sup> Yet, Böehler also points out that Piłsudski was perfectly capable of calculated pragmatism in the pursuit of his overarching goals, which became abundantly clear as he subordinated both the idea of national independence within ethnic borders and the cause of social revolution, or at least reform, to the creation of geopolitical structures and international agreements that served Polish strategic goals and, in the long run, would have overwhelmingly benefited Poland.<sup>211</sup> Indeed, perhaps the greatest popular support for Warsaw’s hegemony over Belarus and Ukraine came from local Polish landowners and capitalists whose wealth Piłsudski’s forces saved, at least temporarily, from

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<sup>209</sup> Charaszkiewicz, “Referat,” 65-67.

<sup>210</sup> “Letter from J. Piłsudski to I. Paderewski concerning the Eastern policy of Poland,” in *Ukraine and Poland in documents, 1918-1922*, volume 1, ed. Taras Hunczak (New York: Shevchenko Scientific Society, 1983), 140-145; Jochen Böehler, *Civil War in Central Europe, 1918-1921: The Reconstruction of Poland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 93.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

expropriation by radicalized peasants and, later on, the Red Army. While Piłsudski claimed to be pursuing a voluntary federation of equal nations against the threat of renewed Russian domination, many of his Lithuanian and Ukrainian rivals accused him of engaging in a similarly dangerous form of “Polish imperialism.” Piłsudski’s National Democratic foes in Warsaw, meanwhile, charged him with overextending the country’s resources and attempting to establish reciprocal relations with non-Polish “tribes” incapable of leading a functional national existence.<sup>212</sup>

While the primary objective of Piłsudski’s eastern policy was to prevent a powerful Russian or Soviet state from reemerging out of the chaos of the civil wars, he confronted Ukrainian and Lithuanian nationalists on the battlefield before directly engaging with the Red Army in 1919 to 1920. When Piłsudski assumed power in November of 1918, the first foreign enemies with which Polish armies clashed were the forces of the West Ukrainian People’s Republic (ZUNR), whose leaders unsuccessfully attempted to claim L’viv as their national capital amid the breakup of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. As the outmatched troops of the Ukrainian People’s Republic (UNR), under Symon Petliura, struggled against the Red Army and the Whites further east, Polish divisions had marched across the width of Galicia, from the San River to the Zbruch, by the summer of 1919.<sup>213</sup> The armed units of the ZUNR, which included the Sich Riflemen and other formations that had fought alongside Austrian armies in the First World War, were devastated in the war with Poland,

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<sup>212</sup> “Memorial of Dr. Mykhailo Lozynskyi to Joseph Piłsudski concerning the question of Eastern Galicia and Ukrainian-Polish relations,” in *Ukraine and Poland*, volume 1, 11-19;

Michał Römer, “Answer to Józef Piłsudski,” in *Discourses of Collective Identity in Central and Southeast Europe 1770–1945: Texts and Commentaries, volume III/1*, ed. Ahmet Ersoy, Maciej Górny, and Vangelis Kechriotis, trans. Zuzanna Ładyga (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2015), 376-381; Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations*, 58-59.

<sup>213</sup> Palij, “The Ukrainian-Polish War in Galicia and Its Aftermath,” in *The Ukrainian-Polish Defensive Alliance*, 48-58.



leaving the UNR to fend for itself as the Red Army crossed the Dnipro River. By the close of 1919, Petliura faced the same fate as his contemporaries in the ZUNR, pressed against the Zbruch and forced to flee across the Polish border, where his displaced government began to negotiate the terms of a military and political alliance with Piłsudski.<sup>214</sup> The Polish encounter with Lithuanian forces in the spring of 1919, meanwhile, was more sporadic and less intense, consisting primarily of a pro-Polish uprising in Sejny, near Suwałki, and a reportedly popular, bloodless takeover of Vilnius (Wilno).<sup>215</sup> For the time being, Polish troops did not press further north or west into more ethnically Lithuanian regions, which would have undoubtedly provoked a bloodier conflict. In the late summer of 1919, Minsk fell to Polish rule, though this time Piłsudski's main opponent was the Red Army, which had previously taken the city from the short-lived Belarusian People's Republic.<sup>216</sup>

By the early spring of 1919, Polish forces and the Red Army had already seen their first major clashes, and the contours of a wider clash for the western borderlands emerged as the year progressed and Piłsudski extended his still fragile reach over the murky swampland and forests of central Belarus. In response to the growth of the territory under Poland's nominal control, the military had declared the creation of a Civil Administration of the Eastern Lands (ZCZW) in February, seeking to present the local, mostly non-Polish population with a more palatable manifestation of Polish authority rather than placing them directly under the control of the armed forces.<sup>217</sup> It was also around this time, on 22 April 1919, that Piłsudski appeared in Wilno to issue

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 80-91.

<sup>215</sup> Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations*, 62.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., 61; 64.

<sup>217</sup> The most complete work on the ZCZW is Joanna Gierowska-Kałuża, *Zarząd Cywilny Ziemi Wschodnich: (19 lutego 1919 - 9 września 1920)* (Warszawa: Neriton, 2003).

his “Address to the Inhabitants of the Former Grand Duchy of Lithuania,” a brief speech that promised its intended audience the right to “resolve your internal national and religious issues as you like, without any force from Poland’s side” while declaring the end of “national repression” and a coming election based on universal suffrage.<sup>218</sup> While Piłsudski did not clearly articulate the kind of relationship that would obtain between Poland and the old Grand Duchy in the future, his desire to restore “historic Lithuania” within some kind of political union had long since been made clear. For the time being, the ZCZW presided over the former territory of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, with the exception of the central and western parts of “ethnographic Lithuania,” forming a network of Belarusian-language schools that catered to what was likely the largest ethnolinguistic community under its rule.<sup>219</sup>

Piłsudski’s first substantive attempt at drawing up the internal boundaries of a resurrected “historic Lithuania” on a federal basis came only in the autumn of 1920, by which point the struggle against the Red Army had mostly stabilized and peace negotiations were underway. While Poland’s eastern border had yet to be formally drawn, most of Belarus, including Minsk, remained under Polish rule, along with Wilno and its heavily Polish countryside. Despite the successes of Lithuanian nationalists in maintaining their nascent nation-state centered on Kaunas, Piłsudski, for the time being, held the most important cities of the former Grand Duchy and could begin to think more specifically about the shape of “historic Lithuania.” The solution, until most of Belarus joined the Soviet Union under the Peace of Riga in 1921, was to follow Limanowski’s Swiss-based model of three “cantons,” one Polish

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<sup>218</sup> Piłsudski, “Odezwa do mieszkańców byłego Wielkiego Księstwa Litewskiego,” in *Pisma*, T. 5, 75-76.

<sup>219</sup> Marjan Świechowski, “Obecny stan szkolnictwa białoruskiego na Ziemiach Wschodnich,” *Sprawy narodowościowe* 1.1 (January and February 1927).

based in Wilno, another Lithuanian and centered on Kaunas, and the third Belarusian, with its capital in Minsk. This vision, however, was undermined when Minsk was ceded to Soviet Belarus by the National Democrats, who rejected the idea of a distinct Belarusian nation, and the territory of the proposed Kaunas canton remained beyond Polish control. Only the canton organized around Wilno emerged in the form of a self-declared Republic of Central Lithuania, which was formed by Lucjan Żeligowski, a Polish military commander, on Piłsudski's orders until its incorporation into Poland in 1922. Representatives from the League of Nations, meanwhile, attempted to advance the idea of a federated Lithuania consisting of two cantons, one based in Kaunas and the other in Vilnius, that would enjoy the widest possible autonomy despite belonging to the same state. This proposition fell through, however, and Poland retained Wilno while remaining locked in a diplomatic cold war with Lithuania throughout the interwar period.<sup>220</sup>

In spite of Piłsudski's reputation as a proponent of "federalism," his endorsement of the sort of cantonal project devised by Limanowski only came towards the end of 1920, by which point Poland's war effort against the Red Army had been exhausted and the time to draw up international borders was dawning. During the military struggles in the east between November of 1918 and late 1920, Piłsudski had consistently left open the question of how the territories "liberated" by Poland would be organized, seeking the greatest possible gains and only advancing a more concrete cantonal program once his options for further expansion had been constrained. In this context, Piłsudski appears less as a principled "federalist" and more as the pragmatic pursuer of a general doctrine of containment against the Bolsheviks, making few binding promises to the "equals" who were supposed to join this multinational

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<sup>220</sup> Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations*, 61-65.

structure. Although Limanowski continued to support the idea of a Polish federation with Ukraine and the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania into 1921, his earlier argument that a union of cantons, in order to succeed, would have to be based on the shared consent of those involved proved to be accurate. Lithuanian nationalists refused to imagine the Kaunas-based region in a Polish-led structure, while the National Democrats had precluded the creation of a Minsk-based Belarusian canton because they opposed the incorporation of a large population of impoverished, rural East Slavs into what was supposed to become a unitary Poland.<sup>221</sup>

Just as importantly, Piłsudski had attempted to create a multinational state in which different groups, namely the Lithuanians and Belarusians, would have had to accept autonomous cantons rather than fully independent polities as their national structures, while Poles, as the likely overall beneficiaries of this arrangement, would have enjoyed both a canton centered on Wilno and a sovereign nation-state with its capital in Warsaw. While the Belarusian national movement was still weak in 1920 and malleable peasant loyalties could have been shaped in favor of such an arrangement, the better organized and more militant Lithuanian nationalists rejected Piłsudski's proposal as a veiled attempt at bringing all of Lithuania, both "ethnographic" and "historical," under Polish domination. The issue of Polish control over Wilno and the failure of Piłsudski to demonstrate the benefits of a renewed union between Poland and Lithuania would look like in practice ensured that Lithuanian nationalists, as well as self-described "Polish Lithuanians" such as Michał Römer, viewed the events of 1919 to 1920 as Polish violations of national self-determination and manifestations of imperialist designs to conquer non-Polish territories.<sup>222</sup> Perhaps

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<sup>221</sup> Ibid., 64-65.

<sup>222</sup> Römer, "Answer to Józef Piłsudski," 376-381.

the most important weakness of Piłsudski's plan was that it replicated Limanowski's vision from nearly two decades earlier without modifying it to meet the challenge of the growing salience of ethnic nationalism in Lithuania, something that Wasilewski already noted in 1901, or gain popular support from the Belarusian-speaking peasants who would have made up the majority of its population. While Piłsudski had spent much of his energy after the Revolution of 1905 on producing an updated, technically sound plan for the mobilization of a Polish uprising, he did not devote similar attention to devising a detailed federal model that could be implemented in the event of a Russian collapse.

In Piłsudski's own imagination, the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania constituted a historically coherent space transcending national differences as well as a pro-Polish bulwark that would serve as the lynchpin in an alliance of states limiting Russian influences in the western borderlands. The decisive confrontation between Polish forces and the Red Army, however, unfolded further south of the Pryp'iat' River in Right-Bank Ukraine, where Piłsudski and Symon Petliura, the exiled leader of the UNR, launched a rapid and initially successful offensive that captured Kyiv by the beginning of May of 1920 before collapsing under a Red Army counterattack that reached Warsaw in mid-August. In 1919, Poland and the UNR had briefly been at war over segments of Volhynia, but Petliura, in what the leaders of the ZUNR considered a betrayal, sought an armistice with Piłsudski, regarding the Bolsheviks as the greater threat to Ukrainian statehood and eventually crossing the Zbruch as the Red Army covered the last remaining territories held by his government. Volodymyr Vynnychenko, a fellow Ukrainian Social Democrat and former leader of the UNR, had split from Petliura and gone into exile in Vienna in February of that year, criticizing the Bolsheviks as Russian "centralists" but ultimately advocating

alignment with the Soviet cause as the best path for the working masses and a lesser evil when compared with an alliance with “bourgeois” Poland.<sup>223</sup> Petliura, however, still had some depleted military formations at his disposal and received recognition from Piłsudski as the legitimate representative of Ukraine, seeking an agreement with Poland that would restore at least part of the Soviet-occupied area claimed by the UNR to his control.<sup>224</sup>

Rather than creating a “union of equals,” the resulting military convention and political alliance signed in Warsaw in late April of 1920 envisioned the creation of a formally independent UNR that would be home to only a minority of Europe’s ethnic Ukrainians and heavily dependent upon Poland, both economically and strategically. The lopsided Warsaw Agreement required Petliura to recognize all of East Galicia and sections of western Volhynia and Podolia as integral parts of Poland, as Wasilewski had desired in 1917, guaranteeing Polish support for the UNR’s territorial ambitions only up to the Dnipro River and the Left-Bank districts of Kyiv. All of the lands claimed by the ZUNR, in other words, became part of Poland, making roughly three million Ukrainians citizens of the Second Polish Republic who would theoretically enjoy the same “national-cultural” freedoms as Poles living in the UNR. In international relations, the UNR was formally prohibited from entering into alliances inimical to Poland’s security, though no similar provisions tying the hands of politicians in Warsaw were introduced, while Poland would be entitled to open trade agreements with Ukraine that, judging from the private correspondence of Polish elites, would have effectively made the UNR a colony of Poland. The urgent “agrarian question” in the UNR, meanwhile, was to be shelved for the time being, and

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<sup>223</sup> See Chapter 3 for Vynnychenko’s views on the Bolsheviks.

<sup>224</sup> Paliy, *The Ukrainian-Polish Defensive Alliance*, 80-91.

the fate of Polish landowners on the Ukrainian side of the border would be decided with the involvement of the Polish government.<sup>225</sup>

The leaders of Petliura's UNR, including Mykola Porsh' and his fellow exiles in Western Europe, understood that an alliance with Poland would be unequal, yet they resolved in their private discussions that it would be the best option for saving Ukrainian sovereignty in a situation with rapidly diminishing opportunities, even if significant territorial losses could not be avoided. In August of 1919, well before the conclusion of the Warsaw Agreement, Porsh' and his fellow ministers soberly accepted that the UNR faced a choice between Poland and Romania, rejecting the possibility of submitting to the Bolsheviks and declaring that radical socialism would only ruin Ukraine's already devastated economy while alienating the capitalist powers that, for better or worse, offered the only realistic chances for reconstruction. The possibility of uniting all of Europe's ethnographically Ukrainian lands into a single polity, though desirable, was not an option in the short run, meaning that the UNR would have to swallow the bitter pill of renouncing territories that it had previously claimed in exchange for a promise of survival within some sort of "federation" with a neighboring country.<sup>226</sup> In 1917 to 1918, the Ukrainian Central Rada had laid claim to all of "ethnographic Ukraine" and experimented with the socialization of agrarian property, measures that had provoked condemnation from Polish landowners in the Right Bank. Even the members of the PPS and the progressive Polish Democratic Center (PCD) who belonged to the Rada denounced the land reform bill in the autumn

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<sup>225</sup> An illustrative example is "Confidential statement of the PCD (Polska Centrala Demokratyczna) in Ukraine concerning Polish-Ukrainian relations," in *Ukraine and Poland*, volume 1, 40-41.

<sup>226</sup> "Minutes of the Conference, Envoys, and Chiefs of the Diplomatic Missions of the Ukrainian People's Republic in Karlsbad," in *Ukraine and Poland*, volume 1, 245-320.

of 1917, compelling Vynnychenko to partially retract it even though Ukrainian peasants had started expropriating Polish estates back in the spring of 1917.<sup>227</sup>

Those in Piłsudski's camp, meanwhile, were cognizant of their dominant position and seldom held back in their letters and conversations when it came to talking about Polish "hegemony," "colonization," and "penetration" in Ukraine as a desirable outcome in the future relationship with the UNR. While Piłsudski wrote to Paderewski that the final goal of a military union with Petliura should be a Polish-Ukrainian "federation," he and his negotiators had no qualms about rejecting the idea of an "ethnographic Ukraine," preferring instead to frame the UNR's territorial extents in reference to the Dnipro, the former southeastern frontier of the Commonwealth in 1772, and the Zbruch, Poland's own strategically necessary but ethnographically unjustified border. This choice of historical precedent was also militarily and politically expedient, since promising Petliura a foothold in the Left Bank would have inevitably overstretched the Polish war effort against the Bolsheviks and entangle Poland in the fate of a territory to which it had few legitimate claims. The guarantees of Poland's economic dominance in the UNR, meanwhile, protected the remaining property of Polish landowners and capitalists in the Right Bank, who had occupied a dominant place in the region's lucrative but exploitative sugar beet industry prior to 1917. Even Karol Waligórski, one of the leaders of the PCD, wrote messages to Warsaw insisting that Poland's right to "economic penetration" and "influence" in Ukraine be prioritized, meaning, most likely, that Ukraine's agrarian resources would remain in Polish hands, providing raw materials to Poland while the rest of the UNR absorbed finished products and ethnically Polish colonists. Poland, in other words, would be both the primary sponsor and chief beneficiary of Ukraine's

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<sup>227</sup> "Protest przeciw konfiskacie ziemi polskiej na Rusi," *Ojczyzna i Postęp* 88 (January 1918); 22-24.



economic reconstruction, holding the Right Bank as a colony in everything but name. Waligórski coldly added that Poland, in any case, should not overextend itself in the southeast if the Ukrainians proved incapable of maintaining their statehood and look after its own strategic and economic interests.<sup>228</sup>

The Treaty of Warsaw, in any case, was not officially billed as a “federation,” yet it was clear that Piłsudski and his allies desired such an arrangement if their gamble on Petliura paid off. To a much greater extent than he had done in “historic Lithuania,” Piłsudski trampled the principle of national self-determination and prioritized Poland’s strategic and economic interests at the expense of the UNR, seeking to both roll back the Red Army and lay the foundations for Polish hegemony in the southeast. Both Vynnychenko’s Ukrainian Communist Party (UKP) and prominent Galician Ukrainians such as Mykhailo Lozyns’kyi accused Poland of “imperialism,” though Petliura, Porsh’, and the other leaders of the UNR appear to have accepted that their pact with Piłsudski was being signed from a position of military and political weakness. Even if the Polish-Ukrainian offensive into the Right Bank had succeeded in driving back the Red Army and a “federation” had been formally consolidated, the distribution of power within the resulting multinational polity would have been more imperial than federal, and the UNR would play the role of a captive market and junior partner to a much stronger Poland. In the case of his dealings with Ukraine, Piłsudski demonstrated the capaciousness and flexibility of “federation” as a vehicle for Polish interests in the east and the advancement of his wider anti-Soviet strategy of containment, both of which took priority over ensuring any sort of meaningful parity or even equity between Poland and the UNR.

### **Undone from within: the National Democrats and Piłsudski’s downfall**

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<sup>228</sup> “Confidential statement,” 40.

Despite its auspicious beginnings, the Polish-Ukrainian offensive into the Right Bank collapsed under a counterattack by the Red Army, which, by the beginning of August, brought Soviet troops to the outskirts of Warsaw and L'viv. While Piłsudski managed to reverse these losses and break back into central Belarus and Right-Bank Ukraine by the end of September, his increasingly costly “adventures” in the east came under sharper and more united scrutiny from Poland’s Legislative *Sejm*, whose right-wing Popular-National Union (ZL-N) forged a dominant coalition with center-right agrarian populists from the Polish People’s Party with the goal of ending the war with the Bolsheviks. Roman Dmowski, whose National Democrats formed a leading part of the ZL-N, had opposed Piłsudski’s anti-Russian and later anti-Soviet ambitions even before an independent Poland emerged in 1918, considering Germany, with its expanding military, vibrant economy, and determined quest for eastern *Lebensraum*, to constitute the most serious threat to the survival of Polish nationhood. In the unending and relentless struggle among nations for resources, territory, and power, Dmowski chose an expedient program of alignment with Russia, which he considered to be weak and backward in spite of its size, writing that the Tsarist system was incapable of systemically denationalizing Poles in the way that Germany could. Clashing for the support of the working masses and joining opposing alliances in the First World War, Dmowski and Piłsudski continued their “duel” once Poland became independent, struggling to advance their competing visions of the country’s borders and its place within a reconfigured Europe.

While the ZL-N’s ethnically Polish support base in the central and western districts delivered a plurality of the mandates in the legislature in early 1919, Piłsudski, in practice, held the reins of the military and state as long as he could score victories in the east. The *Sejm* even issued a congratulatory message to him on the

occasion of the occupation of Kyiv in May of 1920, yet this cordial tone soon evaporated as the Red Army came dangerously close to entering Warsaw only three months later. By this point, the ZL-N had gained credence at Piłsudski's expense and was able to consolidate a stronger, more determined movement to curtail the powers of the Head of State and end the war with the Bolsheviks so that the more important contest with Germany for control over Upper Silesia, Pomerania, and East Prussia could be pursued. While a formal treaty would not be concluded until the spring of 1921, Polish hostilities with Soviet forces died down under a series of ceasefires starting in the autumn of 1920, forcing Petliura and Piłsudski's main Belarusian ally, Stanisław Bulak-Bałachowicz, to abandon their armed struggles for independence and continue their work in exile. If the leaders of "ethnographic Lithuania" had resisted the restoration of "historic Lithuania" by Piłsudski, then it was the National Democratic politicians chosen by "ethnographic Poland" who played a crucial part in halting the continuation of the war for Ukraine in 1920.<sup>229</sup>

The Polish-Soviet peace agreement signed in Riga in March of 1921 reflected the geopolitical ideas of the National Democrats, particularly those of Stanisław Grabski, an economist by training who sought to ensure that Poland's eastern frontiers would be as limited as possible to majority-Polish territories. Any non-Poles left under Warsaw's authority, in Grabski's vision, would have to be "Polonized" in language, culture, and national consciousness, specifically through the encouragement of ethnic Polish colonization in the borderlands and the prioritization of the needs of the "Polish nation" by the government and the educational system. Grabski officially branded his approach to "Polonization" as a "policy of strength without force," emphasizing that Ukrainians and Belarusians would not be denationalized at gunpoint

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<sup>229</sup> Jerzy Borzęcki, *The Soviet-Polish Peace of 1921 and the Creation of Interwar Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 141-160.

but, instead, exposed to the superiority of Polish culture and “civilization,” which would eventually win even the most backward East Slavic peasant for Warsaw. While Grabski accepted the need for provincial and local self-rule, he firmly rejected a “federal” model for Poland and stressed the importance of the unity of the state, which could not afford to make any concessions to non-Poles that might lay the groundwork for secession in the future. With this in mind, Grabski and his fellow delegates opted for a less extensive eastern frontier than what their Soviet counterparts would have been willing to recognize, believing it best to avoid incorporating excessive non-Polish elements into the country. Even so, at least a full third of interwar Poland’s population consisted of non-Poles, though Grabski got his way after the demographic devastation and geopolitical chaos of the Second World War, when he worked to ensure that the new state that would officially become the Polish People’s Republic in 1952 would be as ethnically homogeneous as possible.<sup>230</sup>

If the National Democratic vision of Poland’s eastern borders was decidedly not “federalist,” it also was not truly “ethnic” either. In 1917, while courting the support of the Western Allies, Dmowski had outlined his territorial visions for a future Poland in a memorandum to Lord Balfour, calling for Polish control over much of Lithuania, the better part of Belarus, and significant portions of Right-Bank Ukraine, believing that such an arrangement would not excessively burden the country with minority populations. In drawing up these frontiers, however, Dmowski maintained that the real boundaries of Poland’s “civilization” were the Dvina and Dnipro Rivers, since Poles, despite their numerical weakness, constituted the most productive and

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<sup>230</sup> See Chapter 5 for a detailed discussion of Grabski’s vision.

advanced element in these otherwise impoverished and anarchic East Slavic lands.<sup>231</sup> Other National Democrats, such as Jan Ludwik Popławski, had laid claim to most of present-day Lithuania, Belarus, and Right-Bank Ukraine as spaces for Polish “civilizing work,” making clear that the resources of these territories should be marshaled for Poland’s benefit but still suggesting that a mutually beneficial *modus vivendi* could be struck with the local population.<sup>232</sup> Another harsh critic of the policy of “federation” was Joachim Stefan Bartoszewicz, a Warsaw-born activist who led the National Democrats in Kyiv after 1906 and envisioned Right-Bank Ukraine as a space for Polish colonization and expansion. Bartoszewicz attacked the “federal” model of Piłsudski not so much because it would overstretch Poland’s reach in the east, but due to the fact that it wrongly accorded some measure of political parity to Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Lithuanians, who did not constitute true “nations” on par with Poles. At the time of the Partitions, Bartoszewicz argued, Poland had already congealed into a coherent, unitary nation that transcended ethnic or “racial” differences, much like France, so a “federation” would mark a decisive historical reversal to before the time of the Union of Lublin. Bartoszewicz, in contrast to Grabski, believed that an ethnic Ukrainian could still be a true Pole in his national consciousness, adopting the model of *gente ruthenus, nationae polonus*. In any case, Bartoszewicz backed Dmowski’s territorial program and accused Piłsudski of advancing a hopelessly mistaken eastern policy, spending the interwar period strengthening the “Polish element” in the borderlands.<sup>233</sup> After prevailing at Riga, the National Democrats shifted focus to

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<sup>231</sup> Roman Dmowski, “Memorjał o terytorjum Państwa Polskiego, złożony sekretarzowi Stanu, Balfourowi, w Londynie w końcu marca 1917 r.,” in *Pisma, Tom IV: Polityka polska i odbudowanie państwa. Druga połowa*, volume 6 (Częstochowa: A. Gmachowski, 1937), 262-66.

<sup>232</sup> Ryszard Turzycki, “Partie polskie i opinia społeczna wobec kwestii ukraińskiej,” in *Kwestia ukraińska w Polsce w latach 1923-1929* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1989), 111-138.

<sup>233</sup> Joachim Stefan Bartoszewicz, *Walka o Polskę*, (Poznań: Nakład Sekretariatu Dzielnicy Związku Ludowo-Narodowego, 1920).

limiting the extensive executive powers that Piłsudski had enjoyed since 1918, creating a strong parliament and reducing presidential authority by 1922 while declaring a “government of the Polish majority” that aspired to Polonize the borderlands while targeting Jews as parasites to be excised from the social fabric of the Polish nation.

### **The origins of the Promethean-Bolshevik “cold war”**

In late November of 1920, Tadeusz Hołówko, one of Piłsudski’s close confidants and a leading operative in the Polish Military Organization, published an article reflecting upon what he saw as the grave strategic ramifications of the decision of the National Democratic-led government in Warsaw to arrange an armistice with the Bolsheviks one month earlier and prepare the groundwork for the peace talks in Riga.<sup>234</sup> The greatest blunder and betrayal bound up with this decision, Hołówko argued, was that the National Democrats had entered into bilateral negotiations with Moscow that deliberately excluded the Ukrainian and Belarusian governments that had been aligned with Piłsudski, a move that “abandoned” crucial allies such as Symon Petliura while inviting the Bolsheviks to extend their reach westward and annex lands that had belonged to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1772. Without friendly and “independent” allies in power in Ukraine and Belarus, Hołówko wrote, Poland’s federalist ambitions in the east were destined to founder, while the massively profitable flows of “sugar and grain” that could have routed towards Warsaw would now be shunted northward to rescue the residents of Moscow and Petrograd from starvation. In fact, Hołówko contended, the inclusion of Ukraine and Belarus in a Polish-led bloc, alongside Finland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, would have forced the Bolsheviks to pursue some form of integration into this multinational

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<sup>234</sup> Tadeusz Hołówko, “Skutki pokoju w Rydze,” *Przymierze* 1.16 (1920); 3-5.

structure, however grudgingly, in order to avoid the complete economic ruin that would inevitably accompany the loss of the western borderlands.<sup>235</sup>

With similar bitterness, Hołówko asserted that the Western Allies, in particular Britain and the United States, favored the continuing territorial integrity of prewar “Russia,” whether under White or Bolshevik rule, in the interest of dealing with a “united economic space” in northern Eurasia, likewise preferring the restoration of German influence over East-Central Europe to maintain the coherence of production across the fractious region. In this world of resurgent imperial hegemony, whether Russian, German, or British, Hołówko claimed that Poland’s greatest asset in light of its recent setbacks under the National Democrats lay in its embodiment of the historically dynamic and powerful struggle for the “liberation of nations from enslavement.” Hołówko insisted that those “nations granted an independent existence by the great European war,” and especially those that had either already “arisen upon the ruins of Russia” or continued to struggle under Bolshevik or White domination, would have to form a “common, united front” in order to prove “that they have matured to take on this independence,” adopting the principle of “all for one and one for all.” In order to be “truly independent states and not, in fact, playthings in the hands of their more powerful neighbors,” Hołówko claimed, Russia’s nascent successor states would have to cement a strong and lasting “alliance” (*przymierze*) in which Poland would play a leading part.<sup>236</sup>

While the National Democrats may have derailed the construction of a Polish-led federation encompassing Ukraine and Belarus in 1920 to 1921, Piłsudski and his allies nevertheless considered the Peace of Riga to represent a momentary ceasefire

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<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

that might temporarily delay, but not ultimately prevent, the continuing fragmentation of the former imperial Russian space into a patchwork of nation-states.<sup>237</sup> This idea found some of its earliest and most passionate articulations in the pages of *Przymierze* (*Alliance*), a journal founded in the wake of the Battle of Warsaw whose editors and contributors included seasoned veterans of the PPS and the POW, among them Hołówko, as well as intellectuals and activists who envisioned a distinct mission for Poland and the Poles in promoting cooperation among the newly created states between the Baltic, Black, and Caspian Seas.<sup>238</sup> Włodzimierz Wakar, a lawyer, economist, and one of *Przymierze*'s most prolific authors, succinctly captured the paper's prevailing mood when he argued that the talks at Riga constituted "not a solution, but an interlude in the Polish-Russian contest" that, in his view, would continue to play out across Ukraine and Belarus, where national movements had already shown their vigor and nearly achieved full statehood. For Wakar, the recent proliferation of nation-states across the map of Europe had derived much of its force from the intensification of underlying processes of political and social "democratization" in which the "popular strata" of multinational empires had grown increasingly restless and reinvented themselves as organic, voluntary communities of free and equal citizens. An authentic and lasting peace, Wakar concluded, could not be achieved until the elimination of nationally based oppression and the spread of a "democracy" premised upon the "participation and confidence of society" triumphed across the entire continent and especially in the Soviet borderlands.<sup>239</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> For the "cold war" paradigm, see Jan Jacek Bruski, *Between Prometheism and Realpolitik: Poland and Soviet Ukraine, 1921-1926* (Kraków, 2016).

<sup>238</sup> Marek Kornat, "U źródeł idei prometejskiej. Związek Zbliżenia Narodów Odrodzonych (1921-1923)," *Nowy Prometeusz* 2 (2012); 161-181.

<sup>239</sup> Wakar, "Nauka klęski," *Przymierze* 1.2 (1920); 2.



In Wakar's view, Poland's greatest chance of unmaking the Soviet system lay not in launching another armed campaign but in transforming its own borderlands into vibrant centers of nation-building for its Ukrainian and Belarusian citizens, specifically by providing these cross-border minorities with broad political and cultural freedoms as well as the right to territorial autonomy. While Wakar acknowledged the possibility that carving out spaces for Ukrainian self-rule might backfire against Warsaw by legitimizing separatist claims against Poland, he considered it to be much more probable and potentially rewarding that a pro-Polish Ukrainian movement would grow to exert a mobilizing influence upon the Ukrainians across the Soviet frontier, turning East Galicia and Volhynia into a "Piedmont" that would lead the way in the eventual unification of all Ukrainians within a single state.<sup>240</sup> The great error of Polish leaders during the struggle with the Red Army, Wakar reflected, had been to impose a harsh, top-down "occupation" upon Belarusians and Ukrainians rather than providing these populations with more "democratic" structures of "autonomy" (*samorząd*), a failure that had limited the popular appeal of the federalist project and prevented Poland from harnessing the full power of movements for national and social liberation against the Bolsheviks. While this misjudgment had already played its part in contributing to the unfavorable outcomes at Riga, Wakar believed, as of 1921, that Poland could still establish itself as an attractive haven for the nationalities partitioned between Warsaw and Moscow by abrogating the Polonizing policies of the National Democrats and devolving power to the minorities living within its borders, steps that would undermine the legitimacy

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<sup>240</sup> Idem., "Ugoda," *Przymierze* 36/37 (1921); 1-3.

of the Soviet government among its non-Russian peoples and reopen the possibility of a federation of independent nations between the Baltic and Black Seas.<sup>241</sup>

If Piłsudski and his camp had imagined in 1914 that the outbreak of a generalized European conflict would spark national uprisings against the Tsarist regime and shatter the Russian Empire, Wakar, Hołówko, and their contemporaries at *Przymierze* insisted that a post-1921 Poland could most effectively weaponize Ukrainian and Belarusian nationalism against the Soviet state by institutionalizing it at home, an approach that would theoretically exert a destabilizing influence across the border. The logic behind this strategy rested upon the sense that the Bolsheviks, in piecing back together most of the old Romanov realm, had also inherited the structural weaknesses of late Tsarism, namely an excessive reliance on repressive measures in attempting to control a diverse and increasingly fractious mosaic of peoples. In 1921, Bolesław Limanowski, an ardent proponent of federalism, bluntly compared the Bolsheviks to the Tsars, arguing that the Soviet regime relied purely upon coercive centralization and armed domination over its subjects, who had been denied the democratic, participatory reorganization of production that characterized “scientific socialism.”<sup>242</sup> Echoing what Piłsudski had written twenty years earlier about the developmental gap between Poland and “Russia proper,” Limanowski claimed that the few urban strongholds controlled by the Bolsheviks were surrounded in every direction by a vast, hostile peasantry that would resist the power of the party, while the small, ethnically Russian “semiproletariat” concentrated around Moscow fell far short of the massive labor force that would be essential to industrialize the

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<sup>241</sup> Ibid.

<sup>242</sup> Bolesław Limanowski, *Bolszewickie państwo w świetle nauki* (Warszawa: Księgarnia Robotnicza, 1921), 23-24.

impoverished country.<sup>243</sup> Besieged and exhausted, Limanowski anticipated that the Soviet system might soon collapse, releasing the non-Russian borderlands and mutating into an agrarian republic on the model of medieval Pskov or Novgorod that would pose few threats to Poland. Alternatively, however, Limanowski suggested that Bolshevik rule might very well continue to harden into an even more malignant incarnation of Muscovite despotism, making it all the more urgent for Poland to roll back the Bolsheviks and safeguard its sovereignty as a democratic republic.<sup>244</sup>

Hołówko, writing in 1922, sensed that the moment was ripe for the adoption of innovative nationalities policies that would integrate minority nationalists into the administrative architecture of the Polish state and turn the eastern borderlands into a staging ground for the overthrow of Bolshevik power in Ukraine and Belarus.<sup>245</sup> By his estimate, the Bolsheviks were embroiled in a state of internal crisis and faced the real danger of losing power, though the future regime that might replace them could very well prove to be a much stronger and stabler contender in the struggle to reorganize the lands between the Baltic and Black Seas.<sup>246</sup> The National Democrats and the shaky succession of center-right and right-wing governments that they led between 1921 and Piłsudski's coup in 1926, however, remained in charge of the levers of legislative and executive power to which Hołówko and his fellow federalists would have required comprehensive access to implement the thoroughgoing reconfiguration of Poland that they envisioned. In fact, a combination of worsening economic unrest and aggressive yet generally ineffective efforts by the National

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<sup>243</sup> Ibid., 15; 17-20.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>245</sup> Tadeusz Hołówko, *Kwestia narodowościowa w Polsce* (Warszawa: Nakład Księgarni Robotniczej, 1922), 33-44.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid., 17; 35.

Democrats to impose Polish cultural, demographic, and economic hegemony in the borderlands helped to realize an inverted version of Hołówko's project, inflaming Ukrainian and Belarusian grievances while preparing even more fertile ground for pro-Soviet communists who had infiltrated the villages of Volhynia and Polesie, with weapons and funding from Minsk and Kharkiv, on a scale that caused considerable alarm by 1928.<sup>247</sup> Hołówko, in any case, would certainly not have enjoyed free rein to transform Poland into an experimental federation under a hypothetical post-1921 government led by Piłsudski, who had demonstrated a commitment to pragmatism and the avoidance of excessive risks in his earlier dealings with Ukrainian and Belarusian nationalists and, after 1926, allowed only one fairly moderate venture in nationally based decentralization in the province of Volhynia under the administration of a close ally, Henryk Józewski.<sup>248</sup>

Lacking the means, if not the imagination, to forge a Ukrainian "Piedmont" within Poland's borders after the Peace of Riga, pro-Piłsudski federalists such as Hołówko still commanded influence within the Polish military intelligence corps as well as in the diplomatic service, where they turned their attention to weaving transnational networks that would bring together anti-Soviet exiles within a common institutional and ideological framework. At the beginning of 1921, *Przymierze* became the flagship paper of the freshly founded Union for Rapprochement among the Resurrected Nations (*Związek Zbliżenia Narodów Odrodzonych*, or ZZNO), an organization devoted to rallying the "Baltic and Pontic nations" behind a closely coordinated front that would be prepared to seize power from the Bolsheviks and guide the borderlands towards independence and integration in the allegedly likely

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<sup>247</sup> See Chapter Five.

<sup>248</sup> Timothy Snyder, *Sketches from a Secret War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

event of a Soviet collapse.<sup>249</sup> Hołówko emphasized that the ZZNO, though primarily directed against the Bolsheviks, represented a broadly anti-imperialist endeavor that sought to prevent the major European powers responsible for the First World War from exploiting the smaller, embryonic countries between the Baltic and Black Seas, which, he contended, should unite and collaborate both culturally and economically to achieve regional self-sufficiency.<sup>250</sup> The ZZNO's founders included experienced international intermediaries such as Stanisław Stempowski, a socialist of noble descent from Podolia who had served in Petliura's government in 1920, and Bohdan Kutylowski, one of Piłsudski's emissaries to Ukraine at the height of the Kyiv Offensive, providing a degree of continuity across the rupture of 1921.<sup>251</sup> By the time of its demise in the wake of Piłsudski's resignation from the Polish General Staff in 1923, the ZZNO's web of foreign contacts included not only Ukrainians and Belarusians who had backed Piłsudski in 1920 but also political and military elites from the Caucasus, particularly members of Georgia's Menshevik government who fled abroad when the Red Army invaded the country in 1921. Beyond Poland's borders, consular officers such as Roman Knoll, who had served as one of Piłsudski's representatives in Moscow after 1918 before being stationed to Ankara in 1924, enjoyed limited latitude in pursuing loose, informal relationships with local exile colonies.<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> *Przymierze*, 2.3 (1921); 1.

<sup>250</sup> Hołówko, "Nowe życie," *Przymierze* 2.3 (1921); 3-4.

<sup>251</sup> Ewa Szczepkowska, "Relacje polsko-ukraińskie na łamach tygodnika „Przymierze” ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem publicystyki Joachima Wołoszynowskiego,” *Media – Kultura – Komunikacja Społeczna* 9 (2013); 99-113.

<sup>252</sup> Henryk Bartoszewicz, "Romana Knolla oceny przeszłości i wizje przyszłości," *Dzieje najnowsze* 48.4 (2016); 65-88; Charaszkiwicz, "Referat," 44-50.

After Piłsudski's return to power in May of 1926, the dearth of material resources and state backing that had plagued his comrades since 1921, and especially 1923, was significantly alleviated, with the newly proclaimed Promethean movement (*ruch prometejski*) developing a much more extensive Eurasian network of journals, institutions, and espionage and propaganda operations that attracted exiles from nearly every borderland region of the Soviet Union by the early 1930s.<sup>253</sup> Yet while improved funding and covert support from the authorities in Warsaw broadened Prometheism's horizons, the movement's underlying goal of instrumentalizing exile communities, and anti-Soviet nationalism more broadly, in the service of Poland's geopolitical interests remained as elusive and complicated in practice as it had been before 1926. While the idea of an anti-Soviet internationalism appealed to a wide ecology of exile groupings, it was generally the Promethean movement, centered as it may have been at the Eastern Institute and the military intelligence headquarters in Warsaw, that ultimately had to adapt to the contours of emigre politics, whose intellectual diversity and geographical diffusion often frustrated Polish elites in their enduring pursuit of a tightly regimented weapon to employ in their bid to depose the Bolsheviks. Non-Polish exiles indeed spent months and years in Warsaw and Wilno on Promethean stipends and traveled as far afield as Helsinki and Harbin to establish new contacts and disseminate publications for the sake of the movement's growth, yet very few of them exclusively belonged to Prometheism, simultaneously seeking alliances with other anti-Soviet patrons in Germany, Italy, Turkey, and Japan. By 1939, Prometheism's greatest success lay in its ability to incubate and circulate ideas of Eurasian geopolitical order across ethnic and linguistic boundaries, an achievement

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<sup>253</sup> Ibid.

that would have offered the strategic utility envisioned by its organizers if the Soviet Union had indeed met its demise in the interwar years.<sup>254</sup>

Though Prometheism emerged in the course of a longer struggle to weaponize nationalism against Russia and later the Soviet Union in the ranks of Piłsudski's PPS, Jan Jacek Bruski suggests that it ultimately served as a "defensive" strategy in the Promethean "cold war" against the Bolsheviks that began in earnest in 1921.<sup>255</sup> Bruski's analysis is certainly supported by the fact that the Bolsheviks were effectively on the offensive for most of the post-Riga clash for the Ukrainian and Belarusian borderlands, perhaps not at the time of the Soviet Union's formation in 1922 but most definitely by the beginning of Stalin's First Five-Year Plan in 1928. In 1923, Stalin proclaimed a slate of *korenizatsiia* (indigenization) policies that provided autonomous territories, indigenous cadres, and linguistic, cultural, and social advancements to the non-Russian nationalities, including the Ukrainians and Belarusians who formally enjoyed their own Soviet republics. The arms race to engineer a Ukrainian "Piedmont," something that Wakar had intended to do as early as 1921, was now progressing in the favor of the Bolsheviks in Kharkiv, whose leader, Mykola Skrypnyk, appropriated this same distinction for his republic during the "Ukrainization" campaigns of the 1920s.<sup>256</sup> Across the border in Poland, meanwhile, the National Democrats embodied the Leninist definition of a "bourgeois-nationalist" regime that culturally and economically repressed its minorities in the blind pursuit of a homogeneous "home market," lending credence to pro-Soviet communists who formed alliances with left-wing Ukrainian and Belarusian nationalists in the eastern

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<sup>254</sup> See Chapter Four on rival incarnations of Promethean ideas.

<sup>255</sup> Bruski, *Between Prometheism and Realpolitik*, 295-300.

<sup>256</sup> See Chapter Five on cross-border communist movements.

borderlands. While the Komintern's reversal of its "united front" policy in 1928 and the start of limitations on the perceived excesses of *korenizatsiia* in the late 1920s altered this configuration significantly, Prometheism never truly rivaled or reversed the gains made by the Bolsheviks on Polish territory even after 1926, instead finding its greatest successes in the arena of competing Eurasian internationalisms as an alternative to the Komintern.

As Bruski shows, however, the rapid development of national communist currents within the Soviet Union under *korenizatsiia* provided some future Prometheans with the sense that the non-Russian republics, namely Ukraine, might be embarking on a trajectory of cultural, political, and economic development that would ultimately loosen Moscow's grip over the western borderlands and open the way for the unmaking of Bolshevik rule.<sup>257</sup> In later years, particularly during Stalin's industrialization drive between 1928 and 1932, Prometheans of diverse nationalities would look back upon prominent incidents involving deviant national communists, such as the expulsion and trials of Sultan-Galiev in 1923 and 1928 as well as the Komintern's dissolution of the Ukrainian Communist Party (UKP) in 1924, as proof that genuinely disruptive movements with separatist agendas had been taking shape under the New Economic Policy all along, only to be crushed before they matured. In truth, it was not merely Stalin and the all-Union bureaucracies that carried out this punitive work, which, before 1928, was executed with particular zeal by orthodox national communists such as Skrypnyk, himself a prosecutor by vocation, who vigorously pursued cases of "local chauvinism" in their respective republics to prevent *korenizatsiia* from degenerating into "petty-bourgeois" reaction. Although neither Sultan-Galiev nor the UKP stood a serious chance of actually overthrowing

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<sup>257</sup> Bruski, *Between Prometheism and Realpolitik*, 144-148.



the Bolshevik mainstream, the controversies and inquiries that their ideas provoked nevertheless tested and, in the end, reinforced the acceptable boundaries of national communist conduct within the Soviet Union and the international revolutionary movement, as we will see in Chapter Three.

### Chapter Three: The Family of Socialist Nations

National communism, internationalism, and the contours of socialist nationhood,  
1917-1933

In late September of 1922, Vladimir Lenin penned a brief note to Lev Kamenev outlining his vision for the creation of a “Union of Soviet Republics of Europe and Asia.”<sup>1</sup> Earlier that year, Lenin had clashed with Iosif Stalin over the latter’s program of “autonomization,” which called for the integration of the Ukrainian, Belarusian, and Transcaucasian republics into the existing structure of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR). Proclaimed in January of 1918, the RSFSR had since grown to encompass a patchwork of ethnically defined “autonomous republics” and former imperial oblasts with predominantly Russian populations, while Soviet Ukraine, Belarus, and Transcaucasia had all emerged as formally independent territories whose precise juridical status remained uncertain. Under Stalin’s plan, these three republics would join the RSFSR, receiving a degree of self-rule comparable to that of the existing “autonomous republics” while officially ceding their sovereignty in favor of a tighter bond with the central authorities in Moscow.<sup>2</sup> Lenin, however, was aware of vigorous opposition to this possibility from ethnically non-Russian Bolsheviks in the three outlying republics, ultimately blocking Stalin’s project and explaining to Kamenev that he favored the creation of a “new storey” of administration in the form of a voluntary “federation of equal republics” that would preserve the socialist statehood of Ukraine, Belarus, and Transcaucasia as “equal” partners to the RSFSR.<sup>3</sup> According to Lenin, such a structure would deprive the so-

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<sup>1</sup> Vladimir Lenin, “Letter to L.B. Kamenev for Members of the Politburo (26.IX.1922),” *Lenin: Collected Works, Volume 42* (Moscow: 1971), 421-423.

<sup>2</sup> Serhii Plokhii, “Lenin’s Victory,” in *Lost Kingdom: The Quest for Empire and the Making of the Russian Nation* (New York: 2017), 211-216.

<sup>3</sup> Lenin, “Letter to L.B. Kamenev,” 421-423.

called “pro-independence people” of their grounds for criticism concerning the allegedly immoderate tendency towards centralization within the Soviet state, leaving “their independence” untouched and emphasizing, at least on the surface, the importance of consensus and joint consultation among the different republican authorities.<sup>4</sup>

Today, historians have not reached an agreement as to whether Lenin’s conflict with Stalin in 1922 was a passing spat over formalities or a row arising from deeper divergences in their understandings of how power should be devolved according to nationality within the emerging Soviet system. Moshe Lewin, for instance, attaches considerable importance to the “autonomization” debate in his critical account of Stalin’s rise to power in the 1920s, portraying the episode as an early attempt by Stalin to rein in his Old Bolshevik nemeses, particularly in his homeland of Georgia, who desired a looser and perhaps truly decentralized relationship among the nationalities of the Soviet Union.<sup>5</sup> Other scholars, such as Jeremy Smith, contend that Lenin and Stalin were essentially in agreement as to the need for an underlying mechanism of strong centralization within the Soviet Union, disagreeing only over the outward trappings of the new multinational state and how to mollify nationally minded Bolsheviks in the borderlands.<sup>6</sup> What is clear, however, is that Lenin’s solution did not fully pacify the more strident of the “pro-independence people,” who, during the years of the New Economic Policy (NEP), mounted a series of prominent

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Moshe Lewin, “Autonomization versus Federation (1922-3),” in *The Soviet Century* (New York: Verso, 2016).

<sup>6</sup> Jeremy Smith, *The Bolsheviks and the National Question, 1917-23* (Basingstoke, 1999); Terry Martin, “An Affirmative Action Empire: The Soviet Union as the Highest Form of Imperialism,” in *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin*, ed. Ronald Grigor Suny and Martin (Oxford: 2001), 67-92; Richard Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union: Communism and Nationalism, 1917-1923* (Cambridge, M.A.: 1997 [1954]).

but unsuccessful challenges aimed at reorganizing the state apparatus of the Soviet Union in a manner that would devolve critical military and economic planning powers to both the full “union republics,” such as Ukraine, and the “autonomous republics” of the RSFSR, like Tatarstan. Though marginal within Soviet politics after 1922, these dissenters are worth revisiting because their criticisms and arguments arose not merely from a narrow desire to defend the “independence” of their individual republics, as some treatments suggest, but grew from more profound and enduring frustrations over the failure of a world revolution to create the kind of decentralized, international family of socialist nations that they had desired since at least 1917.

The two key cases that exemplify the connection between the unfulfilled internationalist dreams of the civil war years and post-1922 struggles to decentralize the Soviet Union involve the spectacular rise and fall of Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev, a Tatar Bolshevik, between 1917 and 1923 as well as the efforts of the non-Bolshevik Ukrainian Communist Party (UKP) to carve out a distinct national path to proletarian revolution free from the interference of Moscow between 1920 and 1924. A relative latecomer to the party’s ranks, Sultan-Galiev was inspired by the Leninist principle of national-self determination and joined the Bolsheviks in the summer of 1917, rising as a proponent of a socialist revolution in the colonial world and a brilliant theoretician of the radicalization of Muslims during his time in the People’s Commissariat of Nationality (Narkomnats) under Stalin. From the time of the October Revolution, Sultan-Galiev envisioned a distinct role for an expansive, broadly autonomous Tatar Soviet Republic in revolutionizing colonized peoples, believing that Red Army units staffed by Muslims would one day break through the borders of the former Russian Empire and participate in the emancipation of subaltern societies. The initial strategy of the Bolsheviks, however, focused on pushing through the western borderlands and

into Central Europe, a position, Sultan-Galiev later claimed, that prevented him and his comrades from freeing the colonies immediately and depriving the Western bourgeoisie of its cheap labor and raw materials. Once prospects for a world revolution dimmed after 1921, Sultan-Galiev grew disillusioned with Tatarstan's insignificant place within the RSFSR and the Soviet Union, insisting that all of the "autonomous republics" should be promoted to full "union republics" and receive most of the economic authority reserved for the all-Union institutions. In joining the Bolsheviks, Sultan-Galiev had hoped to build a mighty Tatarstan within a post-colonial world, viewing the Soviet Union as a renewed Russian Empire that stifled the sovereignty and development of the non-Russian nationalities.

Sultan-Galiev was among the members of the small "opposition" at the Twelfth Party Congress in April of 1923, where Stalin presented his seminal theses on *korenizatsiia* ("indigenization") that called for the promotion of native cadres, territories, languages, and cultures in the majority non-Russian territories. These "forms of nationhood," as Terry Martin describes them, became central to the assimilation of national diversity into the structures of the Soviet state, yet Sultan-Galiev and his contemporaries, such as Khristiian Rakovskii, maintained that the true defeat of the legacies of Russian imperialism would require the far more sweeping abolition of centralized bureaucracies and the devolution of power to local administrative organs, especially among the non-Russians. These proposals, in the end, were roundly defeated in favor of Stalin's line on *korenizatsiia*, which remained in place throughout the NEP years, and Sultan-Galiev soon faced serious accusations of collaborating with non-Bolshevik elements during and after the civil war years that led to his eventual ejection from the party. His criticism of Stalin's strategy for defeating "Great Russian chauvinism," however, continued to be articulated by the

UKP, a grouping founded by former members of the Ukrainian Social Democratic Labor Party in 1920 that survived as an opposition bloc against the Ukrainian Bolsheviks until its disbandment by the Komintern in 1924. At the time of its inception, the UKP had maintained that an independent, communist Ukraine would rise from the ruins of the Russian Empire, denouncing the Bolsheviks for attempting to dominate Ukraine and reinforce the power of the local Russian proletariat. Looking westward, the UKP had hoped for the success of revolutions elsewhere in Europe, especially Germany, and explicitly desired an international federation of socialist nations in which Ukraine would stand on equal footing with Russia. With the creation of the Soviet Union in 1922, however, the UKP continued their struggle by other means, petitioning the Komintern for the loosening of centralized control over the Ukrainian SSR and their own installment as the leading republican party in place of the Bolsheviks.

Although they may appear as passing, hopeless quarrels over the formalities of an essentially centralized Soviet system, the conflicts in which Sultan-Galiev and the UKP became ensnared with the Bolsheviks reveal deeper disagreements over the contours of socialist nationhood as well as frustrations with the fact that the Soviet Union, and not a wider, global community of toiling peoples, was what took shape by the early 1920s. Though inspired in no small part by the Leninist rhetoric of the “right of nations to self-determination,” these dissenters ultimately differed significantly, often more so than they initially realized, from Lenin in viewing self-determination as an end in itself and a basis for relations among socialist nations. Lenin, as early as 1914, had consistently stressed that the formation of separate nation-states in the case of Russia’s borderlands belonged to industrial capitalist development, during which the bourgeoisie of a given nationality might carve out a linguistically unified, spatially

compact “home market” over which to impose its monopoly.<sup>7</sup> Subsequently, however, these nation-states would spawn proletarian classes that would overthrow the bourgeoisie and, in Lenin’s view, favor the reconstitution of the Russian “great state” (*krupnoe gosudarstvo*) as a unitary socialist polity. The UKP, in particular, disagreed with Lenin about this eventual reunification, developing their own analysis in which empires, with the coming of the socialist revolution, fragmented into national units that would subsequently reorganize themselves on a voluntary basis while retaining full sovereignty. Such a socialist or communist Ukraine, in any case, would not reenter the orbit of Moscow as the “colony” of a Bolshevik “empire,” gravitating instead towards more developed partners such as Germany.

### **Layered Internationalisms: The Revolutionary Ideas of Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev**

Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev, a Bolshevik of Tatar descent hailing from a small village south of Ufa in present-day Bashkortostan, is probably one of the best known Soviet national communists in the West. Though Sultan-Galiev was already known to French researchers in the 1920s, it was Alexandre Bennigsen whose translated writings presented him to an Anglophone audience by the late 1970s. Bennigsen considered Sultan-Galiev to be a prime “Muslim national communist” who had fallen out of favor with the Bolsheviks for attempting to creatively and controversially adapt the tenets of Marxism-Leninism to the needs of the colonized Islamic world.<sup>8</sup> The crowning intellectual achievement of Sultan-Galiev’s heretical revolutionary career, for Bennigsen, was his pan-Islamic, pan-Turkic concept of a socialist “Turan” that would turn the tables on colonial empires, among them Soviet Russia, by putting

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<sup>7</sup> See Chapters One and Two for a discussion of Lenin’s idea of national self-determination.

<sup>8</sup> Early French-language works mentioning Sultan-Galiev include Joseph Castagné, *Le Bolchevisme et l’Islam* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1922). Since its publication, the definitive account in French and English has been Bennigsen, *Muslim National Communism*.

power in the hands of downtrodden Turkic Muslims and other oppressed peoples.<sup>9</sup> Bennigsen's attribution of the Turanian idea to Sultan-Galiev has subsequently been handed down uncritically to Western scholars, who in turn see Sultan-Galiev as a forerunner of anticolonial heterodox Marxists of the postwar period such as Frantz Fanon.<sup>10</sup>

A closer examination of Sultan-Galiev's writings and activities, however, provides a few crucial reasons to revise some of Bennigsen's key arguments. For one, labeling Sultan-Galiev a "Muslim national communist" is accurate only insofar as he conceived of majority-Muslim societies as united in a common struggle against Western colonialism. Though accepting that a common religion gave Muslims from Morocco to Indonesia some common cultural characteristics, Sultan-Galiev never elaborated an explicit theory of some overarching Muslim nationhood, nor did he write in favor of a pan-Islamic project that would unite Muslims on the basis of religion. The idea of "Turan," meanwhile, arises only in the NKVD documents prepared for Sultan-Galiev's second trial in 1928, when many Muslim communists from Crimea to Central Asia faced often fatal allegations of conspiring against the Soviet state.<sup>11</sup> While Sultan-Galiev produced a rich oeuvre consisting of many polemics and theoretical articles from 1916 until his expulsion from the Party in 1923, only one typewritten tract actually links him to the concept of Turan.<sup>12</sup> This document dates from 1928, long after Sultan-Galiev's literary output had all but ceased, and was recently recovered by historians from the KGB archives, suggesting that it may have

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<sup>9</sup> Bennigsen, *Muslim National Communism*, 66-67; 100.

<sup>10</sup> Renault, "The Idea of Muslim National Communism."

<sup>11</sup> Bennigsen, *Muslim National Communism*, 68-69.

<sup>12</sup> "Tezisy ob osnovakh sotsial'no-politicheskogo, èkonomicheskogo i kul'turnogo razvitiia tiurkskikh narodov Azii i Evropy," in *Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev: Izbrannye trudy* (Kazan': Izdatel'stvo "Gasyr," 1998), 525-538.



been forged by the NKVD. Indus Tahirov, a historian of Tatar origin, as well as other Russian researchers have questioned the authenticity of this source, which shares few conceptual or stylistic similarities with any of Sultan-Galiev's previous writings.<sup>13</sup> If anything, the piece on Turan could have very well been authored by a member of the Promethean movement, as it partly calls for the imposition of the hegemony of the Soviet borderlands, including Belarus and Ukraine, over the Great Russian center.<sup>14</sup>

While it is possible that Sultan-Galiev may have penned this work out of frustration with Stalin's rise, he denied authorship at his trial, only conceding to the prosecution that he had toyed with the idea of a Turanian alternative to the Soviet Union during the uncertain times of the early 1920s.<sup>15</sup> In any case, the idea of mechanically flipping the colonial relations between "West" and "East" on a global scale and between peripheries and the center within the Soviet Union seems alien to Sultan-Galiev's works, which demonstrate a far more nuanced understanding of colonialism, revolution, and Islam. Even Bennigsen, lacking access to the original treatise on Turan, derived all of his material from NKVD records, leaving open the possibility that the caricature of Sultan-Galiev constructed by the prosecution tells us less about Sultan-Galiev's thought and more about the Stalinist campaigns to marginalize alleged pan-Islamists and pan-Turkists.<sup>16</sup> In fact, the Turanian conspiracy was cited by proponents of the NKVD trials as evidence of a widespread, seditious

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<sup>13</sup> Indus Tahirov, *Na izlome istorii* (Kazan': Tatarskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 2004), 103-104; Sergei Zhil'tsov, *Smertnaia kazn' v istorii Rossii* (Moscow: Zertsalo, 2002), 315.

<sup>14</sup> "Tezisy ob osnovakh," 537-538.

<sup>15</sup> "Pokazaniia na zasedanii Tsentral'noi kontrol'noi komissii VKP (b) o predelakh organizatsionnoi raboty grupy 'pravyykh', o svoikh vzgliadakh o sud'be sotsialisticheskoi revoliutsii v Rossii, o sozdanii Turanskoi Federativnoi Sovetskoi Sotsialisticheskoi Respubliki, o podgotovke k sozdaniiu samostoiatel'noi natsional'noi raboche-krest'ianskoi partii. 27 fevralia 1929g.," in *Izbrannye trudy*, 605-633.

<sup>16</sup> Bennigsen, *Muslim National Communism*, 65-72.

movement among borderland communists dubbed the *sultangalievshchyna*.<sup>17</sup> In closing, Bennigsen claims that the Turanian idea was a natural culmination of Sultan-Galiev's earlier ideas, an argument that is not supported by a closer examination of the texts.

Rather than forcing Sultan-Galiev into the molds of "Muslim national communism" or the Turanian project, it is more revealing to conceive of him as a thinker whose revolutionary ideas emerged from the confluence of layered, interacting internationalist visions. Born in 1892 to an impoverished schoolteacher, Sultan-Galiev was strongly connected to his identity as a working-class "native son" of Tatarstan, but, as a Bolshevik and a Marxist, inhabited many wider worlds from which he drew inspiration for his vision of revolutionary thought and action.<sup>18</sup> In fact, one of Sultan-Galiev's earliest articles published in 1916 responded passionately to allegations from a Tatar-language newspaper that he had betrayed his fatherland by joining the ranks of the bloodthirsty, nationless Bolsheviks. Sultan-Galiev asserted that the Bolsheviks, with their vision of internationalist working-class emancipation and their progressive stance on the national question, were the only political movement who embraced him as an equal human being.<sup>19</sup> Despite his humble roots, Sultan-Galiev appears to have been drawn to the Bolshevik revolutionary project by what Liliana Riga terms "*rossiiskii*" or "Russian-inflected class universalism," something that drew figures from Feliks Dzierżyński to Nariman Narimanov into an

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<sup>17</sup> A.M. Arsharuni, *Ocherki panislamizma i pantiurkizma v Rossii* (Moscow: Izdate'stvo "Bezbozhnik", 1931). Alongside Bennigsen's writings, this is the only text cited by Roberts to demonstrate that Sultan-Galiev envisioned an anti-Soviet "Turan."

<sup>18</sup> Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev, "Pis'mo v redaktsiiu [gazety 'Koiash']," in *Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev: stat'i, vystupleniia, dokumenty* (Kazan': Tatarskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1992), 47-49; Sultan-Galiev, "Avtobiograficheskii ocherk 'Kto ia?': Pis'mo chlenam Tsentral'noi kontrol'noi komissii, kopiia - I.V. Stalinu i L.D. Trotskomu. 23 maia 1923g.," in *Izbrannye trudy*, 446-447; 473-479.

<sup>19</sup> Sultan-Galiev, "Pis'mo v redaktsiiu," 53-55.

alliance against Tsarism and capitalism alongside working-class ethnic Russians.<sup>20</sup> It is also notable that Sultan-Galiev, though highly critical of “Great Russian chauvinism,” the Russian Empire, and specific Bolsheviks such as Stalin and Karl Grasis, hardly ever cast doubt upon the revolutionary credentials of the ethnically Russian proletariat.<sup>21</sup> It was within the context of the Bolsheviks’ international struggle to overthrow capitalism, and not against it, that Sultan-Galiev envisioned both a wide-reaching assault on the pillars of Western imperialism in the colonial “East” and the emancipation of Muslims from their double chains of foreign tutelage and indigenous clericalism.<sup>22</sup>

Sultan-Galiev elaborated his theory of worldwide revolution through at least four important frames. The first and broadest was his general Marxist critique of the global division of labor between the imperialist “West” and the colonized “East.”<sup>23</sup> As early as 1918, Sultan-Galiev called for a systemic Bolshevik strategy oriented towards the “East” rather than the “West,” insisting that igniting revolution in the colonies would threaten the material foundations of world imperialism and sharpen the class struggle in Europe by wreaking economic havoc.<sup>24</sup> The second frame of reference was that of the Islamic world, a crucial part of the “East” that encompassed North Africa,

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<sup>20</sup> Liliana Riga, *The Bolsheviks and the Russian Empire* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 4; 22-24.

<sup>21</sup> Sultan-Galiev, “Nash put’ - priamoi,” in *Izbrannye trudy*, 122-123.

<sup>22</sup> Sultan-Galiev, “Miting rabochikh i krasnoarmeitsev-musul’man,” “Russkaia revoliutsiia i Vostok (Beseda s professorom Mustafoi Subkhi-beem),” “Muslmane, k oruzhiu! ,” in *Izbrannye trudy*, 128-130; 131; 132.

<sup>23</sup> “Rezoliutsiia II Vserossiiskogo s’ezda kommunisticheskikh organizatsii narodov Vostoka po dokladu V.I. Lenina o tekushchem momente 22 noiabria 1919 g., proekt kotoroi byl sostavlenn M.Kh. Sultan-Galievym,” in *Stat’i, vystupleniia, dokumenty*, 181-182.

<sup>24</sup> Sultan-Galiev, “Vystuplenie pri obsuzhdenii proekta rezoliutsii po vostochnomu voprosu,” in *Izbrannye trudy*, 223.

southwestern and southern Asia, and the Muslim parts of southeast Asia.<sup>25</sup> Third, overlapping with this idea of the Islamic world was the context of the former multiethnic Russian Empire, which contained the majority-Muslim territories of Crimea, Azerbaijan, the North Caucasus, the Volga region, and Central Asia.<sup>26</sup> Sultan-Galiev envisioned a special role for these former internal colonies of the Tsars as both a laboratory and springboard for revolution, particularly in the case of his fourth and most local geographical frame, Tatarstan.<sup>27</sup> For Sultan-Galiev, the Tatars, as the most proletarianized Muslims in the old Russian Empire equaled in this regard perhaps by the Azeris, bore a special mission to join the vanguard of revolution, especially in the colonial world.<sup>28</sup> To use Terry Martin's phrase, Sultan-Galiev envisioned Tatarstan as a distinct "Piedmont" for the struggle against Western imperialism and its local ally, "Eastern despotism," in the Islamic world and the colonial world more broadly. Sultan-Galiev trusted that the victory of the Bolsheviks in his native corner of Eurasia would serve as a model for more economically backward Muslims on their way to emancipation.<sup>29</sup>

Sultan-Galiev's vision of global revolution proceeded from the broad view that the world could be divided not only into warring "capitalist" and "socialist" camps, as most Bolsheviks agreed, but also into the colonized "East" and the colonizing "West."

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<sup>25</sup> Sultan-Galiev, "Russkaia revoliutsiia," 131; Sultan-Galiev, "Nash put'," 85-87. Sultan-Galiev, "Sotsial'naia revoliutsiia i Vostok," in *Stat'i, vystupleniia, dokumenty*, 90-93.

<sup>26</sup> Sultan-Galiev, "Russkaia revoliutsiia," 131; Sultan-Galiev, "K voprosu o Tatarskoi-Bashkirskoi Sovetskoi Respublike," in *Izbrannye trudy*, 141-142; Sultan-Galiev "Sotsial'naia revoliutsiia i Vostok," 88-91.

<sup>27</sup> Sultan-Galiev, "Metody antireligioznoi propagandy sredi musul'man," in *Izbrannye trudy*, 366-367; Sultan-Galiev, "Tatarskaia Avtomnaia Respublika," in *Stat'i, vystupleniia, dokumenty*, 151; Sultan-Galiev, "Tatary i Oktiabr'skaia revoliutsiia, in *Stat'i, vystupleniia, doukmenty*, 128-130.

<sup>28</sup> Sultan-Galiev, "Tatary," 128; Sultan-Galiev, "Metody antireligioznoi propagandy sredi musul'man," 368-371.

<sup>29</sup> "Miting rabochikh," 128-129. On the "Piedmont principle," see Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, 6-9.

The “East,” in Sultan-Galiev’s mind, was a particularly capacious sphere encompassing much of what more recent anticolonial discourse describes as the “global South,” or the exploited, colonized parts of the world in the yoke of wealthy capitalist empires.<sup>30</sup> Even before the defeat of the German and Hungarian revolutions in 1919 and 1920, Sultan-Galiev penned an impassioned three-part article insisting that the Bolsheviks should first concentrate on igniting revolutionary unrest in the “East” rather than waiting on the “West” to free itself from the reign of the bourgeoisie.<sup>31</sup> This was because the “East,” as a seemingly endless reserve of raw materials and cheap labor, had always been the most important foundation for Western capitalism.<sup>32</sup> In fact, Western capitalists could afford to buy the loyalty of Europe’s native proletariat by driving the exploitation of Eastern peoples to extreme proportions, allowing even the most indigent of Western workers to enjoy a decent standard of living that sowed doubts about the necessity of a socialist revolution.<sup>33</sup> Every great skyscraper and wonder of modern engineering in the West, wrote Sultan-Galiev, had been built upon the bones of slaves and vanquished indigenous peoples, whom he also considered to be “Easterners.”<sup>34</sup>

The West, lacking its own resources and workforce, could only maintain its power through the ongoing subjugation of the “East” and was therefore particularly vulnerable to an attack on its colonial peripheries. “The direct route to Western Europe, for Soviet power,” Sultan-Galiev wrote, “leads through the Eastern world,” an observation confirmed on a smaller scale in the case of the October Revolution and

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<sup>30</sup> “Vystuplenie pri obsuzhdenii proekta,” 208.

<sup>31</sup> “Sotsial’naia revoliutsiia i Vostok,” 90-91.

<sup>32</sup> “Sotsial’naia revoliutsiia i Vostok,” 94-97.

<sup>33</sup> “Sotsial’naia revoliutsiia i Vostok,” 93; “Vystuplenie pri obsuzhdenii proekta,” 223.

<sup>34</sup> “Vystuplenie pri obsuzhdenii proekta,” 223.

the Russian civil wars.<sup>35</sup> Sultan-Galiev pointed out that when the industrial centers of Moscow and Petrograd, Russia's own "West," had fallen to the Bolsheviks, the Whites and their allies fell back to the imperial peripheries, or the colonial "East" of the old Russian Empire.<sup>36</sup> This last argument is especially important to establishing that Sultan-Galiev desired a just reconfiguration of the global division of labor, not some simplistic inversion of colonial relations that would place the "West" at the mercy of an ascendant "East." Far from embracing pan-Islamic, pan-Turkic, or pan-Asian ideas of racial or civilizational supremacy, Sultan-Galiev conceived of radically remaking the East-West relationship by reshaping exploitative relations of production, and still wished to win the Western proletariat for the global revolution. In fact, Sultan-Galiev even warned that a premature revolutionary victory in the West might initiate a "yellow-skinned advance on Europe" on the part of entrenched capitalists and despots in the colonies, a scenario that seemed to be playing out in miniature in the Russian civil war.<sup>37</sup>

While Sultan-Galiev counted Africa, Asia, and the indigenous societies of the Anglophone settler world as part of the "East," he was especially interested in theorizing how Muslims could be mobilized behind the revolutionary cause. Geopolitically, majority-Muslim societies formed a band stretching from Morocco across the Arabic-speaking world into Central and South Asia, and were therefore of special importance to the revolution. The fact that millions of these Muslims, most of them peasants or pastoral nomads, lived within the former Russian Empire meant that

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<sup>35</sup> "Nash put'," 86-87.

<sup>36</sup> "Doklad M.Kh. Sultan-Galieva na II Vserossiiskom s'ezde kommunisticheskikh organizatsii narodov Vostoka po vostochnomu voprosu," in *Stat'i, vystupleniia, dokumenty*, 189-191.

<sup>37</sup> "Vystuplenie pri obsuzhdenii proekta," 223; Sultan-Galiev, "Vosem'desiat vliiatel'nykh printsev, sultanov i potentatov," in *Izbrannye trudy*, 304.

the Bolsheviks both had an excellent opportunity to develop local strategies for radicalizing Muslims and faced the challenging undertaking of uplifting peoples without native proletarian elements. Given their propinquity to Russia, Afghanistan, Persia, and especially Turkey were all territories to which Sultan-Galiev strongly desired to spread the revolution in 1918 and 1919, as his close work with the Turkish communist Mustafa Suphi attests.<sup>38</sup> While Sultan-Galiev is sometimes cited as having attempted to synthesize Marxism and Islam, his articles generally indicate something different, namely that he saw it necessary to carefully configure the terms of Bolshevik agitation to the special circumstances prevailing in Muslim societies. It is also sometimes argued that Sultan-Galiev saw Muslims as a united “proletarian people” whose internal social stratification was superseded by the common experience of being colonized, though his writings still apply the central Marxist idea of a proletarian struggle to the context of the Islamic world.<sup>39</sup> In fact, when he assessed the revolutionary potential of different Muslim peoples, Sultan-Galiev directed much attention to their profoundly varying levels of proletarianization and readiness for revolution.<sup>40</sup>

One of Sultan-Galiev’s most famous writings on revolution in the Islamic world appeared in the pages of *Zhizn’ natsional’nostei* in 1921, and largely reflected his ideas in previous articles published since 1917. In this particular piece, Sultan-Galiev left no doubt about the need to win Muslims over to socialism and atheism, but cautioned his fellow Bolsheviks against launching an overly zealous, aggressive

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<sup>38</sup> Sultan-Galiev, “Sotsial’naia revoliutsiia i Vostok,” 96-97; “Doklad M.Kh. Sultan-Galieva,” 193-198; Sultan-Galiev, “Mustafa Subkhi i ego rabota,” in *Izbrannye trudy*, 335-339.

<sup>39</sup> Renault, “The Idea of Muslim National Communism”; Roberts, *Commissar and Mullah*, 38-39.

<sup>40</sup> Sultan-Galiev, “Metody antireligioznoi raboty sredi musul’man,” 368-374.

assault on Muslim religious beliefs and customs.<sup>41</sup> A more subtle approach would be necessitated, on one hand, by the relative youth of Islam when compared with the other major Abrahamic faiths of Christianity and Judaism. Owing to its newness, Sultan-Galiev warned that Islam had not yet been weakened by major waves of secularization or reform, and therefore exhibited strong tendencies towards clericalism and fundamentalism as reflected in the deep attachment of many Muslims to the *Sharia*.<sup>42</sup> At the same time, the fact that the majority of the world's Islamic countries had long been under the rule of foreign Christian powers, many of which launched anti-Islamic civilizing missions, made Muslims especially sensitive to attacks on their faith. A heavy handed "crusade" by atheist Bolsheviks against Islam would therefore be met with fierce resistance, since Muslims would associate it with previous experiences of colonial domination.<sup>43</sup> Instead of burning the Koran and shuttering mosques, Sultan-Galiev called for communists to live among Muslims and lead by example, showing the intellectual and material benefits of leaving Islam for Marxism-Leninism. By leading public debates and bringing Bolshevik workers into the villages, communists could hope to gradually wean the masses away from religion and bring them into the Soviet system.<sup>44</sup> So, two years before Stalin expounded his theses on nationalism at the Twelfth Party Congress, Sultan-Galiev had envisioned a relatively gradual path to putting down revolutionary roots in the Soviet Union's Muslim countryside.

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<sup>41</sup> "Metody antireligioznoi raboty sredi musul'man," 363-365.

<sup>42</sup> "Metody antireligioznoi raboty sredi musul'man," 364-365; 368.

<sup>43</sup> "Metody antireligioznoi raboty sredi musul'man," 366-367.

<sup>44</sup> "Metody antireligioznoi raboty sredi musul'man," 365-366.



Once again, it must be emphasized that Sultan-Galiev saw the Islamic world not as an undifferentiated mass united by colonial repression, but as a nuanced, internally diverse international community containing peoples at very different levels of historical and cultural development. Sultan-Galiev made this especially clear in his descriptions of the readiness for revolution of the different Islamic populations of the Soviet Union at the start of the 1920s. “Turkestan, Khiva, and Bukhara,” all located in Central Asia, were the least prepared, as Sultan-Galiev saw in them bastions of clerical fanaticism, repression towards women, and the absence of proletarian elements.<sup>45</sup> “Kirgizia,” meaning most of modern-day Kazakhstan, ranked only slightly higher due to its apparent equity towards women and the weakness of its clergy, while the North Caucasus was only beginning to enter the Soviet sphere.<sup>46</sup> “Bashkiria,” which was actually Sultan-Galiev’s own homeland by today’s geographical terms, ranked further up on the list, but was still a predominantly peasant country with potentially dangerous social and political resentment towards the Tatars.<sup>47</sup> Crimea and Azerbaijan came nearest to the top owing to their high levels of economic development and the weakness of religious fanaticism due to the presence of a modern, class conscious proletariat.<sup>48</sup>

The leading place in Sultan-Galiev’s scheme of the Islamic world, both inside and outside of the former Russian Empire, was Tatarstan.<sup>49</sup> As the most economically advanced and proletarianized Muslim country, Tatarstan was, in Sultan-Galiev’s imagination, the anticolonial Muslim “Piedmont” that would serve as a model of

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<sup>45</sup> “Metody antireligioznoi raboty sredi musul’man,” 372-373.

<sup>46</sup> “Metody antireligioznoi raboty sredi musul’man,” 372.

<sup>47</sup> “Metody antireligioznoi raboty sredi musul’man,” 371-372.

<sup>48</sup> “Metody antireligioznoi raboty sredi musul’man,” 373-374.

<sup>49</sup> “Tatarskaia Avtomnaia Respublika,” 150-151.

socialist revolution for the rest of the Islamic world. Having already gone through the historical phases of feudalism and bourgeois nationalism, Tatarstan stood ready for the socialist revolution.<sup>50</sup> In the course of the revolution and civil wars, Sultan-Galiev clashed with Russian “internationalists” such as Karl Grasis in calling for the creation of a large, broadly autonomous “Tatar Soviet Republic” that would lead the revolution in the colonial and Islamic worlds.<sup>51</sup> Initially, in 1918, Sultan-Galiev’s calls for a united Tatarstan and Bashkiria met with support from Narkomnats on economic grounds, though this approval was later rescinded and separate Tatar and Bashkir republics joined the RSFSR by 1922.<sup>52</sup> The Bashkir question was a sensitive one for Sultan-Galiev, who saw solidarity and cooperation between the Tatars and Bashkirs as crucial to his global revolutionary project.<sup>53</sup>

In contrast to the short-lived Idel-Ural state formed by more moderate Tatar nationalists, among them the future Promethean Ayas Ishaki, Sultan-Galiev believed that a powerful Tatarstan straddling the Volga would send an unambiguous, powerful message to colonizers and colonized peoples alike about the ability of socialism to uplift weak and backward nations.<sup>54</sup> Although, in the end, Sultan-Galiev did not get his desired Tatarstan, he and fellow Tatar Mullanur Vakhitov organized Red Army units formed from Tatar workers that fought not only on the Volga, but also in Central Asia and other Muslim regions of the former Russian Empire.<sup>55</sup> The prospect of

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<sup>50</sup> “Tatarskaia Avtomnaia Respublika,” 151; “Miting,” 128.

<sup>51</sup> Sultan-Galiev, “Nash put’,” 122-123.

<sup>52</sup> Sultan-Galiev, “Doklad po tataro-bashkirskomu voprosu,” 225-226; 232-234; Smith, *The Bolsheviks and the National Question*, 94-99.

<sup>53</sup> Sultan-Galiev, “Nash put’,” 122-123.

<sup>54</sup> “Miting,” 129.

<sup>55</sup> Geoffrey A. Hosking, *The First Socialist Society: A History of the Soviet Union from Within* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 109-111.

ethnically Tatar forces bearing the red standard and liberating the far reaches of the colonial world was, for Sultan-Galiev, something very real as late as 1920.<sup>56</sup> As a people with extensive diasporic connections across the Turkic-speaking world, Sultan-Galiev believed that the Tatars would take their world-historical place in the vanguard of anticolonial revolution.<sup>57</sup> What is interesting is that the Lipka Tatars who supported the anti-Bolshevik Promethean movement partly shared this organizational logic, seeing themselves as a spatially dispersed yet well educated and mobile people who would fight to keep Crimea, the Caucasus, the Volga region, and Central Asia out of Moscow's sphere of influence.<sup>58</sup> So, by 1921, Tatars of different regional backgrounds had not only claimed an important place for themselves on both sides of the unfolding Bolshevik- Promethean struggle in Eurasia, but they had also fought in opposing armies and used their diasporic links across the former Russian Empire to mobilize fellow Muslims and Turkic peoples behind their respective visions of anti-imperial liberation.

There can be little question from Sultan-Galiev's writings and activities between 1917 and the early 1920s that he identified closely with the Bolshevik cause, or, perhaps more accurately, with what he imagined the Bolshevik movement could achieve for the Islamic and colonial worlds. However, having urged an "Eastern" approach to global revolution early on, there can also be no doubt that Sultan-Galiev grew frustrated with the Bolshevik leadership's seemingly misguided preoccupation with the "West" up to 1920. When asked to prepare a biographical statement

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<sup>56</sup> "K voprosu," 74-77; "Informatsiia Tsentral'nogo musul'manskogo komissariata v Narodnyi komissariat po delam natsional'nostei ob uchastii musul'manskogo proletariata v bor'be protiv interventov i belogvardeitsev v 1918 godu," in *Stat'i, vystupleniia, dokumenty*, 257; 260-262.

<sup>57</sup> "Tatarskaia Avtomnaia Respublika," 160-161.

<sup>58</sup> For a detailed account, see Leon Najman Mirza Kryczyński, "Tatarzy polscy a Wschód muzułmański," *Rocznik Tatarski*, vol. 2 (1935); 1-130. Also consult Włodzimierz Bączkowski, "Wschód a Polska," *Wschód*, nrs. 2-4 (1934); 17- 52.

explaining his opposition to Stalin in 1923, Sultan-Galiev expressed his profound disappointment with the Bolsheviks' fixation on the "West" at the expense of the "East," which he considered to have already been ripe for revolution before 1920.<sup>59</sup> At the same time, Sultan-Galiev voiced disapproval of the Bolsheviks' unwillingness to dispatch sufficient support to the communist movements in Turkey, Iran, or Afghanistan.<sup>60</sup> Finally, he wrote that the Soviet nationalities system introduced after 1922 exhibited a strong tendency towards the "Great Russian chauvinist" deviation at the expense of the borderlands, whose right to self-determination had been dangerously curtailed.<sup>61</sup> In his private notebook, Sultan-Galiev scribbled fragmentary comments about the reemergence of the Russian Empire in Leninist guise and the "retreat" of the revolution from its true path.<sup>62</sup>

As the prospects for a major revolution in the "East" dimmed in 1922, Sultan-Galiev grew increasingly vocal in his disapproval of the direction in which the structure of the Soviet federal system was developing, contending that an increasingly layered, bureaucratized tangle of authorities was effectively suffocating the autonomy of the independent national territories, especially smaller units such as Tatarstan or Chuvashia. In April of 1922, Sultan-Galiev expressed this perspective before the Council of Nationalities during deliberations on the demarcation of administrative units (*raionirovanie*), maintaining that every national territory, no matter how small or impoverished, should enjoy full control over its internal economic affairs as well as the right to decide its degree of involvement in any "economic unions" encompassing

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<sup>59</sup> Sultan-Galiev, "Kto ia?," 447-451; 457.

<sup>60</sup> Sultan-Galiev, "Kto ia?," 450-453; 460.

<sup>61</sup> Sultan-Galiev, "Kto ia?," 463-464.

<sup>62</sup> "Tezisy o natsional'noi politike RKP (b): Iz zapisnoi knizhki," in *Izbrannye trudy*, 438.

multiple nationalities.<sup>63</sup> Later, at the Tenth Congress of Soviets in December, Sultan-Galiev articulated his opposition to the creation of a Soviet Union consisting of the RSFSR, Transcaucasia, Belarus, and Ukraine, arguing instead for the "direct entry" of all of the individual national republics into a looser "union" (*soiuz*) of equals without the nesting of autonomy within "federative structures." Sultan-Galiev specifically objected to the status of Turkestan as an autonomous republic within the RSFSR and, finally, the prospective Soviet Union, claiming, in the first place, that a higher and more independent position was warranted in terms of area, population, and economic importance, all of which overshadowed, for example, those of the Georgian SSR.<sup>64</sup> More generally, Sultan-Galiev denounced the alleged disadvantages that would be faced by the smaller autonomous republics such as Tatarstan, whose own local authorities would be doubly subject to the control of Moscow, first to the RSFSR and then to the all-Union elites, in an arrangement that would effectively deprive them of meaningful self-rule in economic affairs. Though reportedly met with applause, Sultan-Galiev was in the minority on this position, losing out to the system formulated by an ailing Lenin, who had intended to deprive the "nationally-minded people" of their grounds for complaint by creating a "new level" of federal organization rather than integrating all of the outlying republics into the RSFSR as "autonomous" territories, as Stalin had unsuccessfully proposed.<sup>65</sup>

To understand Sultan-Galiev's criticism of the structure of the Soviet Union, it is necessary to revisit his participation in the debates on nationalism at the Twelfth Party

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<sup>63</sup> Sultan-Galiev, "Выступление на заседании Совета национальностей о предоставлении автономиям экономических свобод," in *Izbrannye trudy*, 390.

<sup>64</sup> *Idem.*, "Выступление на заседании фракции РКП (б) X Всероссийского съезда Советов," in *Izbrannye trudy*, 409-410.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 410.

Congress in 1923. Taking the side of Khristian Rakovskii and Polikarp Mdivani, Sultan-Galiev emerged as one of the major voices in the rightist “opposition” that demanded a more decentralized ethnofederal system than Stalin was willing to allow.<sup>66</sup> Sultan-Galiev approved of a “two-tiered” system of all-Union administration, with one house representing the republics on the basis of population and the other reserving equal mandates for each republic, but still reproached Stalin for hoarding too much power for the center in Moscow.<sup>67</sup> The danger of domination by the Union’s largest nationality, the Great Russians, was too serious, and Rakovskii further pressed Stalin on this issue by demanding both the transfer of “nine-tenths” of the administrative powers of the center to the borderlands as well as the possibility of some autonomous regions of the RSFSR becoming full union republics.<sup>68</sup> Sultan-Galiev also claimed that Stalin’s denunciation of “Great Russian chauvinism” was not enough, as ethnic Russians were already monopolizing the Party structures in the borderlands and waging their own merciless war on alleged manifestations of “local chauvinism.”<sup>69</sup> More broadly, the opposition leaders insisted that Stalin’s retreat from the Bolshevik promise of national emancipation would set a harmful precedent and severely weaken the Soviet Union’s standing in the eyes of the international communist movement.<sup>70</sup>

Shortly after the defeat of the “opposition” at the Twelfth Party Congress, Sultan-Galiev was arrested, tried, and expelled from the Bolshevik Party for his allegedly

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<sup>66</sup> *Dvenadtsati s’ezd RKP(b)*, 570-580.

<sup>67</sup> “Vystuplenie na zasedanii sektsii po natsiona’nomu voprosu XII s’ezda RKP(b),” in *Izbrannye trudy*, 435.

<sup>68</sup> *Dvenadtsati s’ezd RKP(b)*, 650-657.

<sup>69</sup> “Vystuplenie na zasedanii sektsii po natsiona’nomu voprosu XII s’ezda RKP(b),” 436-437.

<sup>70</sup> *Dvenadtsati s’ezd RKP(b)*, 657.

unauthorized political cooperation with non-Bolshevik elements from abroad and within Tatarstan.<sup>71</sup> While Sultan-Galiev denied having betrayed the Party, he had indeed been involved with non-Bolshevik communists in the past, though the extent of his work on the ground in Tatarstan has not been fully established.<sup>72</sup> Following Sultan-Galiev's expulsion, the Tatarstan *Obkom* held lengthy discussions on his wrongdoings, with some Tatar comrades coming to his defense. However, the *Obkom*, led by the ethnically Russian Dmitry Zhivov, resolved to denounce Sultan-Galiev's breaches of Party discipline and approved of Stalin's theses on nationalism as the correct Bolshevik line.<sup>73</sup> Sultan-Galiev thus became a "right deviant" who had engaged in non-Russian "chauvinism," though an analysis of his ideas reveals that he was far more of an ambitious internationalist than a straightforwardly anti-Russian Tatar nationalist driven by anticolonial *ressentiment*. Indeed, as Jeremy Smith points out, Sultan-Galiev was far from being the most radically deviant Bolshevik with respect to pan-Islamism or pan-Turkism, both of which he explicitly eschewed as dangerous forms of false consciousness that threatened to lure the masses away from socialism.<sup>74</sup> Of course, Sultan-Galiev's downfall in 1923 officially had less to do with deviant ideas and more to do with breaking Party discipline, though the formal justification for his persecution would change by the end of the decade.

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<sup>71</sup> See Stephen Blank, "Stalin's First Victim: the Trial of Sultangaliev," *Russian History*, vol. 17, nr. 2 (Summer 1990); 155-178. doi: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24656436>.

<sup>72</sup> "Pokazaniia na sledstvii o sodержanii i sposobakh peregovora s mestnymi rabotnikami, soveshchaniakh po natsional'nomu voprosu vo vremia raboty XII s'ezda RKP(b)," in *Izbrannye trudy*, 441-445.

<sup>73</sup> "Iz stenograficheskogo otcheta soveshchaniia Tatarskogo obkoma RKP(b) i OKK, otvetrabotnikov po natsional'nomu voprosu (19-21 iulia 1923 g.)," in *Neizvestnyi Sultan-Galiev: rassekrechennyye dokumenty i materialy*, ed. I.R. Tagirov, et al. (Kazan': Tatarskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 2002), 182-184.

<sup>74</sup> Smith, *The Bolsheviks and the National Question*, 133; "Doklad M.Kh. Sultan-Galieva," 193-194.

When Sultan-Galiev was arrested again in 1928, he was now placed on the stand as a vicious pan-Islamic, pan-Turkic deviant plotting to destroy the Soviet Union.<sup>75</sup> While his writings and activities between 1923 and 1928 have not yet been studied in detail, it is doubtful that Sultan-Galiev would have enjoyed the resources to actually weave a seditious network of national communists capable of threatening Moscow. In fact, Sultan-Galiev appealed unsuccessfully for reinstatement in the Party, leading what seems to have been a humble life far from the levers of state power. The one document establishing Sultan-Galiev's guilt was a short manifesto on "Turan" that called for the peoples of the Soviet borderlands to conquer the Great Russian center and the colonized nations of the world to descend with fury upon the metropolitan societies of the industrialized world.<sup>76</sup> When pressed on the question of the text's authorship in February of 1929, Sultan-Galiev, according to the minutes from his trial, admitted to having experimented with the idea of creating a union of Turkic peoples in the event that the Soviet Union collapsed, either under pressure from the West or as a consequence of resurgent capitalism under the New Economic Policy. He apparently ran these ideas by fellow Muslim communists in conversation around 1925 or 1926, but that was the full extent to which the Turanian project had reached a wider audience.<sup>77</sup>

Leaving the question of authorship unanswered, Sultan-Galiev, surely under duress by this point, conceded that a post-Soviet "Turan" had crossed his mind in the past. This was enough for Party propagandists to report on the rise of the *sultangalievshchyna*, a combination of pan-Islamic and pan-Turkic deviations that

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<sup>75</sup> Bennigsen, *Muslim National Communism*, 89-91.

<sup>76</sup> "Tezisy ob osnovakh," 525-526.

<sup>77</sup> "Pokazaniia na zasedanii Tsentral'noi kontrol'noi komissii VKP (b)," 605-633.



threatened to undo the Soviet Union. Under the pretext of targeting the *sultangalievshchyna*, the NKVD arrested and often executed Muslim communists from the borderlands, publishing far-fetched interpretations of Sultan-Galiev's writings as proof of a plot.<sup>78</sup> In fact, the article on anti-religious propaganda among Muslims was dredged up and misleadingly cited to create the impression that Sultan-Galiev wanted to subjugate Marxism to Islam, not the other way around.<sup>79</sup> Sultan-Galiev escaped execution after his trial, but was later rearrested for the Turanian conspiracy at the end of the 1930s and murdered by the Soviet state in 1940.

Unfortunately, the legacy of Sultan-Galiev's trials has heavily shaped present-day understandings of his life and work. Of course, in a twist of irony, the associations with pan-Islamism and pan-Turkism that earned him a death sentence in 1939 have now become a matter for celebration, as Sultan-Galiev appears to have been a heroic heterodox Marxist who anticipated later decades of anticolonial thought. Of course, while the labels of "Muslim national communism" and "pan-Turanism" are certainly flawed, Sultan-Galiev was nevertheless an original theorist of Islam, colonialism, and revolution deserving of recognition by historians. He operated and thought at the intersection of overlapping internationalist projects and contexts, among them the legacies of the multiethnic Russian Empire, the worldwide colonial division of labor, and the Bolshevik struggle for international proletarian emancipation. Furthermore, Sultan-Galiev's devotion to his native Tatarstan, allegedly a form of "rightist" nationalism, did not stand in the way of these broader internationalist allegiances, but actually served as the concrete link through which he related to them. Far from thinking about the colonial and Islamic worlds as undifferentiated by virtue of their

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<sup>78</sup> *Ocherki panislamizma*, 140-169; Bennigsen, *Muslim National Communism*, 90-91.

<sup>79</sup> *Ocherki panislamizma*, 144-152.

encounter with Western capitalism, Sultan-Galiev believed that different Muslim societies were at contrasting stages of historical development, establishing a hierarchy, however temporary, in terms of who should lead the revolution.

Even before Mykola Skrypnyk delivered his famous meditations on the role of Soviet Ukraine as a “Piedmont” for Ukrainians living in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Romania, Sultan-Galiev developed his own idea of Tatarstan as a “Piedmont” for global revolutionary activity.<sup>80</sup> Sultan-Galiev was, of course, also aware of competing internationalisms in the colonial world, chief among them “pan-Islamism and pan-Mongolism,” which he considered to be reflexive but ultimately flawed responses of oppressed peoples toward their colonial masters.<sup>81</sup> Sultan-Galiev lived, thought, and acted in a world mediated by layered internationalisms, occupying an intersectional space as a Bolshevik revolutionary, a descendant of a majority-Muslim region, and an educated colonial subaltern from the imperial Russian borderlands.

### **Between colonialism and confederation**

In August of 1924, the Executive Committee of the Communist International (Komintern) received a petition that presented a framework for the “truly proletarian resolution of the colonial question of the former Russian Empire” and the “foundation of a truly proletarian union of Soviet republics, one not perverted by the bourgeois tendency towards bureaucratic centralism.”<sup>82</sup> Its signed authors, Andriy Richyts’kyi and Antin Drahomirets’kyi, belonged to the leadership of the Ukrainian Communist Party (UKP), a grouping founded in January of 1920 by former members of the Ukrainian Social Democratic Labor Party (USLDP) who maintained that Bolshevik

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<sup>80</sup> Skrypnyk, “USRR - P’iemont ukrains’kykh trudiashchykh mas,” in *Mykola Skrypnyk*, 178-184.

<sup>81</sup> “Doklad M.Kh. Sultan-Galieva,” 193-194.

<sup>82</sup> “Pis'mo TsK UKP v Ispolitel'nyi Komitet Kommunisticheskogo Internatsionala,” in *Kak i pochemu Ispolkom Kominterna raspustil UKP* (Moscow: 1925), 7-11.

rule in Ukraine had reproduced repressive systems of colonialism and Russification that should have perished with the Tsarist regime. Richyts'kyi and Drahomirets'kyi argued that Soviet Ukraine was illegitimately ruled by the Ukrainian Bolsheviks, who, they argued, formed a mere regional offshoot of the Russian Bolsheviks that defended the interests of ethnically Russian and Russified Ukrainian proletarians while marginalizing ethnically Ukrainian peasants and workers within their own state.<sup>83</sup> Worse yet, Richyts'kyi and Drahomirets'kyi claimed, the overarching structure of the Soviet Union placed excessive power in the hands of centralized institutions in Moscow that deprived Soviet Ukraine of its sovereignty, an arrangement that suited the submissiveness of the Ukrainian Bolsheviks to their masters yet which effectively deprived true Ukrainian communists of the ability to achieve the liberation of their people from the double burdens of class oppression and national persecution.<sup>84</sup>

The solution to this tangle of conundrums, Richyts'kyi and Drahomirets'kyi posited, began with replacing the Ukrainian Bolsheviks with a “single, separate, and independent” Ukrainian party that would stand on equal footing with the Russian Bolsheviks in both the Komintern and the Soviet government. Soviet Ukraine, meanwhile, was to enjoy an independent section in the Red International of Labor Unions, or Profintern, as well as greater autonomy in administering its republican portion of the Red Army, whose composition was to more faithfully reflect the preponderance of ethnic Ukrainians in the local population.<sup>85</sup> These recommendations, which applied specifically to Ukraine, concluded with a far more sweeping and ambitious demand for the “redistribution of the entire government apparatus -

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 10-11.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 9-10.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 9.

administrative as well as economic - to the Union republics, into the hands of their Soviet authorities,” an arrangement that would simultaneously entail the “unification of regulative, planning, and managerial functions” in the all-Union bodies.<sup>86</sup> Despite Lenin’s best efforts to create a federation of equal republics, Richyts’kyi and Drahomirets’kyi suggested that the Soviet Union had taken a deleterious turn towards the “autonomization of the borderland republics” by “surrendering into the hands of the Union’s center all of the material resources of the Union countries, welcoming in the degeneration of proletarian unity into bureaucratic centralism and the reign of the central apparatus... under the domination of non-proletarian, managerial elements.”<sup>87</sup> Adding a thoroughly Leninist flourish, Richyts’kyi and Drahomirets’kyi described this phenomenon as a manifestation of the resurgence of the “great-power-bourgeois-social movement” known as *smenovekhovstvo*, an intellectual current among Russian emigres that, in the Bolshevik lexicon of the 1920s, embodied the danger of counterrevolutionary, imperialist currents creeping into power through party channels.<sup>88</sup>

In late December of 1924, Richyts’kyi and Drahomirets’kyi’s appeal to the Komintern culminated in a series of hearings and deliberations that elicited an aggressive response from the Ukrainian Bolsheviks, namely Mykola Skrynpyk, Mykola Popov, and Oleksandr Shums’kyi, and led to the formal dissolution of the UKP, which, by then, had suffered badly from thinning ranks and Bolshevik infiltration.<sup>89</sup> The acrimony that characterized the UKP’s disbandment arose in no

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 11-14.

small part from the fact that the party had denounced what Terry Martin terms the “forms of nationhood” extended to the non-Russian nationalities under Stalin’s *korenizatsiia* policies, not merely by dismissing them as insufficient for the achievement of self-determination but by implicating them in the subjugation of Ukraine to a renewed form of Russian colonial domination in socialist garb.<sup>90</sup> Insufficiently impressed with the cultural and educational objectives of Skrypnyk’s unfolding “Ukrainization” drive, which Martin describes as “soft-line” measures meant to improve the regime’s popularity and public image, the UKP insisted that the Bolsheviks not only relinquish power in Ukraine but also radically decentralize the heavy machinery of the state, which would necessitate substantial and inevitably disruptive changes to the less negotiable “hard-line” policies governing the operation of strategically vital military, economic, and political institutions.<sup>91</sup>

The fundamental disagreement between the UKP and the Bolsheviks, however, lay not merely in the question of defining the division of federal powers between the “center” and the “borderlands” but in the deeper problem of imagining how a sprawling, multinational, and unevenly developed empire like pre-1917 Russia was to be reorganized according to the contested principle of “national self-determination.” Before January of 1918, the Bolsheviks had emphasized tight economic and political integration as the defining feature of a post-Romanov order, allowing, in the case of Lenin and Stalin’s writings, for the “borderlands” to temporarily secede as capitalist nation-states before reuniting with the rest of the post-imperial space under the banner of “socialist unitarism.”<sup>92</sup> Within months of the October Revolution, the challenges of

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<sup>90</sup> Martin, “An Affirmative Action Empire,” 70-73.

<sup>91</sup> Idem., *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca: 2001), 21-22.

<sup>92</sup> See Chapters One and Two for a discussion of these ideas.

building such a system in practice coupled with the unanticipated scope and intensity of nationalist movements ultimately led Lenin and Stalin to endorse “socialist federalism” as a transitional structure between the forcible “imperialist unitarism” of the old regime and the voluntary “socialist unitarism” of the future, likewise providing an expedient means of proclaiming Soviet authorities that would rival and ultimately overturn “bourgeois-nationalist” governments such as the Ukrainian Central Rada.<sup>93</sup> As early as 1913, Stalin had described “Ukraine” as one of the clearly “crystallized” territories of the Russian Empire that would enjoy “regional autonomy” on economic grounds, though his endorsement of “socialist federalism” was soon accompanied by the claim that “Ukraine” and other Soviet republics were defined by their national composition and “way of life” in addition to their distinctive productive architecture.<sup>94</sup> In either case, Stalin emphasized that Ukraine’s autonomy would not amount to independent statehood, something reserved for the allegedly “bourgeois,” separatist Rada, but instead contribute to the formation of a post-imperial brotherhood of socialist peoples in which the old antagonisms between the ethnically Russian “center” and the non-Russian “borderlands” would be removed.<sup>95</sup>

Before the UKP emerged as a proponent of non-Bolshevik “Soviet power” (*radians’ka vlada*) in Ukraine, its founders had experienced Stalin’s “fraternal” reunification of the fragmented Russian Empire from a vantage point that informed their challenges to Bolshevik rule. At the time of the October Revolution, Richyts’kyi, Drahomirets’kyi, and their close comrade Mykhailo Tkachenko were all serving as delegates of the USDLP in the Central Rada in Kyiv, which the Bolsheviks promptly

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<sup>93</sup> Stalin, “Выступления на III Всероссийском съезде Советов рабочих, солдатских и крестьянских депутатов 10–18 января 1918 г.,” in *Sochineniia*, T. 4, 416–417.

<sup>94</sup> Idem., *Marksizm i natsional’nyi vopros* (1913).

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

denounced as “counterrevolutionary” and the Red Army fought to unseat prior to the conclusion of the separate Soviet and Ukrainian peace agreements with the Central Powers at Brest-Litovsk in February of 1918.<sup>96</sup> When Stalin presented his theses on “socialist federalism” shortly before the settlements at Brest-Litovsk, the Rada, though initially inclined towards broad self-rule within a democratic Russian federation after the February Revolution, had declared the territorial autonomy of the Ukrainian People’s Republic (UNR) in November of 1917 before proclaiming full independence the following January as Bolshevik forces, under Volodymyr Antonov-Ovsenko, intensified their campaigns towards the Dnipro River.<sup>97</sup> Though temporarily spared from both Red Army and White offensives by the new peace, the largely Social Democratic and Socialist Revolutionary Rada failed to deliver shipments of grain to its new imperial patrons in the west and was replaced in a German-led coup by the monarchist Hetmanate of Pavlo Skoropads’kyi, who remained in power until the end of the First World War.<sup>98</sup>

When the USDLP subsequently returned to power within the fragile Ukrainian Directory that headed the revived UNR in November of 1918, its ranks split in early 1919 between the government of Symon Petliura, a military man in favor of parliamentary governance and moderate agrarian reforms, and the more socially radical opposition of Volodymyr Vynnychenko, who saw a revolutionary shift towards a worker-peasant revolution and a communist dictatorship of the proletariat

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<sup>96</sup> For a discussion of the origins of the UKP, see Stephen Velychenko, *Painting Imperialism and Nationalism Red: The Ukrainian Marxist Critique of Russian Communist Rule in Ukraine, 1918-1925* (Toronto: 2015).

<sup>97</sup> See Chapter Two for a discussion of the Rada’s secession.

<sup>98</sup> Gennadii Korol’ov, “Ukrainian Revolution of 1914–1921: The European and Russian Dimension,” *Sensus Historiae* 16.3 (2014).

as the only viable future for Ukraine.<sup>99</sup> For Petliura, the preservation of Ukraine's embattled sovereignty and dwindling territory against the advancing Red and White armies was the greatest priority in mid-1919, leading him to cross into Poland at the end of the year and enter into negotiations with the Polish government of Józef Piłsudski, which had occupied the predominantly Ukrainian regions of Volhynia and East Galicia and ultimately left the UNR an economically and strategically weak area along the Dnipro.<sup>100</sup> Vynnychenko, by then temporarily in exile in Vienna, vigorously denounced Petliura's decision to submit to Western imperialism and its Polish puppet regime, arguing that only the pursuit of Soviet power in Ukraine through the socialization of property and the creation of communism could sustain the mutually constitutive social and national revolutions that had outgrown the "bourgeois" ambitions of the Directory.<sup>101</sup> Yet if Vynnychenko could vituperate Petliura for surrendering to the rapacious Poles, the question of how exactly to establish an independent Soviet Ukrainian authority on a territory increasingly controlled by the Red Army and the Bolsheviks remained unclear, especially because the Ukrainian working classes were to command their own independent state as a mechanism of revolutionary change rather than directly joining the fold of Moscow.

For the time being, the intellectual and practical labor involved in solving this problem fell not to Vynnychenko but to Richyts'kyi, Drahomirets'kyi, and Tkachenko, who, in December of 1919 and January of 1920, announced the dissolution of their "independent" faction of the USDLP and the formation of a new Ukrainian

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<sup>99</sup> John S. Reshetar, Jr., "Ukrainian and Russian Perceptions of the Russian Revolution," in *Ukraine and Russia in Their Historical Encounter* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 1992), 144-146.

<sup>100</sup> Michael Palij, *The Ukrainian-Polish Defensive Alliance, 1919-1921: An Aspect of the Ukrainian Revolution* (Edmonton: 1995).

<sup>101</sup> Volodymyr Vynnychenko, *Do Ukraïntsv-polonenykh!* (1920).



Communist Party (UKP). The historical logic behind this change, according to a programmatic pamphlet published by Richyts'kyi in 1920, was that the First World War, the failed revolutions in Hungary and Germany, and the ongoing conflict in Ukraine had clearly demonstrated the “bankruptcy” of the Social Democracy of the Second International, otherwise derided as the “old socialism,” that had closed ranks with the bourgeoisie when faced with the critical choice between defending the capitalist status quo and making the bold leap to communism.<sup>102</sup> Moreover, Richyts'kyi emphasized, Ukraine’s revolutionary trajectory had already completed its “national” and Social Democratic phases since 1917, shedding the outmoded rule of the Rada and the Directory as it evolved into a genuinely communist force for the complete elimination of the propertied classes and the creation of a Ukrainian nation of the working masses.<sup>103</sup> Crucially, and in contrast to the dominant Bolshevik interpretation of the Rada’s work after the February Revolution and the more recent activities of the Directory, Richyts'kyi stressed that the struggle for communism in Ukraine had gradually but surely grown out of the earlier “national revolution” rather than arising in spite of it, a position that criticized Stalin’s decision in early 1918 to declare Soviet power in Ukraine while dismissing the Rada as a “bourgeois-nationalist” dead end.<sup>104</sup> The point, according to Richyts'kyi, was that the UKP, and not the premature and aggressive Bolsheviks, represented the true vanguard in Ukraine’s fight for communism, primarily because it had organically developed in the course of Ukraine’s indigenous historical development rather than being imposed from outside. Given the tendency of the predominantly Russian or Russified

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<sup>102</sup> Andriy Richyts'kyi, *Од демократії до комунізму* (1919-1920). Obtained at <https://vpered.wordpress.com/2010/09/06/richytsky-democracy-to-communism/>.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

Ukrainian Bolsheviks to run roughshod over the cultural and economic needs of the ethnically Ukrainian population, Rychyts'kyi claimed that the chance for a peaceful “fusion” (*zlyttia*) of Russian and Ukrainian communism had passed, leaving only the possibility of the “absorption” of the former by the latter, though in an “ideological, not national” sense.<sup>105</sup>

While Bolsheviks such as Mykola Skrypnyk had fought with determination and some success throughout 1918 and 1919 to gain greater autonomy for Ukraine in matters of party organization and local administration, Rychyts'kyi and his associates from the USDLP's “independent” faction still considered it necessary in January of 1920 to create a separate center of “Ukrainian communism” in the form of the UKP.<sup>106</sup> Recognizing the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) declared in Kharkiv in 1919 as the sole legitimate bearer of the Ukrainian revolutionary struggle, the UKP nevertheless insisted upon the removal of the Ukrainian Bolsheviks, whom they described as a chapter of the Russian Bolshevik organization.<sup>107</sup> As Rychyts'kyi himself noted, their work continued the earlier efforts of Vasyl' Shakhrai, an ethnically Ukrainian Bolshevik, and his Jewish comrade Serhii Mazlakh to establish the complete “independence” (*samostiynist*) of the Soviet Ukrainian state and its party apparatus from the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) and the Russian Bolsheviks, respectively.<sup>108</sup> Shakhrai, who died in combat against the Whites in the summer of 1919, partnered with Mazlakh in penning a pamphlet that called upon Lenin to honor the principle of the “right of nations to self-determination

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Vynnychenko, *Ukrains'ka Komunistychna Partii (UKP) i Komunistychna Partii (bol'shevykiv) Ukraïny (KP(b)U)* (Vienna and Kyiv: I. Shtainman 1921), 26-32.

<sup>108</sup> Rychyts'kyi, *Oð demokramii*.

to the point of secession” adopted by the Bolsheviks in 1903, precisely by honoring the separateness and sovereignty of a decolonized Soviet Ukraine that, given freedom from Moscow’s hegemony, would voluntarily enter a mutually supportive relationship with the RSFSR.<sup>109</sup> The implication of this demand was that Ukraine would form its own Soviet polity outside of, though bilaterally connected to, the RSFSR, preventing the exploitative relationship that had prevailed between “Russia” and “Ukraine” under Tsarism from reemerging in a nominally socialist form. Shakhrai and Mazlakh’s logic for this model, which resisted Stalin’s call for a “socialist federalism” that would lead to “socialist unitarism,” was that Ukraine’s independence had already been transformed from a dream of progressive intellectuals into a living reality, first under the Rada and the Directory, not to mention the Hetmanate, and now with the direct, mass-based leadership of Ukrainian peasants and workers. The Ukrainian state, in other words, was itself evolving through the distinct historical phases of the Ukrainian revolution while advancing the differentiation of classes, reaching its most decisive test as the weapon with which the toiling masses would liberate themselves from capitalist oppression and imperialism. While Shakhrai and Mazlakh may have shared Lenin’s view that this state would “wither” with the abolition of class divisions, they by no means suggested that such a development would be synonymous with the disappearance of national identities or the reunification of Ukraine with the RSFSR.

Echoing, to a considerable degree, the arguments of Shakhrai and Mazlakh, the First Congress of the UKP, held in Kyiv from 22 to 25 January 1920, resolved that Ukraine constituted a distinct “national-economic unit” that should be organized as an “independent state, as a weapon against the Ukrainian bourgeoisie controlled by European capitalism and as a means for the economic reconstruction of the

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<sup>109</sup> See Chapter Two for a discussion of Shakhrai and Mazlakh’s polemic.

country.”<sup>110</sup> Conspicuously absent was any mention of Bolshevik federalism, with the UKP generally suggesting that the place of the Ukrainian SSR “within the general network and union of Soviet republics should correspond to its specific economic and political weight,” and it is likely that the Congress’s participants, in formulating this statement, still looked forward to a global revolution that would include more industrialized parts of the world outside of the former Russian Empire, namely in Western and Central Europe as well as in North America.<sup>111</sup> Vynnychenko, who later joined the UKP and authored numerous programmatic texts released in both Kyiv and Vienna, explicitly wrote in 1920 that the Ukrainian SSR would gladly join a worldwide alliance of Soviet states governed by a decentralized, nationally federated Komintern but did not mention his eagerness to see Ukraine in any sort of Bolshevik-led federation along the lines envisioned by Stalin in 1918.<sup>112</sup>

One of the chief reasons for this aversion to federalism was the UKP’s strong sense that the Bolsheviks in both Moscow and Kharkiv essentially treated the Ukrainian SSR as a colony in cultural and economic terms, placing all power in the hands of their ethnically Russian base of proletarians in the industrial cities of the southeast while using centralized structures of resource procurement to plunder the ethnically Ukrainian peasantry and semiproletariat of its agricultural products and raw materials.<sup>113</sup> According to the Congress, Ukraine, as a “national-economic unit,” had taken shape over the past two centuries along the Don’, Dnipro, and Dniester Rivers and the northern coast of the Black Sea under the combined pressures of Russian

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<sup>110</sup> “Memorandum Ukrainskoi Kommunisticheskoi Partii II Kongressu III Kommunisticheskogo Internatsionala,” in *Kak i pochemu*, 17-36.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 34-36.

<sup>112</sup> Vynnychenko, *Revoliutsiia v nebezpetsi!* (Vienna and Kyiv: 1920), 2-7.

<sup>113</sup> “Memorandum,” 17-18.

imperialism and colonialism as well as cultural and social policies of Russification that had given rise to an especially tortured entanglement of nationality and production.<sup>114</sup> On one hand, the UKP argued, Ukrainians had lost their native elites to the Russified nobility of the Tsars since the eighteenth century, effectively becoming a nation of peasants that, at an artificially suppressed tempo, gradually developed its own proletarian elements, most of them concentrated in rural industries rather than in the emerging industrial cities. The reason for this, allegedly, was because the dominance of Russian culture in the cities ensured the denationalization of Ukrainian peasants arriving from the countryside, while the simultaneous influx of ethnically Russian migrants from the villages of central European Russia further ensured that a nationally and class conscious Ukrainian proletariat would always be in the minority. In the UKP's terminology, a division had begun to grow in the nineteenth century between the "outer proletariat," which consisted of ethnic Russians and Russified Ukrainians hostile to the surrounding rural population, and the small yet expanding "inner proletariat" that managed to retain its Ukrainian features.<sup>115</sup>

This configuration of national tensions and productive relations, according to the UKP, posed tremendous consequences for the formation of mass-based national and labor movements at the turn of the nineteenth century, with the "outer proletariat" looking to the major cities of Russia and their Social Democratic groupings for their orientation, treating Ukraine as an appendage of Russia and disregarding the needs of its non-Russian peasants and workers. One of the major havens for the "inner proletariat," by contrast, became the Ukrainian national movement led by populist intellectuals and academics with a sense of responsibility for the local toiling masses,

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 21-24.

who still generally lacked a clear national or class identity by the eve of the First World War.<sup>116</sup> The period between the February and October revolutions of 1917, in the UKP's estimate, had witnessed a vigorous and productive flowering of Ukrainian mass politics that had mobilized the "inner proletariat" as never before, initiating the first true stage of the Ukrainian "national revolution" whose bourgeois leaders would, in the next two years, be rapidly obviated and replaced by a far more self-confident working class determined to create Soviet (*radians'ka*) power.<sup>117</sup> Importantly, however, the UKP claimed that Ukraine's Russian and Russified proletarians regarded the "national revolution" with contempt, attacking it, after the October Revolution, as a bourgeois deviation from the all-Russian socialist revolution without appreciating its historical necessity as the antecedent of a distinct Ukrainian path to peasant-worker emancipation. As a result, the struggle of Ukraine's Russian and Russified Bolsheviks against the Rada expanded into a general campaign against everything with a Ukrainian national character, including the development of socialist and later communist organizations such as the USDLP and the UKP that insisted upon national self-determination for Ukraine. What began as a fight against counterrevolution, the UKP claimed, provided a convenient cover for the Bolshevik-led repression of its nationally minded Ukrainian competitors as well as the material expropriation of poor and middling Ukrainian peasants and rural proletarians in order to serve the economic needs of the cities and the rest of the Soviet-controlled territory.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 23-24; 28-30.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 28-29.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 29-30.

By the end of 1917, the problem, according to the UKP's resolutions, was that the bifurcation between the "outer" and "inner" proletariat had deepened into a "dual-centeredness" (*dvoetsentrie*) in Ukraine's Social Democratic movement, perhaps a play on Lenin's concept of *dvoevlastie* (dual power) to refer to the antagonism between the Petrograd Soviet and the Russian Provisional Government after the February Revolution.<sup>119</sup> One camp supposedly emerged around the Bolsheviks, who essentially subordinated Ukraine's needs to the wider Soviet project and had no qualms about maintaining Ukraine as a Russian colony, while the USDLP, as the party that had worked closely with the "inner" proletariat since its creation in 1905, led the struggle to save the Ukrainian revolution from perishing before it could transition from the "national revolution" to socialism. The prospect of a distinct Ukrainian socialist revolution, the UKP claimed, was not a "bourgeois" deviation from the all-Russian mainstream but the historically logical manifestation of two broader phenomena that the Bolsheviks had allegedly neglected to take into account.<sup>120</sup> First, almost precisely as Shakhrai and Mazlakh had claimed, the UKP emphasized in 1920 that modern capitalist development possessed the dynamic energy to transform dormant, "non-historical nations" like the Ukrainians into conscious, mobilized masses by thrusting an unformed peasant rabble into urban milieus that steeled disciplined proletarians with a heightened sense of social and national identity. This process, in the Ukrainian case, had purportedly been slowed significantly by colonialism, which delayed the congealment of industry, and Russification, which had once robbed Ukraine of its landholding elites and now obstructed the formation of a native proletariat, yet the UKP maintained that the

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 20-22.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 15-18.

necessary social transformations were already underway by 1917 and vastly intensified since then.<sup>121</sup>

Second, and perhaps most importantly for the question of Ukraine's status within the Soviet system, the UKP posited in both its inaugural resolutions and a programmatic volume penned by Vynnychenko that socialist revolutions, in principle, tended to precipitate the territorial breakdown of colonial empires such as "Russia, Britain, and Australia."<sup>122</sup> The mechanism behind this transformative process was the awakening of national and class identities among the workers and peasants of the colonies, who, having been alienated from their true productive potential and placed in the service of the metropole, now strove for independence and socialism in order to reclaim their self-determination and organize themselves according to their own needs. Unlike Stalin, Vynnychenko presented no developmental loop that led from "imperial unitarism" to a terminal state of "socialist unitarism" by way of "socialist federalism," simply writing that conglomerate empires would cleave along national lines during revolutionary times, during which postcolonial countries such as Ukraine would, at most, enter an international alliance of socialist polities.<sup>123</sup> If anything, Vynnychenko stressed that some kind of union with Russia was the preferred position of Ukrainian capitalists and landowners, including those who had manned the Hetmanate, because these exploiters served powerful Russian masters in the imperial capitals and knew that they would be adrift and in danger of destruction if they tried to lead Ukraine without the backing of St. Petersburg or Moscow. By contrast, Ukrainian workers and peasants had no need to yoke themselves to Russia for the sake of economic

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 19-20.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 27; Vynnychenko, *Prohrama Ukraïns'koï Komunistychnoi Partii* (Vienna and Kyiv: 1920), 16-17.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 17.



development, benefiting, if anything, from their newly won independence, though Vynnychenko did not explicitly exclude the possibility of a Russo-Ukrainian partnership of the kind discussed by Shakhrai and Mazlakh.<sup>124</sup>

Vynnychenko, as Chris Gilley shows, was in fact interested in negotiating such a relationship with the Bolsheviks, emerging from exile in Vienna in mid-1920 to travel to Moscow and Kharkiv in pursuit of greater independence for Ukraine within the Soviet system. As Gilley claims, Vynnychenko still reviled Petliura for his alignment with Piłsudski, who had buttressed the influences of Polish landowners in Right-Bank Ukraine while incorporating predominantly Ukrainian territories such as East Galicia and Volhynia into Poland. Vynnychenko, meanwhile, considered the national and social revolutions to be deeply entwined in the case of Ukraine, favoring Soviet power as the most historically fitting model of state organization but opposing the dominance of the Bolsheviks, many of them non-Ukrainians by ethnicity, in the republican capital of Kharkiv. While the Bolsheviks were willing to offer Vynnychenko and his non-Bolshevik allies a handful of positions within the government of the Ukrainian SSR, a reflection of Lenin and Stalin's growing awareness of the need to integrate qualified natives of the "borderlands" into Soviet institutions that increasingly looked like bastions of ethnically Russian hegemony, these proposals fell far short of the expectations of the UKP.<sup>125</sup>

In one brief paragraph in his 1920 pamphlet titled *Ukrainian Statehood*, Vynnychenko had been willing to excuse the Red Army's incursions into Ukraine over the previous two years as a disruptive yet necessary and ultimately justified operation in search of resources and labor that was necessitated by the worsening

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<sup>124</sup> Idem., *Ukraïns'ka derzhavnist'* (Vienna and Kyiv: 1920).

<sup>125</sup> Chris Gilley, "Volodymyr Vynnychenko's mission to Moscow and Kharkov," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 84.3 (July 2006); 508-537.

conditions of the civil wars and the tightening encirclement of the capitalist powers.<sup>126</sup> Generally, however, Vynnychenko and his self-proclaimed “Foreign Group” of the UKP leveled grave accusations of imperialism and colonial exploitation against the Bolsheviks, arguing that same year that the dynamic energy of the October Revolution had ossified into a renewed form of Russian despotism controlled by a small circle of elites who relied upon terror and extreme centralization to control the workers and exploit the peasantry.<sup>127</sup> This turn towards tyranny, Vynnychenko continued, had been exported to Ukraine by the local Bolsheviks, who allegedly crushed indigenous uprisings and answered to their masters in Moscow, channeling local resources to the central authorities and denying the UKP its rightful place at the head of the Ukrainian SSR.<sup>128</sup> While the Ukrainian Bolsheviks of 1920 had indeed not yet undergone the significant demographic transformations ushered in by *korenizatsiia* and “Ukrainization,” their ranks still included prominent ethnic Ukrainians such as Skrypnyk and had grown to incorporate non-Bolshevik communist groupings such as the *Borot'bisty* (“Fighters” or “Strugglers”), a left-wing faction of the Ukrainian Socialist-Revolutionary Party led by Shums'kyi.<sup>129</sup> Tolerated as a legitimate communist opposition, the UKP held out within the Soviet Union yet was increasingly overshadowed and numerically dwarfed by the Ukrainian Bolsheviks, who may not have yet established deep roots in the countryside but nevertheless held

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<sup>126</sup> Vynnychenko, *Ukrains'ka derzhavnist'*, 15.

<sup>127</sup> Idem., *Revoliutsiia v nebezpetsi!*, 4-7.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 8-11.

<sup>129</sup> Gilley, “Reconciling the Irreconcilable? Left-Wing Ukrainian Nationalism and the Soviet Regime,” *Nationalities Papers* 47.3 (May 2019); 341-354.

state power and sufficient support among the industrial proletariat to remain in place.<sup>130</sup>

The UKP's last resort in challenging Bolshevik legitimacy in Ukraine following the creation of the Soviet Union was to present its case to the Komintern, something that had already been tried without success in 1920 when the party held its First Congress and issued formal theses on the revolutionary situation. Vynnychenko's Foreign Group in Vienna had originally protested in 1920 that the Bolshevik Central Committee had usurped the Komintern's role as the main organizer of the international proletarian struggle, insisting that the latter should consist of autonomous national sections, including a Ukrainian division led by the UKP, and democratically determine the course of the worldwide revolution.<sup>131</sup> At this point, Vynnychenko had directed his outcry to the "communists of Europe and America," most likely expecting that the non-Bolshevik parties aligned with the Komintern would take control in industrially advanced countries and provide the Ukrainian SSR with membership in a global community of socialist nations.<sup>132</sup> In practice, however, the next spate of working-class uprisings in Central Europe failed and Bolsheviks not only expanded their influence in the Komintern but, in 1923, adopted a policy of building "socialism in one country" that shelved the project of world revolution and concentrated on consolidating the Soviet Union as the world's principal laboratory for non-capitalist development. By the time that Richyts'kyi and Drahomirets'kyi appealed to the Komintern again in 1924, the UKP's membership had been seriously

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<sup>130</sup> *Kak i pochemu*, 15-16.

<sup>131</sup> Vynnychenko, *Revoliutsiia v nebezpetsi!*, 37-39.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-5.

eroded by defections to the Bolshevik camp, dropping to a few hundred comrades at most, as Skrypnyk and his allies were keen to emphasize.<sup>133</sup>

While the UKP had fought for the complete independence of a Soviet Ukraine since its formation, the final petition presented to the Komintern attempted to work within the existing framework of ethnically based federalism, requesting military, economic, and political freedoms for the Ukrainian SSR that would more closely approach those held by a sovereign state while reducing the powers of the all-Union authorities.<sup>134</sup> These motions were categorically opposed by Skrypnyk, who forcefully argued that the UKP desired a “confederation” that would be too weak and loose to coordinate large-scale development projects on an all-Union level, an absolute necessity given the parlous state of the Soviet economy and the uneven distribution of resources in different republics. More precisely, Skrypnyk claimed that the UKP desired the completion of separate socialist revolutions in individual national territories, viewing a confederation of these units as a final, stable structure, whereas the correct Bolshevik position treated federalism as a transitional approach to more tightly integrating the far corners of the Soviet Union and waging a collaborative revolutionary campaign that transcended narrow national interests.<sup>135</sup> Skrypnyk, as usual, did not claim that the distant end of federalism would somehow coincide with the elimination of national differences, claiming instead that a closer and ultimately better form of socialist territorial and economic organization among the diverse peoples of the Soviet Union would evolve from the particular structures that had arisen in 1922. The “national Bolshevism” of the UKP, as Skrypnyk dubbed it, could

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<sup>133</sup> *Kak i pochemu*, 125.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 63-65.

never marshal the collective might of the Soviet population to build socialism, jealously guarding the ability to determine Ukraine's developmental path out of nothing more than a distaste for Russia and the Russians. In fact, Skrypnyk argued, the UKP would sooner wager on the success of an ambitious and improbable "world revolution" than it would commit to cooperation with Russian Bolsheviks within the already existing framework of the Soviet Union, which required republics to pool their military, economic, and administrative powers in the interest of collective security and advancement.<sup>136</sup>

While the UKP prided itself as the heir to a nearly quarter-century history of fighting for the liberation of the Ukrainian working classes, beginning with the foundation of the Radical Ukrainian Party (RUP) in 1900 and continuing through the years of the USDLP between 1905 and 1920, Skrypnyk, Popov, and Shums'kyi all targeted this legacy as evidence of the party's failure to abandon the reactionary spirit of the "Second International."<sup>137</sup> The past involvement of UKP leaders such as Richyts'kyi and Drahomirets'kyi's in the Central Rada and the Directory likewise provided the Ukrainian Bolsheviks with grounds on which to accuse their rivals of having formed opportunistic alliances with the Central Powers and, after 1918, the Western Allies, a point emphatically made by Shums'kyi, himself a former Ukrainian Socialist Revolutionary who would become embroiled in his own national "deviation" in 1927.<sup>138</sup> While Richtyts'kyi and Drahomirets'kyi attempted to defend themselves against these accusations, the Komintern's committee, led by Otto Kuusinen and joined by an especially inquisitive Clara Zetkin, were primarily interested in arranging

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., "Pro ukapizm," *Statti i promovy*, T.2, Ch. 1 (Kharkiv: 1929), 59-66.

<sup>137</sup> "Memorandum TsK KP(b)U v Ispolkom Kominterna," *Kak i pochemu*, 37-42.

<sup>138</sup> *Kak i pochemu*, 90-96.

the UKP's integration into the ranks of the Ukrainian Bolsheviks, an aim that had already been partially achieved through the defection of the UKP's Bolshevik-aligned "Left" faction.<sup>139</sup>

Importantly, however, the disbandment of the UKP did not result in the immediate downfall of figures such as Richyts'kyi and Drahomirets'kyi, who remained in the Ukrainian SSR and took up posts in the Bolshevik administration during Skrypnyk's "Ukrainization" campaigns of the 1920s.<sup>140</sup> Unfortunately for all three of these men, the mechanisms of all-Union economic and political integration that Skrypnyk passionately defended against nationalist "deviations" in 1924 and again amid Shums'kyi's downfall in 1927 provided powerful weapons in the hands of an ascendant Stalin in 1928, when the start of the First Five-Year Plan plunged the Ukrainian SSR into a devastating famine. With this in mind, Stephen Velychenko raises an interesting counterfactual scenario by asking how the fate of a Soviet Ukraine under the rule of a party such as the UKP might have played out differently, though such a situation would only be conceivable if a grouping much less centralist than the Bolsheviks had simultaneously held power in the RSFSR.<sup>141</sup> The alternative federal model proposed by the UKP in 1924, as well as the prospect of an independent Soviet Ukraine raised in 1920, nevertheless demonstrate that the Soviet system that took shape in the interwar period was hardly the only conceivable structure through which to resolve the "national-colonial question" in the "borderlands," where expansive revolutionary imaginations took on the challenge of reorganizing a post-

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 145-149.

<sup>140</sup> Viktor M. Zaruba, *Михайло Слабченко в епістолярній та мемуарній спадщині: 1882-1952* (Dnipro: 2004), 335.

<sup>141</sup> Velychenko, *Painting Imperialism and Nationalism Red*.

imperial Russia with different assumptions and ambitions than those held in Bolshevik circles.

### **A Federation of Equals: Mykola Skrypnyk and Soviet national communism**

While there are few direct links connecting the *Ukapisty* to Sultan-Galiev and his circle, both of their visions of national communism and “national self-determination” found a common, determined enemy in Mykola Skrypnyk.<sup>142</sup> A longtime leader of the Kyiv faction of the KP(b)U, Skrypnyk had vigorously opposed the *Ukapisty* as Ukrainian national chauvinists from 1920 to 1925, appearing at their Komintern hearings and advancing the case for their disbandment. Two years earlier, in 1923, Skrypnyk had defended Stalin’s theses on the national question as the true Leninist interpretation, though he conceded that the relationship between Ukraine and Russia was still not perfectly equal.<sup>143</sup> When Sultan-Galiev was expelled from the Party later that year, Skrypnyk delivered a long speech denouncing the theoretical deviations of many borderland communists, accusing Sultan-Galiev of attempting to derail the Bolshevik nationalities policies and fundamentally change the Party line.<sup>144</sup> According to Skrypnyk, the diverse republics of the Soviet Union, though distinct in their languages, cultures, borders, and internal affairs, must strive towards an increasingly tight, fraternal “family of socialist nations.” This perhaps helps to clarify his condemnation of the *Ukapisty* as advocates of “confederation,” a configuration that Skrypnyk considered to be fundamentally wrong in the context of the Soviet Union.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, 345.

<sup>143</sup> *Dvenadtsatyi s'ezd RKP(b)*, 570-580.

<sup>144</sup> Skrypnyk, “Pro spravu Sultan-Halieva,” in *Mykola Skrypnyk*, 29-38.

<sup>145</sup> Idem., “Zblyzhennia i zlittia,” 263.

How, then, did Skrypnyk envision the simultaneous distinctiveness and conversion of the different republics of the Soviet Union? Terry Martin makes the case that Skrypnyk can be considered a paradigmatic national communist who adopted and fiercely defended the Party line laid out by Stalin in 1923.<sup>146</sup> Skrypnyk strongly believed in the importance of territory for the creation of socialist national republics, even suggesting the transfer parts of the Central Black Earth Region from the RSFSR to Ukraine on the basis of their non-Russian ethnographic composition. Citing Stalin, the enlargement of Ukraine, an “oppressed nation,” at the expense of Russia, a former “oppressor nation,” would be a constructive step towards shedding the colonial legacies of the former Russian Empire.<sup>147</sup> As for diaspora populations, such as the millions of ethnic Ukrainians scattered around the Soviet Union, Skrypnyk emphasized that the union republic, the nation’s territorial heartland, should look after the advancement of its extraterritorial population.<sup>148</sup> The integration of cross-border Ukrainians, whether within the Soviet Union or under the rule of its imperialist neighbors, should also be pursued as part of what Martin terms the “Piedmont principle.”<sup>149</sup> Skrypnyk emphasized that the Karelian autonomous region of the RSFSR should pursue the same policy with respect to Karelians in capitalist Finland, while he also apparently encouraged black visitors to the Soviet Union from the United States to carve out their own territorial homelands from the land of their “oppressor nations.”<sup>150</sup> Within the national territories, as Martin points out, Skrypnyk ardently supported all of the elements of Stalin’s policy, encouraging the revival of

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<sup>146</sup> Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, 345.

<sup>147</sup> Skrypnyk, “Pro kordony USRR,” in *Mykola Skrypnyk*, 101-117.

<sup>148</sup> Idem., “Nimets’ke pytannia v SRSR,” in *Tvory*, volume 2, part 2, 244-250.

<sup>149</sup> Idem., “USRR - P’emont ukraïns’kykh trudiashchych mas,” in *Mykola Skrypnyk*, 178-186.

<sup>150</sup> Idem., “Natsional’ne pytannia u Karelii,” in *Tvory*, volume 2, part 2, 60-63.



formerly outlawed languages, the formation of national proletarian cultures, and the development of indigenous Party cadres. Skrypnyk viewed these cultural and linguistic processes, as well as the formation of national identities, as more than fleeting superstructures of economic development, and insisted that nations, though inevitably subject to evolution, would not perish with the attainment of communism.<sup>151</sup>

Skrypnyk's defense of Stalin's "Leninist" positions often found its strongest manifestations in denunciations of various "deviants" from the official Party line. Two groups to receive a particularly thorough castigation in Skrypnyk's writings were the alleged "Luxemburgists" and "Esperantists" who took the concept of a universal proletarian internationalism too far by either downplaying the national issue or imagining that the attainment of communism would forge a single working-class identity complete with its own language.<sup>152</sup> While Rosa Luxemburg had been murdered in Berlin during the German revolution years earlier, Skrypnyk still saw the spirit of her polemics against Lenin in the ranks of the Polish Communist Party and among numerous comrades in the Soviet Union, including Bukharin and Larin, who continued to attack Stalin for making excessive concessions to nationalism. Luxemburg herself had attacked Lenin in 1918 for creating national problems where they had allegedly not existed before, faulting him for undermining the existing revolutionary unity in Ukraine by recognizing Ukraine's "right to self-determination."<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Idem., "Natsional'na polityka na Ukraïny," in *Tvory*, volume 2, part 2, 42-47.

<sup>152</sup> Idem., "Esperantyzatsiia chy ukrainizatsiia," in *Tvory*, volume 2, part 2, 374-379.

<sup>153</sup> See Rosa Luxemburg, "The Nationalities Question," in *The Russian Revolution*, trans. Bertram Wolfe (New York: Workers' Age Publishers, 1940 [1918]).

On the other side of the deviant spectrum, Skrypnyk polemicized with “chauvinists” of different national backgrounds, especially the Great Russian *smenovekhtsy* whom he worried would attempt to infiltrate the Soviet state under NEP.<sup>154</sup> At the same time, Skrypnyk castigated Ukrainian “chauvinists,” among them the *Ukapisty* as well as Bolsheviks critical of Moscow such as Shums’kyi, Khvyl’ovyi, and Volobuyev.<sup>155</sup> What is important, however, is that Skrypnyk shared the views of these fellow national communists that national identities would persist through socialism and that creating a family of equal socialist nations should be the project of all Bolsheviks.<sup>156</sup> Where he differed from them was on the issue of Russo-Ukrainian relations, which the *Ukapisty* in particular saw as beset by the colonial legacies of the old Russian Empire to the extent that Ukrainians should turn away from Moscow and view themselves within an “international federation of Soviet republics.” Shums’kyi and Khvyl’ovyi were more subtle in their analysis of Russo-Ukrainian ties, but they still argued into the late 1920s that Ukraine’s successful experiment in national communism justified more independence from Moscow and closer cultural connections with the West.<sup>157</sup> Volobuyev, meanwhile, theorized that Ukraine was a self-sufficient economic unit separate from the Great Russian core, challenging the idea that economic planning on an all-Union level was either necessary or beneficial for Ukraine.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Skrypnyk, “Lenin pro Ukraïnu,” in *Tvory*, volume 2, part 2, 25-30.

<sup>155</sup> See idem., *Do teorïi borot’by dvokh kul’tur* (Kharkiv: Derzhavne vydavnistvo, 1928).

<sup>156</sup> Idem., “Natsional’na polityka,” 46-47.

<sup>157</sup> Orest Subtelny, *Ukraine: A History*, fourth edition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 391-393.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 393-394.

Skrypnyk, meanwhile, elaborated a different vision in his “Theory of Two Cultures,” a manifesto concerning Russo-Ukrainian relations that pushed against excessive calls for distance between Kharkiv and Moscow.<sup>159</sup> According to Skrypnyk, “chauvinists” on both the Russian and Ukrainian sides, among them Shums’kyi, had devoted their careers to propagating the idea of an irreconcilable antagonism between the two nations rooted in a long history of oppression and struggle. This interpretation, for Skrypnyk, proposed its own “theory of two cultures,” namely the Russian and Ukrainian cultures, that could never fully coexist because of mutual hatred and distrust. Skrypnyk, of course, recognized the presence of contempt for Ukrainian national communism in the ranks of some Russian Bolsheviks, but maintained that the real struggle at hand was entirely different than Shums’kyi claimed. Rather than a centuries old conflict between two distinct Russian and Ukrainian nations, Skrypnyk saw a relatively recent clash between national “chauvinists,” both Russian and Ukrainian, and true socialists of both nationalities who desired a close but equal relationship between the Soviet Union’s two largest peoples.

Perhaps such a reading of the national landscape was possible for Skrypnyk because he sincerely believed that the post-1923 framework for eliminating Russian oppression in the borderlands could allow for a full blossoming of distinct but fraternal national proletarian cultures and deliver the Soviet Union from the Tsarist past. However, despite the renaissance of Ukrainian language and culture which Skrypnyk thoroughly celebrated, Stalin retained power over all-Union economic and military affairs and found no shortage of Party men willing to take Skrypnyk’s place after 1928. No matter how vigorously the Ukrainian cultural awakening had progressed by the start of the first Five-Year Plan, the warnings of Shums’kyi and

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<sup>159</sup> Skrypnyk, *Do teorii borot’by dvokh kul’tur*.

Volobuyev about the underlying dangers of a resurgent, centralizing Moscow held more than a grain of truth, something that Skrypnyk refused to fully accept until his suicide in 1933. Stephen Velychenko suggests that the *Ukapisty* had been right about Ukraine's relationship with Moscow in 1925, and that these "rightist" national communists, in some wild, alternative version of events, might have prevented the calamities of 1928 to 1933 had they managed to seize power and form a separate Ukrainian Red Army and an independent system for economic planning. Skrypnyk's faith in Russo-Ukrainian friendship as the basis for a genuinely Leninist internationalism was undoubtedly powerful, yet the foundations of that partnership proved far too fragile to withstand Stalin's onslaught and the subsequent rehabilitation of the Russian imperial past under what David Brandenberger calls the regime of "national Bolshevism."<sup>160</sup> Stalin indeed retained the rhetoric of a "friendship of nations" after the Second World War, but this family had been violently forged on the ruins of the "family of socialist nations" envisioned by early national communists such as Skrypnyk.

Mykola Skrypnyk's downfall and the dire implications of the first Five-Year Plan for Ukrainian national communism attracted attention from beyond the Soviet Union, perhaps most of all from the Prometheans in Poland. While they had always considered the Soviet state to be the heir to the Great Russian imperialist legacies of Tsarism, the circle of Promethean emigres concentrated in Warsaw, among them the Ukrainians Roman Smal-Stocki and Yuriy Naumenko, detected an especially sinister shift in Soviet borderland policies by 1932.<sup>161</sup> Over the course of the previous decade,

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<sup>160</sup> David Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931-1956* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

<sup>161</sup> "Zjazd językoznawczy narodów ujarzmionych Z.S.R.R.," in *Wschód* 2/3 (1936), 53-58; Yuriy Naumenko, "Ukraina sowiecka," in *Wschód* 3 (1935), 1-11.

Promethean thinkers and theoreticians of nationalism such as Leon Wasilewski and his colleagues at *Sprawy narodowościowe* (*Nationality Issues*) had been keenly aware of Stalin's apparent concessions to the non-Russian peoples of the borderlands. Some, including Wasilewski and Henryk Józewski, knew that the policies of creating indigenous cadres and supporting local languages and cultures in borderland republics like Ukraine would give Soviet rule an attractive national face.<sup>162</sup>

The potential cross-border implications of this for the heavily impoverished Ukrainian and Belarusian peasants of Poland's eastern regions could be dire. In Volhynia, Józewski championed an experiment in Ukrainian autonomy by incorporating Ukrainians into important administrative posts, while the Polish government instituted some agrarian and educational reforms in western Belarus to deter peasants from looking to Minsk for liberation.<sup>163</sup> In any case, Wasilewski and his contemporaries saw Soviet nationalities policies as a temporary retreat from Muscovite centralism intended to keep the outlying republics under Moscow's control on more appealing terms. Lacking natural resources, Wasilewski wrote, the Russian center needed the borderlands far more than the borderlands, which could always count on one another, needed Moscow.<sup>164</sup> In the Promethean imagination, this form of Soviet *Realpolitik* in the nationalities arena would either yield to an eventual reinstatement of central dominance or, if left unchecked, unleash potentially destabilizing antagonisms between Moscow and the borderlands. Within Europe, the

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<sup>162</sup> Timothy Snyder, *Sketches from a Secret War: A Polish Artist's Mission to Liberate Soviet Ukraine* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.; Seweryn Wysłouch, *Rola komunistycznej partji zachodniej Białorusi w ruchu narodowym Białorusinów w Polsce* (Wilno: Rocznik Instytutu Naukowo-Badawczego Europy Wschodniej w Wilnie, 1932).

<sup>164</sup> Leon Wasilewski, " 'Samookreślenie' narodów byłej Rosji," "Ruchy separatystyczne Kaukazu i Turkiestanu," in *Sprawy narodowościowe w teroju i w życiu* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo J. Mortkowicza, 1929), 177-202; 203-232.

Prometheans were surely among the closest followers and harshest critics of the Soviet national communist experiment, anticipating postwar “totalitarian” views of the essentially cynical motives behind Moscow’s toleration of the borderland renaissances of the NEP years. So, despite the Prometheans’ conviction that real power remained in the hands of the Muscovite center after the formation of the Soviet Union in 1922, it was the national communists who, for some time, posed the greatest danger to Poland’s equally perilous experiments in multinational governance.

### **Conclusions**

This chapter has attempted to demonstrate the centrality of internationalist ideas to the articulation of Soviet national communism in the interwar period, focusing on the cases of the Ukrainian Communist Party (UKP or *Ukapisty*), the Tatar Bolshevik Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev, and the Ukrainian Bolshevik Mykola Skrypnyk. Both in the early Soviet Union and in contemporary historiography, internationalist preoccupations are most commonly associated with “left deviants” from the Party line such as Georgy Piatakov, who downplayed the importance of national factors and indeed viewed Lenin and Stalin’s concessions to the borderlands as obstacles on the true path to proletarian universalism. Though vigorously opposed to the “leftists,” the allegedly national-chauvinist “right deviants” were internationalists on terms of their own making. They not only saw themselves as part of an emerging “family of socialist nations” that would one day encompass the world, but also charged Stalin and his supporters with betraying genuine internationalist solidarity by falling back on the centralist, colonialist, and “Great Russian chauvinist” foundations of the former Russian Empire in building the Soviet Union.

In the case of the *Ukapisty*, the KP(b)U led by Skrypnyk were not only charged with being local agents of Muscovite domination in Ukraine, but they were also

categorized as a direct product of the colonial economic system of the former Russian Empire. As a “local chapter” of the Russian Communist Party, the KP(b)U, to the *Ukapisty*, could never claim to be the authentic representatives of the Ukrainian working classes struggling for independent statehood and true socialism. At best, these outsiders could claim to represent the Russian proletarian elements that were running roughshod over the national needs of Ukraine and attempting to bend the course of the “Ukrainian revolution” to meet the economic and strategic needs of their masters in Moscow.

By contrast, Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev started out as a firm believer in the Bolshevik project and seldom expressed a critical attitude towards the Russian workers in his native Tatarstan. Instead, he envisioned the Bolshevik project, with its promises of fraternal national equality and working-class emancipation, as a vehicle for his layered internationalist vision of anticolonial struggle and revolution in the Islamic world. For Sultan-Galiev, Tatarstan was the most industrially developed, proletarian corner of the Islamic world, qualifying it to serve as a “Piedmont” for global revolution. The project of building a geographically expansive, socialist Tatarstan with its own Red Army divisions at home meant nothing less than crafting a model for revolutionary organization that would captivate oppressed peoples around the world and inspire rebellion. With the failure of the Soviet state to free the colonial world, the rise of Stalin, and the declaration of forging “socialism in one country” by 1923, Sultan-Galiev became profoundly disillusioned with the Bolsheviks for their refusal to recognize the primacy of the anticolonial struggle in the East over the revolutions in the West that never came. Moreover, Sultan-Galiev saw in Stalin an oppressor of the borderlands who, in Lenin’s absence, was rolling back the radical

tide of early Bolshevism and constructing a Soviet Union in which the center held far too much power.

Mykola Skrypnyk, meanwhile, rejected both the *Ukapisty* and Sultan-Galiev as “chauvinists,” trusting that a common devotion to national equality and proletarian fraternity would allow Ukraine and Russia to coexist within the Soviet Union. Largely concerned with language and culture, Skrypnyk helped oversee Soviet Ukraine’s creative renaissance in the 1920s, yet the concentration of all-Union powers in Moscow allowed Stalin to intervene against the national communists after 1928. Skrypnyk had always been one of the most devoted champions of the Stalinist nationalities program articulated in 1923, and so the passing of this system in 1928 to 1933 proved central to his undoing.

All three of these case studies demonstrate the centrality of internationalist visions and frames of reference for very different national communists who lived and fought for revolution around the same time. For some of them, namely the *Ukapisty*, breaking free from the legacies of imperial Russia and the ongoing hegemony of the Muscovite center meant not only criticizing colonial relations between Russia and Ukraine, but also imagining an alternative community of free socialist nations beyond the reach of Moscow. When this vision failed to materialize and the Soviet Union was consolidated in late 1922, the *Ukapisty* struggled to reconfigure the federal system into a loose confederation by demanding for Ukraine full sovereignty, complete with an independent army, a separate Party apparatus, and a locally dictated economic policy. For Sultan-Galiev, the local struggle for a Soviet Tatarstan was closely interwoven with the destruction of worldwide colonialism and the elevation of Islamic societies to socialism, goals that seemed attainable through work with the Bolsheviks and contact with communists in Afghanistan, Iran, and Turkey. The betrayal of



anticolonial internationalism and the reinstatement of unequal ties between center and periphery by Stalin in the early Soviet Union disillusioned Sultan-Galiev, who became an outcast from the Party and was later constructed by the NKVD as the prime antagonist in various pan-Islamic, pan-Turkic plots to topple socialism. Skrypnyk, finally, trusted in the possibility of true national equality within the parameters set by Stalin in 1923, becoming the most passionate advocate of this version of national communism whose destruction claimed his life.

## Chapter Four: An Alternative Internationalism

The Promethean world network, borderland exiles, and visions of post-Soviet order in Eurasia, 1926-1939

When the Red Army invaded the Georgian Democratic Republic in February of 1921, Noe Zhordania, the country's Chairman and an eminent Menshevik leader, fled into exile, first escaping the Bolsheviks through nearby Turkey and eventually settling in France for the rest of his life.<sup>1</sup> The following year, Zhordania published a scathing denunciation of the Bolsheviks in Berlin, disparaging his rivals as "Asiatic" despots who had build a "state-capitalist" system rooted in the dictatorship of the party and the suppression of the toiling masses.<sup>2</sup> While Zhordania and his Menshevik comrades had seen the February Revolution of 1917 as a crucial step in Russia's struggle to overturn autocracy and undergo modern capitalist development, they believed that it would be a protracted and gradual process of socioeconomic maturation before the sprawling, multinational state could achieve a democratic form of socialism by "scientific" means. The Bolsheviks, by contrast, had discarded the valuable experiences of more advanced European countries and blazed their own violent path to domination, deriving power, in Zhordania's view, from Russia's vast territory and population without achieving anything in the way of historical progress.<sup>3</sup> Zhordania's view, at the time, was increasingly common among anti-Bolshevik Social Democrats around the world, including the Russian-Jewish Menshevik Iulii (Julius) Martov, who claimed in 1923 that Bolshevism had essentially grown from the raw "backwardness" of Russia before infecting more cultured societies thrust into breakdown by the First

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<sup>1</sup> Eric Lee, *The Experiment: Georgia's Forgotten Revolution 1918-1921* (London: Zed Books, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> Noe Zhordania, *Bol'shevizm* (Berlin: Tsentral'nyi Komitet Sotsial-Demokraticheskoi Rabochei Partii Gruzii, 1922).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

World War.<sup>4</sup> Karl Kautsky, meanwhile, had visited Zhordania's Georgia before its demise, considering the small country to be a vibrant enclosure of genuine Social Democracy that would be crushed by the militaristic "Bonapartism" of the Bolsheviks.<sup>5</sup>

Early in his time abroad, Zhordania found himself in good company in the Labor and Socialist International (LSI), a loose federation of moderate socialist parties founded in 1923 as a continuation of the Second International that explicitly opposed the Bolshevik-led Communist International (Komintern) formed in 1919. Heavily shaped by the British Labour Party and the Social Democratic Party of Germany, the LSI included several major groupings forced to take refuge abroad by the Bolsheviks, from the Russian Socialist Revolutionaries and Russian Mensheviks to the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, the Ukrainian Social Democratic Labor Party, and Zhordania's Georgian Mensheviks.<sup>6</sup> Yet while the LSI condemned Bolshevism and proposed to strive for a different kind of "Socialist Commonwealth," it was not specifically geared towards the political interests of exiles like Zhordania, who began constructing their own institutions of cross-borderland solidarity in key urban hubs such as Paris as early as 1921.<sup>7</sup> The idea of a distinctly defined internationalism of the imperial Russian and later Soviet borderlands, however, had already been germinating in the minds of Józef Piłsudski and his camp even before the October Revolution, when Zhordania and his contemporaries in other non-Russian regions still overwhelmingly held that the "national question" could be resolved through structures

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<sup>4</sup> Iulii Martov, *Mirovoi bol'shevizm* (Berlin: "Iskra", 1923).

<sup>5</sup> Karl Kautsky, *Georgia* (London: International Bookshops, Limited, 1921).

<sup>6</sup> "Labor and Socialist International," in *The American Labor Yearbook* 5 (1923-1924); 290-297.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 296.

of autonomy for the nationalities. Piłsudski, since the 1890s, had promoted full independence from Saint Petersburg and Petrograd as the sole path to national and social liberation, a marginal position in 1917 that, in the course of the civil war years, grew increasingly prevalent throughout the borderlands as the rise of the Bolsheviks, the mobilization of the monarchist Whites, and the breakdown of the smoldering front lines strung between the Baltic, Black, and Caspian seas compelled previously reform-minded leaders such as Zhordania to declare their separation from Russia.<sup>8</sup>

While Piłsudski and his associates had attempted to promote their separatist project among Poles and non-Poles alike within the late Russian Empire, they had made relatively little progress in finding allies by 1917, yet the turmoil of the next five years coupled with the massive exodus of borderland intellectuals and activists to other parts of Eurasia created much more propitious circumstances for the creation of an anti-Bolshevik internationalism of the borderlands in exile.<sup>9</sup> Following several years of covert network building by Polish military intelligence officers, the Promethean movement (*ruch prometejski*) formally emerged in Paris and Warsaw in the first half of 1926, just as Piłsudski, stripped of his executive powers in 1922, returned to power in Poland by way of a coup. Zhordania, alongside the leaders of the Azeri Müsavat Party, the North Caucasian emigration, and Ukrainian emigre circles aligned with Symon Petliura all joined Prometheism's inaugural cohort in Paris, laying the groundwork for a network that would significantly expand to include research institutions, publishing ventures, and espionage operations by the start of the 1930s. From the outset, Prometheism was multifocal in both geographical and intellectual terms, and few of its non-Polish members were exclusively committed to

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<sup>8</sup> See Chapters One and Two for a discussion of the positions of Piłsudski and the Polish Socialist Party.

<sup>9</sup> See Chapter Two on ideas of autonomy and federalism in the borderlands.

the project, with Zhordania continuing his correspondence with progressive Russophone exiles and the Mūsavat contingent pursuing ties with pan-Turkic ideologues throughout the interwar period. Moreover, while Prometheism broadly called for the creation of a post-Soviet Eurasia of independent nation-states inhabited by the “peoples oppressed by Moscow,” the question of what kind of international structure should order relations among those future polities, and where a post-Soviet Russia would fit into any such arrangement, elicited diverse interpretations. Importantly, many of the same Parisian Prometheans who had sought autonomy within Russia before 1917 now advocated a liberal internationalist society of sovereign, “civilized” nation-states grouped within federations and confederations. Prometheism, in this sense, was not an end in itself but a means, and a materially enticing forum, for the contemplation of how to structure ties among nations in the absence of Bolshevik federalism.

The Warsaw Prometheans, meanwhile, appear to have been the closest heirs to the informal school of weaponized nationalism that Piłsudski pioneered in previous decades, founding academic institutions that produced some of interwar Europe’s most voluminous bodies of writing on how to bring down the Soviet Union. Having failed to totally tear away the borderlands from Bolshevik rule by 1921, Piłsudski’s disciples immersed themselves in the pursuit of preparing for the next great geopolitical “conjuncture” (*konjunktura*), whether wrought by war or economic crisis, that would weaken the Bolsheviks and open the way for the exploitation of the Soviet Union’s ethnic heterogeneity. Armed with state funding and access to expert emigres with a supposedly intimate knowledge of the internal fault lines of the Soviet space, the Warsaw Prometheans turned the study of the Soviet nationalities and the weaponization of nationalism into a far broader enterprise concerned with the history,

economics, politics, and geography of Eurasia, creating an applied “Orientalism” meant to serve the interests of the Polish state and assist in the eventual creation of a Warsaw-backed bloc of countries between the Baltic and Black Seas. Many of these studies on the Soviet system produced a partial and distorted image that runs against the grain of more recent scholarship, yet it was, according to Ralph Schattkowsky, one of the most prominent intellectual and political undertakings of its kind in Europe at the time, even exerting influence on German *Ostforschung*.<sup>10</sup>

While the Promethean world network enjoyed a degree of ideological and organizational coherence that kept it together, it would be inaccurate to think of this global movement as either the handmaiden of the Polish state or as an organization rigidly governed by unchanging ideological strictures.<sup>11</sup> To the contrary, Prometheism was a geographically multifocal, intellectually evolving internationalist project whose immense output in the pages of several major multilingual journals over more than a decade reflects the movement’s internal complexities and ambiguities. Just as often as they affirmed their shared antipathy for the Soviet system, Prometheism’s leading thinkers differed as to which specific borderlands formed the true crux of their campaign, envisioning special, often messianic roles for their particular nations. Moreover, the question of what constituted a proper “nation” remained open as late as 1939, with some activists criticizing the established Ukrainian and Caucasian emigres for neglecting the “emerging” or “crystallizing” nations of the Soviet Far East and Central Asia.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, in an apparent clash of “fathers” and “children,” to

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<sup>10</sup> Ralph Schattkowsky, *Osteuropaforschung in Polen 1918-1939* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2019).

<sup>11</sup> For an excellent commentary on this subject, see Paweł Libera, “Zarys ruchu prometejskiego,” in *II Rzeczpospolita wobec ruchu prometejskiego*, 31-66.

<sup>12</sup> Central Military Archive of Poland (henceforth CAW), I.303.4.5693, “Uwagi w kwestii reorganizacji pracy prometeuszowskiej w Paryżu,” 1-4.

borrow from Turgenev, the younger activists of the 1930s demanded a more disciplined, uniform, and authoritarian structure for the Promethean movement, specifically taking aim at the older guard of emigres whom they lambasted for their lavish lifestyles and Social Democratic leanings.<sup>13</sup> If the main internationalist mission of the established Promethean emigres had been to spread an unfinished “national revolution” to the Soviet borderlands and bring the “captive nations” into the “civilized world,” these more youthful upstarts sought to forcefully update Prometheism so that it could withstand competition from the fascist anticommunism emanating from Germany, Italy, and Japan, envisioning for themselves a place in the impending “world war” between “nationalism” and “communism.”<sup>14</sup>

In short, a dialectic of cohesion and conflict was always inherent in Prometheism, suggesting that emigre internationalism, though theoretically a source of unity, raised just as many contentious questions as it provided clear answers about ideology and organization. While Prometheism itself is only coming to be well understood outside of Eastern Europe, it has the potential to contribute a rich case study to the growing literature on the intellectual activities of Soviet emigres in the interwar years. The recent work of Elizabeth White on the Socialist-Revolutionary community in Prague between 1921 and 1939, for instance, has demonstrated that emigres did much more than jostle for recognition from established governments in a crowded world of stateless intellectuals.<sup>15</sup> Instead, White has compellingly argued that the vibrant Socialist-Revolutionary camp in Prague actually produced strikingly original yet

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 5-10.

<sup>14</sup> On the younger activists and “national radicalism,” see *ibid.*, 2-3; *Młody Prometeusz* (1936 and 1938 issues).

<sup>15</sup> Elizabeth White, *The Socialist Alternative to Bolshevik Russia: The Socialist Revolutionary Party, 1921-39* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

sadly unknown meditations on the nature of Russian national identity, the situation of the national minorities in the borderlands, and, most importantly, the potential economic, social, and administrative structure of a post-Soviet Russia. The case of the Prometheans further advance White's general conclusions about interwar emigre networks as intellectually fecund communities of ideas while bringing in the voices of a multiethnic community of thinkers for whom the "national question" was a central concern.

At the same time, the story of Prometheism as a multinational project in emigration serves as a kind of inverted image of Liliana Riga's portrait of the early Bolsheviks as an ethnically pluralistic community of revolutionaries.<sup>16</sup> Riga has contended that the Bolsheviks' rejection of Russian "chauvinism" and embrace of a more inclusive, civic, *rossiiskii* identity helped to cement an alliance between socially aggrieved ethnic Russians of working-class background with non-Russians who, despite belonging to higher social strata, were marginalized by ethnic exclusion under Tsarism. Yet, if *rossiiskii* "universalism" united the Bolsheviks by 1917, there were also many alternative, anti-Bolshevik internationalist projects such as Prometheism that brought together a diverse community of non-Russian elites who had been forcibly expelled in the course of the civil wars. Unlike Bolshevism, Prometheism posited a fundamental continuity between the Tsarist and Soviet states as evidence of the tyrannical character of Russian political culture and a basis for an alliance of the peripheries against Moscow. However simplistic that premise appears at the outset of the twenty-first century, it held immense purchase in the minds of a worldwide community of emigres not only in the interwar years, but also in the Cold War world, where many surviving Prometheans aligned themselves with the American camp as

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<sup>16</sup> Liliana Riga, *The Bolsheviks and the Russian Empire* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012).



professional Sovietologists and policy advisers, contributing to the elaboration of theories of “oriental despotism,” “totalitarianism,” and the fundamentally “patrimonial” character of the Russian state since the inception of Muscovy.

### **The architecture of the Promethean world network**

While the collapse of the Russian Empire into revolution and civil war between 1917 and 1922 produced a massive exodus of borderland nationalists who had opposed the Bolsheviks and the Whites, the Promethean world network of the interwar period provided a flexible but, in general, coherent framework within which some of these exiles chose to organize themselves. Most current historians of the Promethean movement concur that the formal origins of the movement, as well as the very name “Prometheism,” date to the mid-1920s, when members of the Polish military intelligence staff who had been loyal to Piłsudski brokered an alliance of emigres from Ukraine, Georgia, Azerbaijan, the North Caucasus, and Central Asia in Paris.<sup>17</sup> While this was the first time that a substantial group of borderland emigres decided to form a common center for anti-Soviet political and intellectual activity, archival records and recently published documents show that Polish agents, most notably Tadeusz Hołówko, had actually exerted substantial effort to win over exiles in Ankara and İstanbul in the young Turkish republic between 1921 and 1925.<sup>18</sup> There, working through Polish diplomatic posts, Hołówko and his associates had fought to gain passage to Poland for military elites originally hailing from the Caucasus, but the process of obtaining formal approval for this endeavor proved to be convoluted because of the uneasy political situation in Poland, which was then ruled by the

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<sup>17</sup> Charaszkiwicz, “Referat,” 63-67.

<sup>18</sup> Archiwum Akt Nowych w Warszawie (henceforth AAN), Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych, B 22985/6678; Libera, “Zarys,” 42-43.

National Democrats.<sup>19</sup> Hołówko also attempted to group together emigres from Chechnya, Dagestan, and other regions of the North Caucasus, but the maneuvering of Turkish political elites towards better relations with the Soviet Union coupled with serious divisions among the exiles themselves drew out the affair.<sup>20</sup> By 1926, Hołówko had partially succeeded in bringing Caucasian exiles into Poland, yet the difficulties of the previous five years illustrated just how complex it was to build a Promethean network across national borders and ideological fault lines in practice.<sup>21</sup> Before delving into the intellectual history of Prometheism, it is essential to first establish a sense of the movement's overarching structural features, without which it would be impossible to properly appreciate the spatial and organizational underpinnings of the Promethean community of ideas.

The architecture of the interwar Promethean world network was characterized from the outset by a dialectic of cohesion and tension inherent in the attempts of its builders to mobilize a geographically diffuse, ideologically diverse, and constantly shifting landscape of emigre communities behind the polysemic project of creating an anti-Soviet internationalism. The structures of emigre groupings constantly shifted under the force of internal disagreements and sometimes severe disputes between exiles of different nationalities, while proponents of an overarching Promethean unity frequently found it difficult to assert their ideological imperatives and ideas for organizational consolidation over governments-in-exile with a strong sense of autonomy. Meanwhile, the attractiveness of rival anti-Soviet internationalisms, such as the fascist anticommunism of Hitler's Germany or the pan-Asian visions of some

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<sup>19</sup> Charaszkiwicz, "Referat," 63.

<sup>20</sup> AAN, B 22985/6678; Mamoulia, "Predislovie," in *Kavkazskaia konfederatsiia*, 8-15.

<sup>21</sup> Charaszkiwicz, "Referat," 64-65.

Japanese leaders, proved to be the source of constant anxiety for military intelligence officers and devoted Promethean activists who feared the defection of their emigre allies to other camps.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, it is impossible to overstate the importance of the shifting political landscape within Poland, the source country for much of the Promethean budget, and the changing situation in Polish-Soviet relations in the 1930s. When Piłsudski sought nonaggression pacts with both Berlin and Moscow in the waning years of his life, Prometheism was thrust into an inconvenient, uncomfortable, and costly position as the official line of the Polish government towards the Soviet Union softened.<sup>23</sup> The same principle, of course, applied to the many other countries in which Promethean operations were underway, especially in France and Turkey, making the overall situation all the more challenging to coordinate from the viewpoint of the military intelligence staff in Warsaw.<sup>24</sup>

Yet in spite of these constant fluctuations and centrifugal tendencies, there were strong sinews of coherence and unity that, on balance, supported the Promethean world network throughout the interwar period. These sources of cohesion can be thought of in terms of at least three main concepts, namely institutions, intermediaries, and ideas. First, the movement was perhaps most robustly anchored in several major cities that hosted Promethean institutions ranging from newspapers and journals to emigre circles and official Promethean “clubs.”<sup>25</sup> In the course of the interwar period, only Warsaw, Paris, Helsinki, and Harbin became home to Promethean “clubs,”

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<sup>22</sup> CAW, I.303.4.5629, “Przeciągania prometeuszowców na stronę Japonii-Niemiec-Włoch, informacje i stanowisko.”

<sup>23</sup> Charaszkiwicz, “Referat,” 77-80.

<sup>24</sup> CAW, I.303.4.5710, “Stosunki turecko-sowieckie,” “Wycinki z prasy tureckiej o stosunkach turecko-sowieckich,” “Stan pracy prometeuszowskiej w Stambule pod koniec roku 1935”; CAW, I.303.4.5613, “Plan przeniesienia kierowników organizacji narodowościowych-prometeuszowskich z Francji.”

<sup>25</sup> Charaszkiwicz, “Referat,” 64-65.

which were usually housed in apartments or offices and served as gathering points for local emigres and traveling Prometheans, hosting lectures, film screenings, and social hours for those affiliated with the movement. The Promethean clubs were also the sites of serious organizational meetings and ideological discussions that shaped the movement's direction, while their leaders were generally involved in editing, printing, and distributing Promethean literature.<sup>26</sup> Warsaw and Paris were by far the leading centers of intellectual activity in terms of the volume of Promethean publications that they produced, yet it was Warsaw, home to the densest concentration of Promethean institutions and the headquarters of the military intelligence elites who heavily funded the network, that was the jewel in the crown. Other centers of Promethean work appeared for stretches of the interwar years in other cities, most notably Berlin, Prague, Ankara, İstanbul, Tehran, and Cairo, where efforts at organizing local emigres were always underway. Wilno, the largest city in the traditional homelands of the Lipka Tatars, was especially important for the Turkic and Muslim emigres in interwar Poland, though it did not boast a club of its own.<sup>27</sup>

Second, the major institutional nodes in the Promethean network were linked by mobile intermediaries who crossed international boundaries, founded institutions in new cities, and ensured the physical circulation of money, information, and ideas. In an increasingly interconnected world of telegraph lines and postal systems underpinned by railways and steamship routes, the Promethean network did not necessarily rely on human emissaries for its most routine integrative functions, such as the dissemination of newspapers and journals, the transmission of sensitive information, or the movement of funds in multiple currencies. Yet, personal

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<sup>26</sup> "1938, 1 czerwca, Warszawa. Tekst powitania przywódców frontu prometejskiego na konferencji polsko-prometejskiej," in *Państwo polskie*, 444-450.

<sup>27</sup> Charaszkiwicz, "Referat," 64-65.

connections remained crucial in holding together the Promethean movement throughout the interwar period, whether in the resolution of serious disputes among emigres, the recruitment of exiles in new countries, or the foundation of Promethean outposts beyond the network's existing boundaries. The case of the Lipka Tatar diaspora stands out as an exemplary instance in which the personal and familial ties of highly mobile elites within the old Russian Empire worked to connect the Promethean cause with a wide community of Muslim and Turkic intellectuals who proved to be some of its most articulate proponents.<sup>28</sup> The peregrinations of figures such as Tadeusz Hołówko and Edmund Charaszkiewicz likewise illustrate how the globetrotting efforts of intermediaries determined to advancing the Promethean movement continued to play a crucial role in the age of the telegram.<sup>29</sup> Likewise, even in a time of mass print media, the intellectual life of Prometheism was kindled by the growing community of Orientalists and Sovietologists who traveled great distances between clubs and academic institutions to deliver lectures to audiences often consisting of the movement's youngest, most curious members.

Third and most broadly, ideas constituted the vital lifeblood of the Prometheism and constituted the principal medium in which the movement's diverse community of nationalist intellectuals, Sovietologists, and Orientalists articulated and contested the meaning of the endeavor in which they were engaged. Ideas lived a fascinating social and spatial life in the Promethean world network, circulating in the pages of the movement's major journals, in organizational and ideological directives emanating from Warsaw and Paris, and in the unrecorded lectures, debates, and conversations that filled every center of Promethean activity in multiple languages. At the same time,

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<sup>28</sup> Leon Kryczyński, "Tatarzy polscy," 103-115; Ayas Ishaki, "Kongres muzułmański 1931 r.," *Wschód: kwartalnik* 7/8 (1932), 57-59.

<sup>29</sup> Libera, "Zarys," 40-43.

the production of Promethean ideas was deeply embedded in Promethean institutions, most of which published their own newspapers, journals, and monograph series dealing with the borderlands of the Soviet Union and the organization of a post-Soviet northern Eurasia.<sup>30</sup>

For much of the interwar period, it was elite emigres and Polish Sovietologists who enjoyed a privileged position with respect to the means of knowledge production in Promethean circles, editing, printing, and circulating the movement's most widely read publications.<sup>31</sup> In principle, even the newcomers among the Promethean emigres were regarded as honorary experts on the inner life of the former Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, and the work that they published entered the canonical tomes of Promethean Sovietology. Simultaneously, they pushed to establish themselves as authorities on the Soviet "prison of nations" beyond Promethean circles by appealing to the "civilized" sensibilities of foreign educated audiences and political leaders in a variety of languages that included German, French, English, and Turkish. Reaching these readers, of course, entailed more than using a widely understood language, and Promethean writers often incorporated the language of Wilsonian liberal internationalism into their appeals for Western opposition to the Soviet Union.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Charaszkiewicz, "Referat," 64-67.

<sup>31</sup> The principal Promethean journals were *Wschód*, published in Polish with frequent English translations or summaries, *Wschód: kwartalnik*, managed by the Circle of Young Orientalists, and *Le Prométhée*, officially run by the Caucasian National Committee in Paris. A shorter paper, *Daleki Wschód*, was published in Harbin, while *Prometheus*, which mostly consisted of reprints from the three main journals, appeared in Helsinki.

<sup>32</sup> See Djafar Seydamet, "Wschód i Tiurkowie," *Wschód: kwartalnik*, 22-26; Bączkowski's introductory article in *Wschód: kwartalnik* 3-4 (1932), 1-5 and the opening piece titled "Z dziedziny polskiej polityki wschodniej," in *Wschód* 1-2 (1932-1933), 1-3. Direct appeals to Wilsonian principles were much more common in *Le Prométhée*. Illustrative examples include Georges Scelle, "Paix et Fédéralisme," 2 (December 1926), 4-6; "Memorandum du Comité pour l'indépendance du Caucase à la 9<sup>me</sup> Session de l'Assemblée de la Société des Nations," 23 (October 1928), 1-3; M. Kartweli, "La Confédération des États du Caucase: Quelques réflexions sur un projet de Pacte Fédéral," 53 (April 1931), 6-9. Most discussions of a Caucasian Confederation and appeals to the League of Nations are couched in a Wilsonian register.

The different urban emigre centers enmeshed in the Promethean world network can be best understood in terms of the interplay of institutions, intermediaries, and ideas in which each specific node served particular functions. Warsaw, as one of the focal points of Promethean activity, was home to a large community of Ukrainian emigres, many of whom had fought under Piłsudski and Petliura in their ill-fated march on the Dnipro in 1920.<sup>33</sup> Alongside the Ukrainians, a sizable colony of Georgian, Azeri, and North Caucasian exiles lived in Warsaw, with another wave of Tatars from Crimea and the Volga region as well as Central Asian nationalists arriving in the 1930s. While Wilno and its Lipka Tatar hinterlands attracted some of the Turkic and Muslim emigres, the major Promethean institutions in Warsaw were just as alluring, especially in the case of the Eastern Institute founded in 1926.<sup>34</sup> With Piłsudski's rise to power that year, funding for Promethean research on the Soviet Union and the "East" more generally increased, allowing the Institute's affiliates to publish ethnographic, economic, and geopolitical treatises on the Eurasian borderlands in the journal *Wschód (Orient)* organized in part by the Ukrainian scholar Roman Smal-Stocki.<sup>35</sup>

While many of the more established emigres contributed to this title, another journal run by the Circle of Young Orientalists at the Eastern Institute gathered a diverse circle of university students committed to promoting better understanding between the peoples of the "West" and the "East."<sup>36</sup> This latter group, which included Ukrainian, Tatar, Georgian, Azeri, Chechen, and Ingush affiliates, was headed by

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<sup>33</sup> Charaszkiwicz, "Referat," 62.

<sup>34</sup> Leon Kryczyński, "Tatarzy polscy," 109.

<sup>35</sup> Charaszkiwicz, "Referat," 64-65; Schattowsky, "Prometheismus und Osteuropaforschung," 538-539.

<sup>36</sup> "Pozdrowienie Młodzieży Narodów Wschodu," "Od Redakcji," *Wschód: kwartalnik* 1 (1930), 2-4; Mahomet-Bej Chukua, "Kaukaz a Rosja," *Wschód: kwartalnik* 2 (1930), 22.

Włodzimierz Bączkowski, a student who later became a prominent Sovietologist in Poland and, after 1939, Great Britain and the United States.<sup>37</sup> Both of the Institute's major journals served as spaces for the articulation of borderland internationalism by both the established exile community and the Young Orientalists, making Warsaw a crucial center of knowledge production within the Promethean world network. However, by the 1930s, some of these younger Prometheans contributed to the push for a more disciplined, uniform movement, challenging the authority of the older generation of emigres.<sup>38</sup>

In addition to hosting a major Promethean club and the Eastern Institute, Warsaw was home to the headquarters of the General Staff of the Polish Armed Forces, whose Second Division managed, or at least tried to control, the movement's organizational and financial affairs throughout the interwar period. Well before Piłsudski had seized power in 1926, agents of the Second Division had worked to bring together emigres of different nationalities behind a common, international front against the Soviet Union, which men like Charaszkiewicz regarded as the greatest threat to Polish independence.<sup>39</sup> While the formal establishment of the Promethean movement in 1926 brought a greater degree of regularity to relations between Warsaw and the borderland exiles, the messiness and unpredictability of emigre politics that had plagued much of Hołówko and Charaszkiewicz's work in 1921 to 1925 persisted as a perennial point of frustration between the Second Division's senior officers and the emerging Promethean centers, particularly in Paris. Desiring a well organized, ideologically united, and organizationally efficient model for the Promethean movement,

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<sup>37</sup> Jacek Kłoczowski and Paweł Kowal, "O Włodzimierzu Bączkowskim," in *Włodzimierz Bączkowski: O wschodnich problemach Polski* (Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, 2000), 7-14.

<sup>38</sup> See the issues of *Młody Prometeusz* from 1936 and 1938.

<sup>39</sup> Charaszkiewicz, "Referat," 56-63.



Charaszkiewicz and his associates sometimes grew frustrated with the Paris circle, whose members he reprimanded for privileging their own governments-in-exile over the “general-Promethean” cause as well as failing to tightly adhere to the budgets set in Warsaw.<sup>40</sup> Up until the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, the tensions that characterized the Paris-Warsaw relationship led prominent figures in the Second Division to contemplate the wholesale “reorganization” of Prometheism in a manner that would curtail the autonomy of individual emigre groupings and establish a stricter definition of Promethean internationalism.<sup>41</sup>

In spite of these disagreements, the Paris-Warsaw axis was perhaps the most important backbone of the Promethean movement in interwar Eurasia. This was largely because Prometheism’s formal inception had taken place in Paris in 1926, when a group of Georgian, Azeri, and North Caucasian emigres collaborated with the Second Division to form an organization centered on the monthly journal *Le Prométhée*, a leading intellectual force in the Promethean world.<sup>42</sup> These same emigres, claiming to be the legitimate representatives of their Soviet-ruled homelands, soon formed a Caucasian National Committee and, in the late 1930s, a Committee of the Friendship of Peoples that included Ukrainian and Central Asian exiles.<sup>43</sup> Both of these Parisian projects, according to Charaszkiewicz, were achieved with substantial input from the Second Division, which provided the funding and organizational initiative necessary to rally the Caucasian emigres behind “general-Promethean”

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<sup>40</sup> “1930, listopad/grudzień. Notatka Karola Dubicza Penthera z pobytu w Paryżu w listopadzie 1930 r. w sprawie reorganizacji miesięcznika *Prométhée*,” “1931, 30 kwietnia: Projekt statutu czasopisma *Prométhée* autorstwa kpt. Edmunda Charaszkiewicza,” in *II Rzeczpospolita*, 174-175, 184-185.

<sup>41</sup> CAW, I.303.4.5693, “Uwagi w kwestii reorganizacji pracy prometeuszowskiej w Paryżu.”

<sup>42</sup> Mamoulia, *Kavkazskaia konfederatsiia*, 11-19.

<sup>43</sup> Libera, “Zarys,” 48-49; “1934, 23 lipca. Pismo kpt. Edmunda Charaszkiewicza do placówki w Paryżu, w sprawie utworzenia Komitetu Przyjaźni Ludów Kaukazu, Ukrainy i Turkiestanu zamiast Klubu Prometeusz w Paryżu, nr. 745/34/31,” in *II Rzeczpospolita*, 308-309.

projects that transcended the interests of individual “governments-in-exile.” The management of *Le Prométhée*, which never seemed to reach a sufficiently wide commercial readership to even cover the costs of its publication, likewise proved to be a point of contention between the emigres and the Second Division, with Charaszkiewicz inferring that the emigres were simply making use of the journal to pocket monthly subsidies from Warsaw and finance their comfortable lifestyles.<sup>44</sup>

While *Le Prométhée* ran some of the most iconic and ideologically influential Promethean articles of the interwar period, this was a clear breach, in the eyes of Charaszkiewicz, of the level of discipline expected from members of a major internationalist movement that would need much more devotion and cohesion to succeed in its anti-Soviet mission. The Paris Promethean circle also faced difficulties in uniting the entire Caucasian emigration all the way up to 1939. The Armenians, though guaranteed a place in these organizations, abstained from working with the Caucasian National Committee because of the pro-Turkish orientations of its core members, especially the leaders of the national-liberal and mildly pan-Turkic Azeri Mussavat party of Mammad Amin Rasulzadeh.<sup>45</sup> Noe Zhordania, a Menshevik who led the Georgian “government-in-exile” in Paris, was opposed by a rival group of Georgian emigres based in Berlin, while the *Prométhée* circle’s claim to be the sole defender of Caucasian, Ukrainian, and Central Asian interests was disputed in the second half of the 1930s by an emigre “Union of Black Sea States” that appealed to the Second Division for recognition.<sup>46</sup> Yet in spite of the deficiencies of the Paris

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<sup>44</sup> “1931, 30 kwietnia: Projekt statutu czasopisma Prométhée autorstwa kpt. Edmunda Charaszkiewicza,” in *II Rzeczpospolita*, 184-185.

<sup>45</sup> Mir Yacoub, “Le Problème du Caucase,” *Le Prométhée* 45 (August 1930), 1-2.

<sup>46</sup> “1937, 21 maja, Paryż. Memoriał Rady Związku Państw Morza Czarnego dla marszałka Polski Edwarda Rydza-Śmigłego,” in *Państwo polskie*, 406-412.

circle from the perspective of military intelligence elites in Warsaw, the *Prométhée* group formed a tightly woven community of emigres who, by 1939, had made significant strides towards theorizing the geopolitics of the Caucasus and actually preparing the juridical ground for an alternative “Caucasian Confederation” that would replace the existing model in the event of a Soviet breakup.<sup>47</sup> This project even attracted exiles from Ukraine and Central Asia who, strikingly, looked to the Caucasus rather than Poland as the lynchpin in the worldwide Promethean project.<sup>48</sup> Though perhaps not the most efficient enterprise in financial or organizational terms, *Le Prométhée* was an extraordinarily prolific journal that produced a substantial part of the total intellectual output of the Prometheans between 1926 and 1940.

While Warsaw, Paris, and the dramas that linked them lay at the core of the Promethean world network, Helsinki and Harbin also played notable roles in the movement’s system of institutions, intermediaries, and ideas. Helsinki’s first major entry into Promethean affairs dates to the very beginning of the 1930s, when the Tatar emigre Ayas Ishaki traveled there one summer from Warsaw with the goal of gauging potential support for the movement among the communities of exiles residing in the Finnish capital.<sup>49</sup> Once a major city of the western Russian Empire, interwar Helsinki had also attracted a small but vibrant population of emigres, the greater part of whom hailed from the territories of Ingria and Karelia that became part of the Soviet Union by 1922 and belong to the Russian Federation to this day. The activists and intellectuals from these regions were ethnically and linguistically related to the Finns

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<sup>47</sup> “Pakt Konfederatsii Kavkaza, 14 iulia 1934 g,” in *Kavkazskaia konfederatsiia*, 95-97.

<sup>48</sup> “Deklaratsiia predstavitelei Azerbaidzhana, Severnogo Kavkaza, Gruzii i Ukrainskoi Respubliki ob ukreplenii i razvitii Kavkazsko-ukrainskikh sviazei. 26 iulia 1925 g,” in *Kavkazskaia konfederatsiia*, 55-57; Dmytro Boug, “La Mer Noire,” *Le Prométhée* 73 (December 1932), 20-23.

<sup>49</sup> “1930, 21 października. Sprawozdanie Ayasa Ischaki z wyjazdu organizacyjnego do Finlandii w sierpniu i wrześniu 1930 r., nr. 2700/II.Inf./21/XI,” in *Państwo polskie*, 165-169.

living in Finland, and were able to work closely with right-wing Finnish nationalists in Helsinki to strive for an enlarged, pan-Finnish state that would grow at the expense of the Soviet Union.<sup>50</sup> When Ishaki arrived in Helsinki, however, it became clear that he had chosen a poor time of year for his journey, as nearly all of the prospective Prometheans whom he had hoped to track down had left for their vacations. Nevertheless, Ishaki, as an intrepid intermediary, managed to find himself in the company of a few fellow Tatar emigres who advised him on how to best locate the Ingrian and Karelian activists.<sup>51</sup> The next year, negotiations between the Second Division and the anti-Soviet exiles in Finland proved fruitful, especially because the anti-Soviet internationalist vision of the Prometheans appealed to those in Helsinki who considered Soviet rule in Ingria and Karelia to constitute a continuation of Russian imperial domination. A Promethean club and a Finnish journal titled *Prometheus* emerged soon after, and the Second Division provided considerable stipends for the upkeep of these two projects, as the military intelligence archives show.<sup>52</sup> The records also show that *Prometheus* sometimes featured unique pieces on Ingrian and Karelian affairs, but that much of its content was drawn from *Le Prométhée* and *Wschód*, the two major Promethean journals in the interwar years.<sup>53</sup>

Of the major urban centers of interwar Promethean activity, Harbin was by far the conspicuous geographical outlier, yet the decision to operate in Manchuria was, from the viewpoint of the Prometheans, a logical one. In the first place, Harbin was home to a population of several thousand ethnic Poles, many of whom had found their way

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<sup>50</sup> CAW, I.303.4.5518, “Wydawnictwo organizacji karelskiej - wznowienie wysyłki subsydjum.”

<sup>51</sup> “1930, 21 października. Sprawozdanie Ayasa Ischaki,” 166-168.

<sup>52</sup> CAW, I.303.4.5518 contains many of the receipts documenting the Second Division’s financial contributions to the Helsinki circle.

<sup>53</sup> CAW I.303.4.5664 contains Polish translations and summaries of *Prometheus* articles that illustrate the journal’s contents.

to the Far East during the construction of imperial Russia's railway system in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>54</sup> One of these Poles was Władysław Pelc, a leading Promethean intermediary and supporter of Piłsudski who closed the vast distance between Warsaw and his native Harbin by organizing Polish-language newspapers and promoting contact between the Circle of Young Orientalists at the Eastern Institute and their contemporaries in Manchuria.<sup>55</sup> Pelc, however, was not just interested in developing Polish interest in Harbin, and worked along with Ayas Ishaki to rally the city's other emigre colonies behind a shared Promethean front. With the collapse of the Russian Empire and the rise of the Soviet Union, Harbin attracted a newer wave of elite emigres, among them a significant circle of Siberian Cossacks opposed to the Bolsheviks along with Ukrainian, Mongol, and Buriat exiles.<sup>56</sup> The Cossack contingent, which maintained contact with the Promethean movement but never joined as an official emigre nationality due to serious disagreements over territory and tactics with other groups, favored some kind of reformed, federalized Russia from which the borderland peoples could freely secede given sufficient interest.<sup>57</sup> The Second Division staff were even more interested in the Ukrainian diaspora community residing in the "Green Wedge," a region encompassing part of

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<sup>54</sup> Kim Yong-Deog, "Życie kulturalne Polaków w Mandżurii w latach 1897-1947," *Postscriptum polonistyczne* 2/6 (2010), 117-142. A full collection of documents on the Manchurian Poles can be found at AAN file 198.

<sup>55</sup> "Z Instytutu Wschodniego," *Wschód: kwartalnik* 1 (1930), 29-32; Charaszkiwicz, "Referat," 64-65.

<sup>56</sup> "1939, 27 lutego, Sprawozdanie z podróży organizacyjnej Ayasa Ischaki na Daleki Wschód w latach 1933-1935, nr. 536/II/2/39," in *Państwo polskie*, 453-473; CAW, I.303.4.5443, "Emigracja narodów prometeuszowskich na Dalekim Wschodzie."

<sup>57</sup> CAW, I.303.4.5443, "Robotniczo-włościańska i kozacka partja Dalekiego Wschodu i Syberji." Also see I. Biłyj, "Kozacy i zagadnienie kozackie," *Wschód* 1-2 (1932-1933), 20-25.

the Far Eastern *krai* of the RSFSR between the Sea of Japan and the Amur River, even obtaining a detailed map of these territories.<sup>58</sup>

Writing in the pages of *Wschód* in the 1930s, Pelc urged fellow Prometheans to recognize that the Far East, despite its distance from Poland, constituted a major theater in the worldwide struggle against Soviet power, which, by his estimate, was still fairly weak in Siberia and the Far East.<sup>59</sup> Włodzimierz Bączkowski, the head of the Circle of Young Orientalists, strongly supported Pelc's argument in a separate piece that compared Soviet Siberia, with its vast territory, rich natural resources, and ethnically mixed population, to Britain's American colonies at the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>60</sup> Just as the United States had drifted out of the British sphere and followed their own historical trajectory, Bączkowski predicted that Siberia would soon find its own "Washington" and dissociate from the ethnically Russian core on the western side of the Urals, depriving the Bolsheviks of a massive part of their Eurasian territories.<sup>61</sup> Ayas Ishaki, having already laid the foundations for the Promethean center in Helsinki and spent time in Warsaw, also lent his skills as an intermediary to the furthering of anti-Soviet mobilization in the Far East, traveling to Harbin, by then a part of Japanese-dominated Manchukuo, between 1933 and 1935.<sup>62</sup> On this journey, Ishaki devoted special attention to communicating with representatives of the Buriat emigration and other indigenous peoples of Siberia and the Far East, whom he found to have been greatly influenced by pan-Asian ideas

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<sup>58</sup> CAW, I.303.4.5443, "Robotniczo-włościańska i kozacka partja Dalekiego Wschodu i Syberji."

<sup>59</sup> Władysław Pelc, "Kwestia syberyjska w ruchu prometeuszowskim," *Wschód* 1-2 (1937), 35-47; also see idem., Mandżu-Go, *Wschód* 2-4 (1934), 112-132.

<sup>60</sup> Bączkowski, "Syberia czeka na swojego Waszyngtona," in *Włodzimierz Bączkowski*, 155-170 (originally published in *Wschód*).

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 166-170.

<sup>62</sup> "1939, 27 lutego, Sprawozdanie z podróży organizacyjnej Ayasa Ischaki," 460-473.

emanating from the Japanese Empire. Although Ishaki considered this to be a positive development, the rapid rise of Japanese intellectual influences in Manchuria after 1932 meant that Prometheism faced stiff competition in the contest for the loyalty of emigre groupings, not only in the Far East but also in southwestern Asia, where the influences of pan-Asianism were apparently waxing.<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless, many prominent figures including the Paris-based Georgian Menshevik Noe Zhordania considered pan-Asianism to ultimately be a positive force that would forge a path across Central Asia and into the Caucasus that would bring down the Soviet Union.<sup>64</sup>

The four main nodes in the Promethean world network were complemented by a smattering of interstitial points, chief among them Berlin, Prague, Bucharest, İstanbul, Ankara, and Tehran. Promethean involvement in these cities often operated through existing Polish consulates and embassies was chiefly motivated by the presence of significant concentrations of Ukrainian, Cossack, Caucasian, and Tatar nationalist emigres.<sup>65</sup> As Charaszkiwicz reported in 1940, the Second Division also sponsored both Polish and foreign students interested in studying abroad, whether within the established network of Promethean centers or in cities beyond its reach, such as Cairo.<sup>66</sup> Scholarship funds issued by the Second Division also brought a substantial cohort of students from the Caucasus to Warsaw, Poznań, and Kraków, expanding the ranks of the Circle of Young Orientalists but also training young emigres to work as

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<sup>63</sup> CAW, I.303.4.5629, “Opanowywanie przez Japończyków grup prometeuszowskich na Bliskim Wschodzie.”

<sup>64</sup> Noe Zhordania, “Problem światowy,” *Wschód* 5/1 (1933-1934), 1-7. Also see Hiroaki Kuromiya and Georges Mamoulia, *The Eurasian Triangle: Russia, The Caucasus and Japan, 1904-1945* (Berlin: De Gruyter Open, 2016).

<sup>65</sup> Charaszkiwicz, “Referat,” 64-67.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

engineers, chemists, and electricians.<sup>67</sup> Meanwhile, the web of personal connections maintained by the Lipka Tatars and their Volga and Crimean Tatar allies brought Promethean ideas to pan-Islamic gatherings as far afield as Jerusalem and Jakarta, where many participants apparently learned for the first time of the atrocities committed by the Bolsheviks against the Muslims of the former Russian Empire.<sup>68</sup>

The overall reach and effectiveness of Promethean soft power projects in the cold war with the Bolsheviks, of course, waxed and waned over the course of the interwar years, especially as a consequence of Poland's changing relationship from the Soviet Union. When Piłsudski concluded a peace agreement with Moscow in 1932, the Second Division was placed in the difficult position of supporting a global movement of anti-Soviet internationalists at a time when Polish-Soviet ties were supposed to be on the mend.<sup>69</sup> Between 1932 and 1939, Polish state funding for Prometheism plummeted by close to fifty percent, seriously constraining the Second Division's ability to keep up with its monthly payments to activists around the world, though the major Promethean publications still managed to regularly appear until the start of the Second World War.<sup>70</sup> From another perspective, however, the crisis wrought by the deescalation of Polish-Soviet hostilities occasioned serious debates within the movement about crucial issues of organization and ideology that brought Prometheism's inner fault lines into sharper relief. While a common devotion to fragmenting the Soviet colossus into a Eurasian alliance of nation-states remained at the core of Promethean internationalism, the strained interactions between the older

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 64-65; CAW, I.303.4.5460, "Emigracja prometeuszowska: całość zagadnienia."

<sup>68</sup> Ishaki, "Kongres muzułmański 1931 r.," *Wschód: kwartalnik* 7/8 (1932), 57-59.

<sup>69</sup> Charaszkiwicz, "Referat," 77-78.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 77.



generation of emigres, the military intelligence officers of the Second Division, and the increasingly vocal “Promethean youth” produced notable discord within the movement. Nevertheless, the Promethean world network proved to be flexible and durable all the way up until the beginning of the Second World War, and was even partially reconstructed between 1939 and the start of the Cold War.<sup>71</sup> While the financial resources of the Second Division and the appeal of Promethean institutions to a wide community of emigres were key sources of stability, the expansive field of Promethean ideas produced in the movement’s clubs and journals was crucial to providing a degree of ideological coherence across the global network, even if those ideas were often subject to debate and disagreement. The two most important areas of internationalist intellectual activity and exchange among the Prometheans were the study of the origin and evolution of the Soviet system and the articulation of plans for the post-Soviet organization of Eurasia. Promethean Sovietology, as we will briefly see below and revisit in greater detail in Chapters 6 and 7, provided much of the conceptual groundwork for specific visions of the geopolitical transformation of the post-Soviet space that hinged on the encirclement and containment of the “Muscovite” heartlands of northern European Russia.

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<sup>71</sup> Charaszkiwicz’s file at the JPIA contains substantial evidence of his attempts at reconstructing old Promethean ties into the 1970s.

Figure 1: Prometheism as a global network, 1939

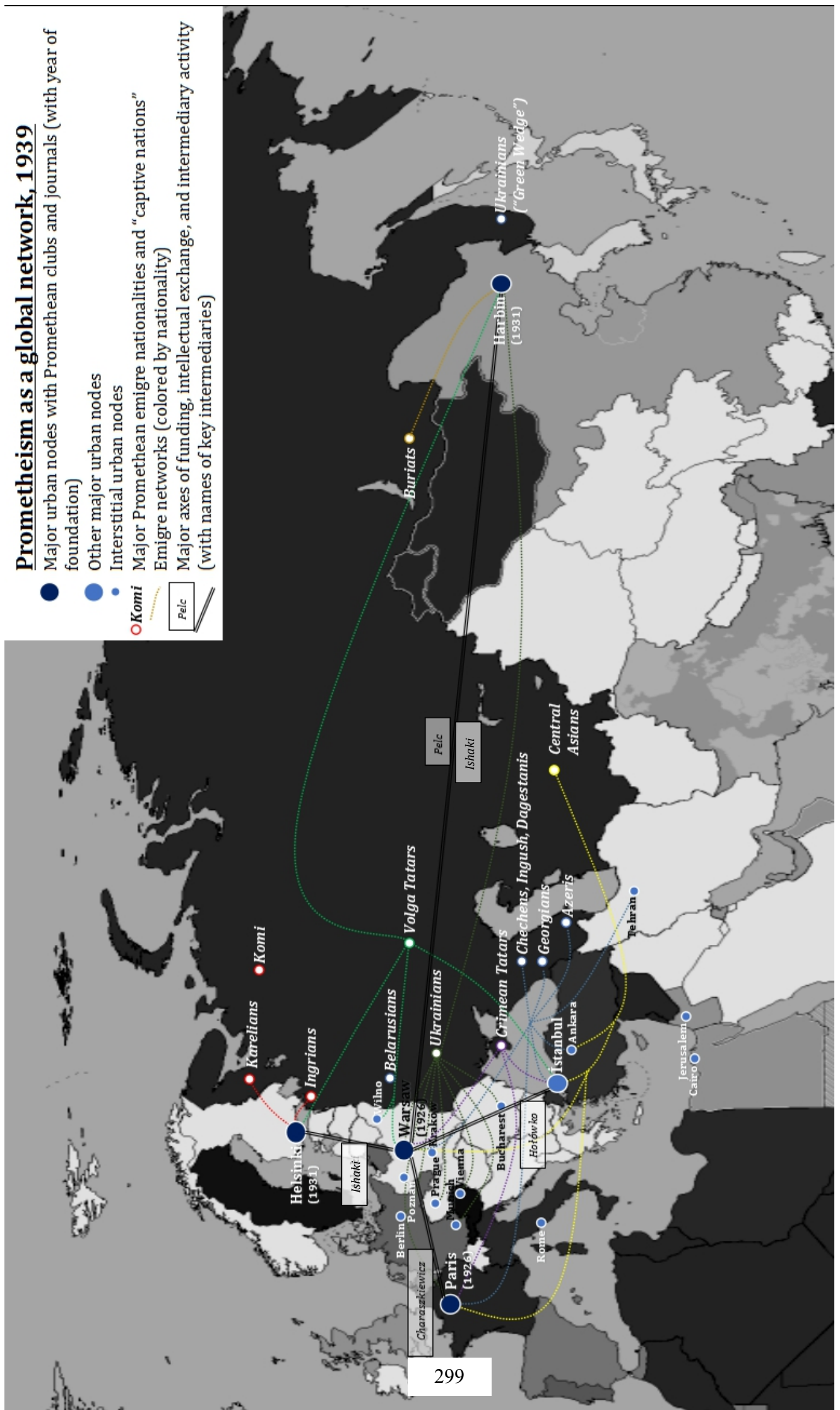




Figure 2: A Promethean Eurasia  
 “Russia is a Prison for Nationalities / Russia in the future will fall to pieces and form a number of national states”  
 (From *Wschód: kwartalnik* nr.4 [1931], between pages 8 and 9)



## The architecture of the Promethean imagination

In 1931, a vivid “Map of the Oppressed Nations in Soviet Russia” appeared in the pages of *Wschód: kwartalnik* (*The East: quarterly*), the flagship journal of the Circle of Orientalist Youth (OKM) at Warsaw’s Eastern Institute and a leading multilingual outlet for Promethean intellectual activity.<sup>72</sup> Published at the height of Prometheism’s global reach, the map articulated the cumulative territorial ambitions of the movement’s Eurasian network of borderland exiles, portraying an expansive, composite mosaic of breakaway nation-states that would encircle a geographically shrunken and strategically vulnerable “Russia” following its future fragmentation.<sup>73</sup> Deprived of access to the Black and Caspian Seas and truncated at the Ural Mountains, this post-Soviet Russia would roughly return to the frontiers of Muscovy at the beginning of the reign of Ivan the Terrible in the mid-sixteenth century, if not to an even earlier point given the map’s recognition of the Komi and Karelians living below the Arctic Circle as “oppressed peoples.” To the west, Belarus and Ukraine would deter Russian designs against Poland and the rest of Europe, while a formidable barrier maintained by the Crimean Tatars, Volga Tatars, Don’ Cossacks, the nations of the Caucasus, and a united Turkestan would foil Moscow’s southward expansion into the Eurasian steppe. Further afield, large Yakut and Buryat polities would swallow up swathes of Siberia and the Far East, whose remaining territory, according to the OKM’s leader Włodzimierz Bączkowski, might find its own pioneering “Washington” and break away from Moscow’s rule, much as the United States had seceded from the British Empire.<sup>74</sup> Shorn of its sprawling empire, Russia, like the

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<sup>72</sup> *Wschód: Orient*, 4 (1931).

<sup>73</sup> CAW, I.303.4.5693, “Uwagi w kwestii reorganizacji,” 4.

<sup>74</sup> Bączkowski, “Syberia czeka na swojego Waszyngtona,” in *Włodzimierz Bączkowski*, 155-170.

post-Ottoman Turkey drawn up at Sèvres in 1920, would assume the contours of a compact, ethnically homogeneous nation-state whose legitimacy the Prometheans, however cautiously, might finally accept upon the realization of their grand prophecy of imperial collapse.<sup>75</sup>

Throughout the interwar years, the idea of radically dismembering the Soviet Union along national lines provided one of the central intellectual foundations for Promethean internationalism, loosely gathering a diverse, diffuse ecology of uprooted nationalists who were determined to resurrect the nation-states that they had ephemerally declared upon the ruins of the Russian Empire between 1917 and 1922. This program of territorial rearrangement, at its core, was underpinned by the historical argument that Bolshevism, though veiled in the outward trappings of proletarian universalism, was actually the truest, most brutal incarnation of the despotic, “Asiatic” political culture of the Muscovite heartlands that had forged imperial Russia through the subjugation of the “oppressed nations.”<sup>76</sup> As this empire seemingly splintered and contracted under the combined pressures of social strife and geopolitical crisis after 1917, its darkest energies, according to the Prometheans, regrouped in the Bolshevik strongholds of European Russia, raising an army of ruthless conquest that, over the next five years, clawed its way back to the old borders of the Tsarist realm while crushing most of the breakaway polities of the peripheries. This reading of the Red Army’s triumph in the revolutionary and civil war years posited a fundamental continuity between Tsarism and Bolshevism as forms of empire-building that derived their character from the deep structures of Mongol tyranny that had been implanted in medieval Muscovy and subsequently exported

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<sup>75</sup> *LP*, 38 (January 1931); 1.

<sup>76</sup> D. Andriewski, “L’Eurasie,” *Le Prométhée* 6 (April 1927), 25-29.

across Eurasia by generations of servile ethnic Russians.<sup>77</sup> What this assessment argued, in effect, was that Russia and the Russians sharply diverged from the “captive nations” not only in their mode of sovereignty, social structure, and folk customs but, most importantly, through their malignant path of predatory aggrandizement that collided with the universal, historically progressive proliferation of nation-states across nineteenth- and twentieth-century Eurasia.<sup>78</sup>

This Promethean *Sonderweg* thesis, in its most general form, envisioned nations and empires not only as synchronic spatial formations to be charted on a map in two dimensions, but as diachronic phenomena, or chronotypes, that mutated through time, following different trajectories of historical development and cycles of internal change. Russia, as an especially deviant chronotype, stood out in the Promethean narrative because of the destructive “Asiatic” stasis allegedly evidenced in its adherence to a violent course of expansionism and exploitation, which had artificially prevented the “oppressed nations” from pursuing their evolution into proper nation-states with democratic governments and productive economies.<sup>79</sup> These broad outlines, however, only go so far in reflecting the historical and territorial thought of the Prometheans, who, despite espousing a shared devotion to the Soviet Union’s unmaking, differed in the nuances of their understandings of how the liberated borderlands should collectively organize themselves and what place a post-Soviet Russia would occupy in the world. While Prometheism’s patrons in Warsaw

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<sup>77</sup> Clear and representative examples of the continuity thesis can be found in “L’Exégèse du Bolchevisme,” 1-6; and Pelc, “Komintern-ZSSR-Rosja,” *Wschód* 4 (1936), 29-39.

<sup>78</sup> Illustrative examples include N. Choumicki, “L’Ukraine,” *Le Prométhée* 1 (November 1926), 22-25; “Le Bolchevisme et les peuples de l’Union,” *Le Prométhée* 3 (January 1927), 1-3; “L’Exégèse du Bolchevisme,” *Le Prométhée* 21 (August 1928), 1-6; Mir Yacoub, “Le Bolchevisme et le Peuple Turk,” *Le Prométhée* 28 (March 1929), 25-28; and André Yacovliv, “Les relations entre l’Ukraine et la Moscovie du point de vue historique et de Droit,” *Le Prométhée* 126 (May 1937), 11-16.

<sup>79</sup> “Le Problème du Caucase,” *Le Prométhée*, 1 (November 1926); 4-8.

continued to focus on weaponizing anti-Soviet nationalism in the service of Poland's geopolitical ambitions, the Caucasian, Ukrainian, and Central Asian exiles based in Paris found fresh outlets for their ideas of transnational cooperation, stressing the urgency of integrating their homelands into the "civilized world" through membership in the League of Nations and, with Polish involvement, the creation of the legal framework for a post-Soviet Caucasian Confederation.<sup>80</sup>

By 1939, the challenge of elaborating a blueprint for a post-Soviet order revealed a tangle of tensions along Prometheism's Warsaw-Paris axis, showing that the movement's vibrant urban centers, though embedded in a shared network and linked by loose ideological affinities, had spawned a plurality of possible plans for the future, reflecting the deeper peculiarities of their intellectual roots and political priorities. Though responsible for generating some of Prometheism's most iconic ideas, these manifestations of heterogeneity increasingly worried the Polish military intelligence staff, who feared the movement's degeneration into an anarchic patchwork of decadent emigres and scrambled to devise a unifying ideology that would reinvigorate the network and expand its reach.<sup>81</sup> Having persistently questioned the viability of liberal internationalism from the inception of the League of Nations in 1920, the Warsaw Prometheans now faced the challenge of maintaining their movement's independence and worldwide appeal as the countries of the Anti-Komintern Pact assumed a central place in the impending global clash between "nationalism" and "communism."<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> CAW, I.303.4.5693, "Uwagi w kwestii reorganizacji," 4.

<sup>82</sup> The two known issues of *Młody Prometeusz* (1936; 1938) embody this shift.

### **The “allogeneic peoples” and the fate of “civilization”**

During the civil war years, Polish diplomats and military officers serving under Piłsudski took an avid interest in developments in the Caucasus, forming ties with the region’s nascent nation-states that persisted as the Red Army’s advance forced their self-proclaimed governments into exile by 1922.<sup>83</sup> Scattered around the major cities of Europe and southwestern Asia, above all in Turkey and France, displaced Caucasian nationalists drew the attention of the former publishers of *Przymierze* and future organizers of the Promethean movement, such as Tadeusz Hołówko and Edmund Charaszkiewicz, who struggled to consolidate a tightly unified Caucasian “national center” that would participate in anti-Soviet intelligence gathering and propaganda activities coordinated from Warsaw. Many prospective Caucasian collaborators, however, were averse to submitting to Polish sponsorship or entering a transnational structure that might constrain their ability to act independently, while Hołówko’s ability to operate in key locations such as İstanbul and Ankara was limited by the easing of bilateral relations between Turkey and the Soviet Union. Finding willing Armenian allies, meanwhile, proved to be an insurmountable obstacle given the recent genocide in Anatolia and the pro-Turkish, openly Kemalist orientation of the Azeri Musavat emigres who, under the leadership of Mammad Amin Rasulzadeh, entered the Caucasian National Committee (KNK) that took shape in Paris in the late spring of 1926. Along with the Georgian Menshevik emigration led by Noe Zhordania and Noe Ramishvili, the KNK incorporated a cohort of exiles from the former Mountainous Republic of the North Caucasus and formed enduring ties with representatives of Symon Petliura’s Ukrainian People’s Republic, namely the

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<sup>83</sup> AAN, Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych, B6674, 6675, 6676.



diplomat Oleksandr Shulhyn, and Turkestanian nationalists such as Mustafa Shokay, all of whom contributed to the Parisian monthly *Le Prométhée* (*Prometheus*).<sup>84</sup>

While the Polish Promethean leadership favored a KNK with its permanent headquarters in Warsaw, the Caucasian exiles and their associates insisted upon remaining in Paris, where they had already been lobbying the Western Allies at Versailles and the League of Nations in Lausanne to accept them as the legitimate heads of wrongly occupied nations belonging to the “civilized world.”<sup>85</sup> However, many of these Allied interlocutors, including American president Woodrow Wilson, continued to hope for a Bolshevik defeat in the ongoing civil wars and preferred the restoration of a constitutional Russia within the borders of 1914, save for the loss of Finland, Poland, and the Baltic countries, to a chaotic, fractious smattering of secessionist states.<sup>86</sup> These difficulties persisted beyond the formal foundation of the Soviet Union in 1922, both due to bitter competition among exile circles that claimed to represent the same territories and because of the influence of ethnically Russian emigres, most of whom were unwilling to prematurely renounce their claims to the borderlands.<sup>87</sup> The Polish military intelligence officers aligned with Piłsudski, by contrast, were interested in furnishing material assistance and logistical support to the future KNK and embraced the notion of a tumultuous revolt of the non-Russians against Moscow’s hegemony, downplaying ideological differences among the exiles and building a capacious network of Promethean allies around broadly shared goals of

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<sup>84</sup> An excellent synthesis of the developments leading up to the formation of the KNK may be found in Georges Mamoulia, “Predislovie,” in *Kavkazskaia Konfederatsiia v ofitsial’nykh deklaratsiakh, tainoi perepiske i sekretnykh dokumentakh dvizheniia “Prometei”*. *Sbornik doukmentov*, ed. Georges Mamoulia (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo sotsial’no-politicheskaia mysl’, 2012), 6-40.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-20.

<sup>86</sup> Georg Schild, *Between Ideology and Realpolitik: Woodrow Wilson and the Russian Revolution, 1917-1921* (Westport: Greenwood, 1995).

<sup>87</sup> See “Berlinskoe soveshchanie sotsialistov-revoliutsionerov (Dekabr’ 1922),” in *Partia sotsialistov-revoliutsionerov*, volume 3, part 2, 943-946.

geopolitical transformation, even if the exact post-Soviet alternative remained to be determined in detail.<sup>88</sup>

As the main journal of the KNK and its Ukrainian and Central Asian affiliates, *Le Prométhée* served as one of the foremost laboratories in which Promethean thinkers attempted to synthesize an otherwise cacophonous multitude of exiled voices into overarching theories of Eurasian history, geopolitics, and civilization that would register with a Francophone audience of educated liberal internationalists, namely those associated with the League of Nations. Issued in November of 1926, the inaugural number of *Le Prométhée* framed the Promethean struggle not simply as the result of the frustrated national ambitions of 1917 but, more importantly, as the continuation of the dynamic and radical yet ultimately unfinished global transformations unleashed by the French Revolution of 1789.<sup>89</sup> The passing of the *ancien régime*, according to the Parisian Prometheans, witnessed the advent of a new and disruptive paradigm of nationhood in which a voluntary, organic community of citizens managed their collective existence through democratic institutions, free from the arbitrary domination of autocrats who had stifled their spiritual and material development. The Prometheans emphasized that the revolutionary “national idea” spread rapidly and seemingly irresistibly across the rest of Europe during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, first in the form of the Napoleonic restructuring of Central Europe and later in the wars of national unification in Germany and Italy. More recently, the demise of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires had opened the way for the formation of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and other states that had spurned the rule of emperors and sultans in favor

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<sup>88</sup> Charaszkiwicz, “Referat,” 56-58.

<sup>89</sup> *Le Prométhée*, 1 (November, 1926); 1-2.

of a consensual, republican model of political organization rooted in allegedly natural ethnic affinities rather than dynastic legitimacy.<sup>90</sup> By presenting the French system as the wellspring of European democracy and national liberation, the Prometheans came strikingly close to reproducing the theses of Bolesław Limanowski, who also frequently looked to 1789 as the decisive moment in which a unique and genuinely dynamic alternative to absolutism had erupted into the world.<sup>91</sup>

The story presented by the Parisian Prometheans, however, was not one of endless triumph, especially when it came to the fateful collision of the “national idea” with the entrenched despotism of the Russian Empire, which had not only foiled Napoleon’s invasion in 1812 but subsequently stifled the growing tendency of its oppressed nationalities to covet their own states. Here, the authors emphasized that Russia, though highly centralized in its administrative structure and regarded as the property of the ruling dynasty, was not an organically unified polity beneath the surface, encompassing a multitude of restless “allogeneic peoples” (*les peuples allogènes*) who had been forcibly subjugated by the Tsars and their submissive army of ethnic Russians. The “allogeneic peoples,” in this portrayal, differed from Russians not only in their multitude of languages and cultures, but, more importantly, in their shared ability to partake in the progressive march of the nineteenth-century “national idea” and seek reunification with the “civilized” Europe from which they had grown estranged.<sup>92</sup> The Tsarist mode of amalgamating and governing territories and peoples, *Le Prométhée* proclaimed, was embodied in the top-down mechanism of the *ukaz*, or imperial “decree,” which squarely contradicted the voluntary, egalitarian spirit of the

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>91</sup> Limanowski’s ideas are discussed in Chapter One.

<sup>92</sup> *Le Prométhée*, 1 (1926); 1-3.

modern “national idea” and sought to erode the indigenous forms of social and political organization of the “allogeneic peoples.” The Caucasus and Ukraine, according to the article, could embrace nation-statehood on the basis of their shared democratic values and historic ties to “Mediterranean civilization,” with the objective of joining an orderly world governed by the League of Nations.<sup>93</sup> Although Promethean activists widely considered their respective nations to possess longstanding traditions of political freedom and even sovereign statehood that predated their incorporation into Russia, the “national idea” and the nation-state appeared as decidedly modern phenomena embedded in a trajectory of constructive, Western-oriented development that presented the “allogeneic peoples” and their Russian captors as incompatible chronotypes whose entanglement could only be resolved through secession.

By the time that *Le Prométhée* made its debut, this concept of the “allogenic peoples” had already been circulating in Francophone polemics published by borderland emigres for nearly a decade, with Juozas Gabrys, a Lithuanian nationalist, placing it at the center of his forceful argument for Russia’s partition in a hefty brochure released in 1917.<sup>94</sup> As one of the leaders of the Lausanne-based Union of Nationalities (*Union des Nationalités*) founded in 1912, Gabrys, a colleague of the right-wing Ukrainian ideologue Dmytro Dontsov, strove to convince his Western readers of the ingrained barbarism of ethnic Russians and the vicious campaigns of denationalization pursued by the Tsarist authorities, arriving at some of the same conclusions propagated by Piłsudski’s PPS about the grim prospects for Russia’s

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 7-9.

<sup>94</sup> Inorodetz (Gabrys), *La Russie et les peuples allogènes* (Bern: 1917).

reformation.<sup>95</sup> Gabrys, as an ardent proponent of an independent, expansive Lithuania, apparently found little in the way of common ground with the PPS, yet his movement nevertheless grew to encompass a wide network of fellow conspirators who dreamed of shattering not only Russia but also the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the remaining Ottoman territories into nation-states before, during, and after the First World War. Most of the future Parisian Prometheans, however, had favored the institutional and territorial rearrangement of Russia as a democratic, federal polity prior to the October Revolution of 1917, making them poor candidates for membership in Gabrys's Union, while some of them, most notably the Georgian Mensheviks, still considered it possible for a post-Soviet Russian nation-state to coexist with the "allogeneic peoples" in the future.<sup>96</sup> Even the introductory manifesto featured in *Le Prométhée* emphasized that Russia, given sufficient time for the development of a political culture compatible with the twentieth-century reign of nation-states, could someday make lasting contributions to human "civilization."<sup>97</sup> Before the rise of the Bolsheviks, the Azeri Musavat program had envisioned such a possibility within a federalized Russia, though the Parisian Prometheans strongly opposed any return to a common state structure within the boundaries of 1917, maintaining that Russian engagement with the "allogeneic peoples" could only take place in the form of reciprocal relations among juridically equal nation-states.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Klaus Richter, *Fragmentation in East Central Europe: Poland and the Baltics, 1915-1929* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 16-25.

<sup>96</sup> Noe Zhordania, *Nashi raznoglasiiia* (Paris: 1928).

<sup>97</sup> *Le Prométhée*, 1 (November 1926); 3.

<sup>98</sup> Zhordania, *Nashi raznoglasiiia*; for a sampling of exile clashes with Russian emigres over the viability of a future federation encompassing the Soviet space, see Alexandre Choulguine (Oleksandr Shul'hyn), "Le peuples opprimés et la Démocratie Russe," *Le Prométhée*, 25 (December 1928); 8-11; Doiron, "Il n'y a pas qu'une question russe," *Le Prométhée*, 25 (December 1928); 12-14; Mir Yacoub, "La situation internationale et le problème des nationalités en Union Soviétique," *Le Prométhée*, 87 (February 1934); 8-21.

For the Parisian Prometheans writing retrospectively in 1926, the decisive test of Russia's ability to break from its Tsarist past and embrace a post-imperial modernity arrived in 1917, when the "allogeneic peoples" and the ethnic Russians pursued starkly contrasting paths to reorganizing the territory of the embattled empire. In the Promethean narrative advanced in *Le Prométhée*, it had been the non-Russian borderlands, namely Ukraine and the Caucasus, in which the local populations and their revolutionary leaders had taken the initiative to organize orderly governments representing the popular will and protecting the public interest, while the ethnically Russian regions centered on Moscow and Petrograd descended into anarchy and bloodshed once the Tsarist regime no longer held them in its coercive grip.<sup>99</sup> The principal consequence of this mounting turmoil in the Muscovite heartlands was, according to the Prometheans, the birth of Bolshevism as a mass movement among the ethnic Russians, who readily submitted to this newest form of total control and readily enlisted to reclaim the peripheries.<sup>100</sup> The crucial point here, for the Prometheans, is that the "allogeneic peoples" had already congealed into coherent, conscious nations capable of building state structures according to their needs, whereas the Great Russians, as both the cannon fodder and the adhesive material that sustained the old empire, were woefully underdeveloped in cultural and social terms and easily bowed to the will of whatever dictatorship could make a compelling show of force.

While the Parisian Prometheans recognized the presence of supposedly more enlightened political currents among the ethnic Russians in the earlier months of 1917,

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<sup>99</sup> N. Ramichvili (Noe Ramishvili), "La Crise du Bolchevisme et la Liberte des Peuples," *Le Prométhée*, 1 (November 1926); 11-13; D'Khosrov Soutan Zade, "La Confédération du Caucase," *Le Prométhée*, 1 (November 1926); 14-17.

<sup>100</sup> M.Y. (Mir Yacoub), "Le Bolchevisme et le peuple Turk," *Le Prométhée*, 28 (March 1929); 26-28.

they nevertheless argued that Bolshevism constituted the revenge of the exhausted and humiliated imperial center against the flourishing borderlands, which demonstrated their capacity for creating Western-style institutions and ideas in an exceptionally chaotic time. If the February Revolution had won the non-Russians considerable space to undertake productive nation- and state-building projects free from the domination of Petrograd, then the October Revolution, in Noe Zhordania's words, was characteristically "Asiatic" in its reliance on underhanded, conspiratorial methods of seizing power.<sup>101</sup> Unlike the French Revolution, which had forged an egalitarian community of citizens, the October Revolution, by Zhordania's standards, simply concentrated authority in the hands of a circle of cynical intellectuals who manipulated indigent, "politically illiterate" Russian peasants with promises of property redistribution and the coming of "socialism."<sup>102</sup> Yet Zhordania, as a Menshevik, contended that mature capitalist development and a democratic form of government constituted the essential structural conditions for the constructive redistribution of wealth, pointing to examples from the experiences of Britain and France to illustrate his point.<sup>103</sup> For Zhordania, Russia, and, most of all, its ethnically Russian regions, completely lacked both of these critical prerequisites, meaning that the Bolsheviks would have to embark on a forceful course of state-run economic development commanded from above while controlling the laboring masses through a combination of terror and propaganda. "Everything for the people," but "nothing by the people," was Zhordania's suggested slogan for the Bolsheviks, whom he accused of deriving their strength from the sheer vastness of the Soviet Union and the

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<sup>101</sup> Zhordania, *Bol'shevizm*, 35-42.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 51-58

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.* 43-50.

exploitation of its population without actually improving the productivity or welfare of either.<sup>104</sup>

Zhordania's key point, and a common thread in many of Prometheism's programmatic writings, was that the historically progressive revolutions that revived the borderlands in early to mid-1917 had been derailed by a regressive coup launched from Moscow and its hinterlands, where the Bolsheviks, as the heirs to the nihilistic worldview of the radical Russian intelligentsia and the "muzhik mentality" of the benighted village, had found a people in need of a dictator.<sup>105</sup> Building on this general argument in a pamphlet printed by the KNK in 1928, Zhordania observed, now somewhat more coolly, that Bolshevism naturally derived its collectivist inspirations and popular support base from the Russian peasant commune, or *obshchina*, whose structure differed dramatically from the smallholding lifestyle common in Georgia and other borderland territories, including Siberia and the Kuban' region.<sup>106</sup> If the organizational architecture of the *obshchina* had found its ultimate articulation in the form of the Soviet Union, then the more decentralized modes of production prevalent elsewhere had given rise to "democratic republics" modeled on Western nation-states, if only for a fleeting while during the civil wars.<sup>107</sup> This explanation, at least by the standards of *Le Prométhée*'s more sensational columns, avoided characterizations of ethnic Russians as racial mongrels descended from the Mongols, proposing a loosely historical-materialist explanation for the divergences of 1917 that did not foreclose the possibility of some future reconciliation between Russia and its internal colonies.

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid. 67-73; Idem., "L'exégèse du Bolchevisme," *Le Prométhée* 21 (August 1928); 1-6.

<sup>105</sup> Idem., *Bol'shevizm*, 67-70.

<sup>106</sup> Idem., *Nashi raznoglasiia*, 20-23.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 21.



Indeed, after identifying these significant differences rooted in the fabric of national cultures and economies, Zhordania argued that the Soviet Union, though controlled by the Bolsheviks, was still home to progressive Russian socialists who could, in the long run, gradually shift the red colossus towards a relatively peaceful dissolution into nation-states, finally merging with a universal process that had already reshaped the major multinational land empires of Eurasia by the beginning of the interwar years.<sup>108</sup>

Importantly, Zhordania's "historical prognosis" of imperial fragmentation held that a post-Soviet federation binding the borderlands to Russia would have to be renounced in advance by Russian socialists, as only the restoration of the full sovereignty enjoyed by Georgia prior to its invasion by the Red Army in 1921 could serve as a point of departure for Tbilisi's relationship with Moscow.<sup>109</sup> A similar line was maintained by other Parisian Prometheans during their encounters and polemics with Russian emigres who advocated some form of federal union between the territories of the Soviet Union in the aftermath of a Bolshevik collapse, a proposal predicated upon the sense that the secession of the borderland republics from the nominal control of the Provisional Government after 1917 had been illegitimate.<sup>110</sup> The cause behind this resistance on the part of the Parisian Prometheans, however, had more to do with the failure of a democratic, federated Russia to take shape after the February Revolution than it did with any categorical rejection of federalism or international cooperation more broadly, which figures such as Zhordania and Rasulzadeh continued to pursue within the context of the Caucasus and in their bids to

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 43-48.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 44-47.

<sup>110</sup> Mir Yacoub, "La situation internationale," 14-21.

bring their homelands into the orbit of the League of Nations.<sup>111</sup> In this sense, the Prometheans always elaborated their federal plans in direct opposition to the structure of the Soviet Union, which they considered to be a unitary despotism controlled by ethnic Russians that masqueraded as a multinational polity on the global stage. From the earliest issues of *Le Prométhée*, the model “federations” to be treated as sources of inspiration for the Caucasus were Switzerland, Germany, the United States, and the British dominion system, among other examples from the “civilized” world.<sup>112</sup> The inviolable principle of Parisian Promethean federalist thought, however, was the complete sovereignty of the nation-states that would form confederations, a distinct departure from the ill-fated programs of 1917 and an emphatic rejection of the Soviet order.<sup>113</sup>

In a similar vein, the Prometheans regarded the Communist International, or Komintern, as a Soviet revival of the pan-Slavist and Eurasianist movements of Tsarist times that had allegedly advanced imperial Russia’s interests abroad by fomenting discord in the ranks of its more democratic rivals and exploiting ethnic tensions in neighboring states.<sup>114</sup> The Komintern, in the Promethean imagination, formed another quintessential product of Russia’s “Asiatic” political culture that had endured across the caesura of 1917, relying, as it had since the Mongol conquest, upon disinformation, propaganda, and underhanded manipulation to triumph over superior foes whose only weakness was their adherence to standards of moral conduct

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<sup>111</sup> “La Confédération”; M. Kartveli, “Le principe fédératif dans la constitution soviétique en Transcaucasie,” *LP* (July 1931); 3-7.

<sup>112</sup> M. Kartveli, “La Confédération des États du Caucase,” *LP* 53 (April 1931); 6-9; M.M., “L’organisation de l’autorité fédérale,” *LP* 80 (July 1933); 22-27.

<sup>113</sup> Kazi Khan, “La question des nationalités en U.R.S.S.,” *LP* 63 (February 1932); 13-17; M.M., “La structure juridique de l’autorité fédérale dans la Fédération Caucasienne,” *LP* 72 (November 1932); 18-21.

<sup>114</sup> Georges Gwazana, “Le problème russe,” *LP* 11 (October 1927); 9-12.

and international norms in times of war.<sup>115</sup> The Prometheans, in turn, presented themselves to both “civilized” Europe and the colonial world as direct competitors to the Komintern and the bearers of a collaborative, constructive internationalism committed to spreading the unfinished “national revolution” wherever the Bolsheviks and their allies held “captive nations” in their thrall.<sup>116</sup> This overarching mission, in one sense, involved the mobilization of the non-Russian peoples of the Soviet Union against the Bolsheviks and the forceful overthrow of an ethnofederal system that occupied much of Eurasia, a goal that, though beyond the movement’s reach, still animated the minds of many of the Polish Prometheans who wished to simultaneously advance their country’s global influence and realize its messianic role in the world. At the same time, however, toppling the Soviet regime necessitated concrete plans not only for an internationalist struggle but also for a viable, alternative geopolitical order, something with which the Parisian Prometheans occupied themselves most fruitfully.

In its broadest outlines, the Promethean theory of Eurasian geopolitics that developed in Paris after 1926 treated the Soviet Union as the continuation of the old Russian Empire, maligning the Bolsheviks as heirs to the Tsars who had succeeded in conquering the non-Russians of the borderlands by harnessing the brute force of the ethnically Russian working classes. The Soviet system, by this reasoning, was the product of the deeply rooted, “Asiatic” political culture of the ethnic Russians of northeastern Europe and, just as importantly, a form of despotism conjured in the course of the Bolsheviks’ violent, historically regressive seizure of power, which had arrested the progressive, democratic, French-style revolutions launched by the peoples of the peripheries starting in the early months of 1917. Accordingly, the Prometheans

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> *LP*, 1 (November 1926).

declared that “Russia, irrespective of regime or time period, is a menace to European civilization,” positioning themselves as the determined yet largely unrecognized defenders of a Western world that lacked an adequate appreciation of the Bolshevik danger.<sup>117</sup> This assessment notably excluded any condemnation of the Jews as the architects of Bolshevism, a perspective that had already taken hold among some of the Red Army’s right-wing rivals in the civil wars and which subsequently fueled interwar German fascist denunciations of the Soviet population as a horde of Slavic and “Asiatic” *Untermenschen* lorded over by a cabal of Jewish communists.<sup>118</sup> If the “allogeneic peoples,” as the Parisian Prometheans called them, had demonstrated their “civilized” qualities by resuming their paths to statehood and liberation for even a brief time, then the ethnic Russians had descended deeper into an essentially destructive, malignant spiral of tyranny, merely replacing the rotting, fractured structures of Tsarism with a Soviet “prison of nations” that represented another cycle of dictatorship rather than a meaningful break with the past.<sup>119</sup> Tarring the Soviet Union and its ethnically Russian heart of darkness was fairly straightforward for Promethean publicists and politicians, some of whom, like Noe Zhordania, could skillfully alternate between penning incendiary propaganda pieces for the front page of *Le Prométhée* and writing more sustained, insightful treatises meant, in part, to be read by Russian socialists living in exile.

Just as crucial as constructing a monstrous caricature of the nefarious Russian nemesis, however, was the task of demonstrating how all of the “allogeneic peoples” constituted a coherent community that transcended their tremendous religious, ethnic,

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<sup>117</sup> D. Andriewski, “L’Eurasie,” *Le Prométhée* 6 (April 1927), 25-29.

<sup>118</sup> See Paul Hanebrink, *A Specter Haunting Europe: The Myth of Judeo-Bolshevism* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 2018).

<sup>119</sup> Georges Gvazana, “La prison des peuples,” *LP* 121 (December 1936); 4-7.

and linguistic plurality, not to mention their division into different “races” and “civilizations” in the mind of mainstream Euro-American anthropology.<sup>120</sup> The answer, in short, was that many of these potential sources of division could be conveniently elided in the leading Promethean journals if the “oppressed nation” in question, however “Eastern” or “exotic,” could demonstrate its compatibility with the structure of the nation-state and, in turn, conceivably gain membership in a “civilized” forum such as the League of Nations. While there were no strict requirements for admission into the Promethean camp, nearly all of the exiles who wrote profiles of their Soviet-ruled homelands in *Le Prométhée* and the Orientalist journals in Warsaw emphasized a number of common points to distinguish themselves as the representatives of proper nations, and not just “ethnographic masses,” to paraphrase Leon Wasilewski’s formulation, that belonged to the progressive historical stream of the “national revolution.” From its initial core of Poles and Georgian, Azeri, North Caucasian, and Ukrainian exiles, the Promethean pantheon grew to include a united Turkestan, the Crimean and Volga Tatars, Finland and the Komi, Karelian, and Ingrian communities, and the Yakuts and Buryats, with Belarus occupying an uncertain and often peripheral position due to its geopolitical sensitivity as a zone of intense Soviet infiltration in northeastern Poland.<sup>121</sup> This league of “captive nations,” however, was not restricted to peoples that could already boast clear, linear histories and claim distinct territorial homelands, welcoming future cohorts of “crystallizing”

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<sup>120</sup> Marshall Poe, *A People Born to Slavery: Russia in Early Modern European Ethnography, 1476-1748* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000); also see Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

<sup>121</sup> For representative samples concerning Ukraine and the Caucasus, see *LP* 1 (November, 1926); on the “crystallizing” nations, see the section below on Promethean proto-Sovietology.

nations whose chaotic and uncertain formation theoretically constituted the cutting edge of Prometheus's weaponized brand of nationalism.<sup>122</sup>

Rasulzadeh himself perhaps set the standards for the defining traits of a Promethean nation when he contended that Azerbaijan's parity with its European contemporaries was most visible in its rich literary and musical cultures, its historically vibrant national press, and its long tradition of independent political and social organization outside of the Russian Empire, whose domination arrived only in the nineteenth century and failed to seriously corrupt the fabric of local life.<sup>123</sup> Much like the interwar Musavat program, Rasulzadeh's articles in the Promethean papers contended that "nations," unlike the mechanical architecture of the "states" that structured them, were living organisms that encompassed human populations united by a collective sense of consciousness that found its most essential and vital expressions in a common language and an independent political existence. The modern "state," and specifically the "national state," functioned largely to alleviate the strains of class inequality and provide public institutions to cultivate an enlightened, patriotic citizenry capable of serving the "nation," with the Turkish Republic serving as an ideal model for a reborn Azeri polity.<sup>124</sup> For most of the Parisian Prometheans, socioeconomic plurality formed a normal part of a nation's composition, though Mensheviks such as Zhordania considered a moderate, democratic program of "scientific socialism" informed by the experiences of mature, industrialized economies to be viable and desirable in the case of Georgia.<sup>125</sup> Both the

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<sup>122</sup> CAW, I.303.4.5693, "Uwagi w kwestii reorganizacji pracy prometeuszowskiej w Paryżu," 1-4.

<sup>123</sup> Mammad Amin Rasulzadeh, "Rzeczpospolita Azerbajdzkańska," *Wschód: Orient* 2 (1930); 26-29.

<sup>124</sup> Idem., "Synteza epoki," in *Wschód* 12 (1938), 9-10.

<sup>125</sup> For some of the exiles, property ownership was a sign of "civilization." See "Le Bolchevisme et la peuple Turk."

Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, in contrast, appeared as extreme cases in which the coercive apparatus of the “state,” and not the organic cohesion of the “nation,” was ultimately what kept people and territory together, a condition that exposed the “allogeneic peoples” to unnatural oppression while simultaneously kindling Promethean hopes that a future war or revolution might upset this rigid yet increasingly vast and complicated system of domination.<sup>126</sup>

The essential elements of Rasulzadeh’s profile of Azerbaijan as a Promethean nation, namely its “civilized” character, tradition of statehood, history of struggle against Russian rule, and recent experience as a nation-state, constituted the key motifs in most of the brief pieces that argued for the importance of a given corner of the Soviet Union for the advancement of the movement’s goals. In a bid to demonstrate that the various Turkic peoples of Eurasia already belonged to the fold of “civilization,” one writer in *Le Prométhée* emphasized that his compatriots had already institutionalized both private land ownership and national patriotism prior to 1917, features that clearly differentiated them from the ethnic Russians whose extreme collectivism flowed from undiluted Mongol origins.<sup>127</sup> Those from the North Caucasus, meanwhile, pointed to the figure of Imam Shamil, the cleric and rebel who tormented Russian troops in the region during the nineteenth century, as a Romantic hero who embodied the spirit of popular struggle among the linguistically diverse inhabitants of the mountains.<sup>128</sup> For Ukrainian exiles, the main lines of attack against the historical and territorial unity of Russia were more direct, presenting the legacy of the medieval Kyivan Rus’ principalities as an attractive yet tragically forgotten

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<sup>126</sup> Zhordania, “L’exégèse.”

<sup>127</sup> “Le Bolchevisme et la peuple Turk.”

<sup>128</sup> “Pozdrowienie Młodzieży Narodów Wschodu,” “Od Redakcji,” *Wschód: kwartalnik* 1 (1930), 2-4; Mahomet-Bej Chukua, “Kaukaz a Rosja,” *Wschód: kwartalnik* 2 (1930), 22.

alternative to despotic Muscovy while emphasizing the role of the Cossacks in constructing an early-modern Ukrainian state with its own sense of sovereignty and freedom from Tsarist rule.<sup>129</sup> Further to the south and east, the Crimean and Volga Tatar activists could trace the origins of their respective state-building projects to the steppe khanates that had once dominated Muscovy before the sixteenth century, though they distanced themselves from associations with the Mongols by emphasizing the formation of modernizing intellectual currents, such as the jadidism of Ismail Gasprinskii, among the Turkic Muslims of the late Russian Empire.<sup>130</sup>

Once all of the historiosophic acrobatics had been executed, the poisonous inheritance of Genghis Khan remained firmly with the ethnic Russians, the most versatile “others” in the Promethean project, while the descendants of the steppe slipped into the progressive current of nation-state formation that led, however circuitously, to a place among the other “civilized” peoples of Eurasia. While Promethean exiles regularly claimed deep, primordial roots for their respective nations, it was the acquisition of independent statehood during the civil war years, however fleeting it may have been, that constituted the defining mark of a given group’s ability to revolt against Russian domination during the brief interlude between the collapse of Tsarism and its alleged reconstitution in the form of the Soviet Union. Buttressed with a narrative of historical continuity and distinctiveness from Russia, a juridical claim to nation-statehood formed the crux of most Promethean petitions for recognition from individual Western governments and the League of Nations, which, in the end, were effectively arguments for membership

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<sup>129</sup> *LP* 1 (November 1926).

<sup>130</sup> Abdullah Zihni, “Ismail Bey Gasprinski,” *Wschód* 3/4 (1933); 32-35. Themes of Tatar modernity are amply developed in the pages of the two volumes of *Rocznik Tatarski* that were published in 1935 and 1937.



among other post-imperial polities such as Finland, Poland, and Yugoslavia. The calamities of 1917, *Le Prométhée* emphasized, had exposed the inner structure of the former Russian Empire and its Soviet successor to the entire world, demonstrating beyond a doubt that the regimes commanding these multinational states had forcibly yoked the progressive historical trajectories of the “allogeneic peoples” to the despotic deadweight of the backward, ethnically Russian lands around Moscow.<sup>131</sup>

Channeling both the secessionist theses of PPS thinkers such as Wasilewski and Kelles-Krauz and the polemical furor of Gabrys and the Union of Nationalities, the Parisian Prometheans constructed a basic narrative of Bolshevism as the counterrevolutionary vengeance of ethnic Russia against the borderlands that largely replaced their pre-1918 hopes for a dynamic, reformed Russia with a worldview that privileged an alliance of sovereign nation-states as the only realistic safeguard against Moscow’s hegemony. The questions of how such an order would emerge and what structures would govern the ties among its constituent members, however, revealed that the Parisian Prometheans, though thoroughly disillusioned with the notion of an all-Russian federation within the borders of 1917, were still profoundly interested in transnational and supranational frameworks for regional and even global political, economic, and legal integration. The federalist imagination of 1917, in other words, was not extinguished but instead reoriented towards Europe and the League of Nations as its primary beacons, with the disasters of the civil war years and the allegedly imperial model of Soviet ethnofederalism serving as crucial guides to building the right kind of confederation for the peoples of the Caucasus.

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<sup>131</sup> Such petitions were frequently authored collectively by the Parisian Prometheans, as in “Memorandum du Comité pour l’Indépendance du Caucase à la 9<sup>me</sup> Session de l’Assemblée de la Société des Nations,” *LP* 23 (October 1928); 1-3; G.G. (Georges Gwazana), “La Russie évoluée,” *LP* 99 (February 1935); 1-4; “Protestation contre l’impérialisme rouge,” *LP* (September 1936); 1-5; G.G., “La voix des peuples opprimés,” *LP* (October 1937); 1-2.

## **The demise of the Soviet Union and the contours of a Promethean Eurasia**

Replacing the Soviet Union with a Promethean alternative, however, meant first bringing down the Bolsheviks and leading much of northern Eurasia to a situation in which widespread, nationally based secession would be within reach. A major problem for the Parisian Prometheans was that nationalism, though certainly a notable factor in spawning a panoply of peripheral nation-states between 1917 and 1922, had neither toppled Tsarism on its own nor managed to contain the rise of the Bolsheviks, meaning that other, more decisive structural shocks would need to shatter the Soviet Union before it could be dismantled. Furthermore, the exiled Prometheans recognized that the Bolsheviks, despite their ethnically Russian roots, had managed to institutionalize and structure nationalism by recruiting indigenous cadres in the borderlands, a phenomenon reflected in the “Leninist liberalism” that allowed “national communists” and “patriot-Bolsheviks,” such as Mykola Khvyl’ovyi in Ukraine, Nariman Narimanov in Azerbaijan, and Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev in Tatarstan, to operate in the non-Russian republics under the New Economic Policy (NEP).<sup>132</sup> In 1928, on the eve of NEP’s demise, Noe Zhordania had hoped that reformist tendencies within the Soviet Union would unmake Bolshevik imperialism and allow a fairly bloodless reinstatement of the sovereignty of Georgia and the other “democratic republics.” Internal economic and political crises, potentially with the pressures originating from the international arena, would set the stage for nationalism to surface as a dynamic, centripetal phenomenon, much as it had in 1917. While Zhordania did not exclude the possibility of employing military force to depose the Bolsheviks if the need arose, he emphasized that the collapse of multinational empires, however,

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<sup>132</sup> E. Zaboula, “Discussion sur l’oppression coloniale,” *LP* 27 (February 1929); 10-14. Wasilewski, “ ‘Samookreślenie’ narodów byłej Rosji,” “Ruchy separatystyczne Kaukazu i Turkiestanu,” in *Sprawy narodowościowe w teroży i w życiu*.

gradual, was a historical inevitability, particularly in light of the growth of popular nationalist movements in the “civilized” borderlands of Eurasia.<sup>133</sup>

Rather than concentrating on the specific circumstances under which the Soviet Union might dissolve, the Parisian Prometheans focused their intellectual energies on a project concerned with transnational integration, namely creating the framework for a post-Soviet Caucasian Confederation that drew upon Euro-American federalist ideas and looked to the League of Nations for its main source of inspiration. However fervently writers in *Le Prométhée* made the case for a Eurasia of sovereign nation-states in their shared invective against the Bolsheviks, they equally emphasized the necessity of embedding those individual, compact polities with a wider fabric of peaceful cooperation, whether in the Caucasus, the post-Soviet borderlands, or on a global scale. Prior to the intensification of the civil wars and the secession of individual nation-states, federalist ideas had occupied a central place in the geopolitical imaginations of many Caucasian intellectuals, who envisioned the devolution of power in the contiguous Ottoman, Iranian, and Russian borderlands as a way of preserving the integrity of multinational states while eliminating oppressive imperial relations among their patchworks of peoples.<sup>134</sup> Although the federalization of Russia in 1917 had proven abortive, the exiles who led the KNK in Paris after 1926 had not abandoned their ambitious commitment to international integration in place of a narrow fixation on national independence, instead continuing to see these projects as mutually constitutive and intimately connected.<sup>135</sup> Secession from Russia itself inevitably meant locating the identity of a new nation-state within some kind of

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<sup>133</sup> Zhordania, *Nashi raznoglasiia*, 37-45.

<sup>134</sup> See Hourì Berberian, *Roving Revolutionaries: Armenians and the Connected Revolutions in the Russian, Iranian, and Ottoman Worlds* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019).

<sup>135</sup> See the documents in Mamouliia, *Kavkazkaia konfederatsiia*, 41-52.

international context, and while the all-Russian frame for the interrupted territorial reorganization of 1917 had lost much of its promise, the Parisian Prometheans never lost sight of the cause of federalizing the Caucasus and, in turn, weaving the Caucasus into a wider family of “civilized” nations. Though anchored in nation-states, the world for which these Prometheans fought was, at its heart, a layered one in which international law, integrative frameworks, and even pan-national visions overlapped with one another.

For the Parisian Prometheans, the Caucasus was an ideal laboratory for federalism because its ethnic, linguistic, and religious mosaic had organically cohered over the course of centuries into a unified territory with common cultural features and an underlying geographical unity. While *Le Prométhée* occasionally drew connections between the Caucasus and Yugoslavia, the main analogue that they cited to explain the structure of their homeland to Francophone readers was Switzerland, a similarly compact, orderly, and peaceful federation that now housed the headquarters of the League of Nations.<sup>136</sup> All of the nations represented in the KNK, these Prometheans claimed, had already demonstrated their commitment to federalism in 1917 and 1918, when Russia’s descent into anarchy had placed the responsibility of maintaining a semblance of peace in the Caucasus upon local nationalists, some of whom, like Zhordania and Rasulzadeh, directly partook in negotiating a short-lived Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic.<sup>137</sup> Torn apart by the ongoing war with the Ottomans and internal disagreements, namely between the Azeris and the now absent Armenians, this particular incarnation of Caucasian federalism had left the KNK with important lessons to incorporate into an improved structure for regional

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<sup>136</sup> Rasulzadeh, “L’Unité du Caucase,” *LP* 36 (November 1929); 5-7.

<sup>137</sup> “La conférence caucasienne,” *LP* 101 (April 1935); 1-5.

unity, which would now be a much looser confederation of sovereign nation-states that, with some notable differences, would resemble the League of Nations in miniature. This Caucasian Switzerland, moreover, would exercise a civilizing influence over its neighbors, inspiring the other peoples under Soviet rule to choose a peaceful road to statehood, potentially by joining and expanding the confederation, while sending an unambiguous signal to the ethnic Russians that the post-Ottoman path of the Turkish Republic offered one of the best means of leaving behind the burdens of empire.<sup>138</sup>

All of these comparisons were not lost on French jurists and academics such as Georges Scelle, who supported the self-determination of the non-Russian nations of the Soviet Union through a well regulated and nonviolent process of international arbitration. Unlike Stanisław Siedlecki, the head of Warsaw's Eastern Institute, who saw the birth of new nation-states as an inherently chaotic and disorderly struggle for productive resources and defensible borders, Scelle, citing the example of the KNK's plans for a united Caucasus, insisted that bodies such as the League of Nations should only admit freshly formed states that demonstrated an ability to refrain from war and develop the maturity to enter a global community governed by shared institutions.<sup>139</sup> Siedlecki, in his articles in *Le Prométhée*, was clearly dissatisfied with the League of Nations as a guardian of peoples in the process of claiming their independence, recommending that a different organization be created to protect such populations and safeguard them from being reincorporated into the larger countries from which they had seceded.<sup>140</sup> Scelle, however, argued that "civilized" nations could no longer

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<sup>138</sup> Jafar Seydamet, "La Confédération du Caucase et l'Union des peuples opprimés," *LP* 75 (February 1933); 19-23; Rasulzadeh, "Le problème du Caucase," *LP* 84 (November 1933); 6-8.

<sup>139</sup> Georges Scelle, "Paix et Fédéralisme," 2 (December 1926), 4-6.

<sup>140</sup> Stanisław Siedlecki, "La Creation d'un Etat," serialized in *LP* 61-64 (December 1931-March 1932).

demand particular frontiers on the basis of ensuring their own security or gaining an advantage in warfare, since all countries should shed their “barbarism” and share natural resources and access to crucial bodies of water under the aegis of the League.<sup>141</sup> Despite his divergences from Siedlecki’s somewhat more boisterous view of internationalism, Scelle considered the KNK to have a legitimate claim to independent statehood and reproached the Bolsheviks for trampling on the sacred “right of nations to self-determination,” though he concluded that the Caucasus must gain its sovereignty through legitimate channels of international law rather than armed insurrection. Scelle’s support for the independence of the Caucasus, which already appeared in the first years of *Le Prométhée*’s run, was accompanied by a more general argument that federalism, as the voluntary association of free and equal peoples and territories, constituted a force for worldwide progress that would gradually rescue humanity from the horrors of war by encouraging economical, political, and legal interdependence.<sup>142</sup>

Translating these grand principles of international coexistence into a viable model for Caucasian federalism, however, was a difficult process in practice, starting from the inauspicious collapse of the TDFR in 1918. As Georges Mamoulia has illustrated, however, Caucasian exiles of various ideological stripes refused to renounce this struggle as they fled to Turkey, France, and other safe havens amid the Soviet conquest of their home region by 1921, gaining the attention of the Polish military sponsors who backed the KNK after 1926.<sup>143</sup> With the notable absence of an Armenian delegation, which was still officially entitled to participate in its activities

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<sup>141</sup> Scelle, “Paix.”

<sup>142</sup> Idem., “A propos du droit des Peuples à disposer d’eux-mêmes” (serialized in January to March of 1927); “Les Russes à Genève,” 7 (May 1927), 5-8; “Les Soviets à Genève,” 14 (January 1928), 2-5.

<sup>143</sup> Mamoulia, *Kavkazkaia konfederatsiia*, 5-21.

until the end, the KNK included figures such as Rasulzadeh and Zhordania who had worked to reorganize the Caucasus since 1917 and held an important stake in challenging the international legitimacy of the Transcaucasian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (TSFSR) formed as a founding member of the Soviet Union in 1922.<sup>144</sup> Even Olgierd Kryczyński, a Lipka Tatar and Promethean intermediary who had supported Azerbaijan's entry into a union of Caucasian nations in the civil war years, recalled the historical origins of this project in an article for *Le Prométhée*.<sup>145</sup> The allegedly imperial, involuntary Bolshevik system of ethnically based federalism, for the KNK, was a clear foil to their own pursuits, which were to contribute to the "general Promethean" struggle while attempting to win the attention, and, ultimately, the recognition, of the League of Nations.<sup>146</sup> While the KNK's leaders could claim no territory of their own and, individually, had faced the same unpromising fates as other representatives of the "allogeneic peoples" in petitioning the League, the Soviet Union, at least in 1926, was still not a member itself and, at least in Zhordania's mind, stood on shaky foundations, making it conceivable that the Parisian Prometheans might play an important part in managing the post-Soviet remaking of Eurasia.<sup>147</sup>

While the general concept of a federal system for the Caucasus was present in the pages of *Le Prométhée* from the journal's inception, the rigorous, detailed exposition of the actual architecture of the Caucasian Confederation began to appear in 1932, culminating in 1934 with the actual conclusion of a treaty signed by the Georgian, Azeri, and North Caucasian Prometheans, with a vacant space left open for the

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<sup>144</sup> Mir Yacoub, "Le Problème du Caucase," *LP* 45 (August 1930); 1-2.

<sup>145</sup> O.N.M. (Olgierd Najman Mirza) Kryczyński, "Historique de l'idée de la Confédération Caucasiennne," *LP* 100 (March 1935), 6-8.

<sup>146</sup> T. Chakman, "Le problème des nationalités," *LP* 123 (February 1937); 10-12.

<sup>147</sup> Zhordania, *Nashi raznoglasiia*, 42-45.

Armenians.<sup>148</sup> As Mamoulia points out, the timing of these developments closely parallels the improvement of Franco-Soviet ties in 1932 and the controversial entry of the Soviet Union into the League of Nations in 1934, all of which made the challenge of proposing a Promethean alternative to the TSFSR significantly more urgent.<sup>149</sup> Prometheism's Polish organizers in Warsaw, facing devastating cuts to their annual budget with the onset of the Great Depression and the easing of the *Sanacja* regime's relations with Moscow, played a key part in accelerating the process of drafting the program for the Caucasian Confederation as the movement's future became increasingly uncertain.<sup>150</sup> In this sense, the efforts that produced one of the most important intellectual achievements of Prometheism were made in a moment of gathering crisis that simultaneously tested the faith of the Parisian exiles in the liberal internationalism of the League as it officially accepted their greatest enemy into its ranks following years of petitions and protests.

While the architects of the Caucasian Confederation claimed to have considered the Swiss constitution of 1815, the German Confederation of 1815, and the 1776 Declaration of Independence of the United States as their primary inspirations, the framework that they drew up, in the end, reserved only a handful of explicit, carefully limited powers for a few modest organs of federal authority.<sup>151</sup> In defining how the Caucasian Confederation would function, "M.M.," the author of a series of key articles published in *Le Prométhée* in 1932, found it most effective to begin by carefully explaining what this creation would not be. Unlike Switzerland, Germany,

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<sup>148</sup> "Pacte de la Confédération du Caucase," *LP* 92 (July 1934); 3-6.

<sup>149</sup> Mamoulia, *Kavkazkaia konfederatsiia*, 31-35.

<sup>150</sup> Libera, "Polish authorities and the attempt to create the Caucasian Confederation (1917-1940)," *Studia z dziejów Rosji i Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej* 52.3 (2017); 231-252.

<sup>151</sup> M.M., "L'organisation de l'autorité fédérale," *LP* 80 (July 1933); 21-27.



or the United States, the Caucasian Confederation itself would “not be a state,” but instead a legal compact willingly formed by its constituent nation-states, all of which would accept, on a completely voluntary and nonbinding basis, the limited authority of a federal supreme court, an assembly consisting of delegations from the individual national parliaments, and a smaller executive council chosen by the assembly.<sup>152</sup> To prevent the concentration of power in any particular member state, the federal institutions would be housed in a neutral capital district, much like Washington, D.C., while the actual implementation of their resolutions and rulings in most matters would be left up to the national governments.<sup>153</sup> M. Kartveli, another regular contributor, emphasized that the decisions of the supreme court would be subject to ratification or rejection by the national authorities, while the legislative assembly would have to come to unanimous decisions on particularly grave issues such as declarations of war and the conclusion of peace treaties, both of which belonged to the federal organs.<sup>154</sup> To the disappointment of the Polish sponsors of the KNK, who hoped for a sturdy bulwark against the Soviet Union, the Caucasian Confederation would also not maintain a standing army but would instead entrust matters of mass mobilization to a centralized military command in the event of a conflict. Finally, a common set of external frontiers would effectively allow for open borders among the member states, facilitating the creation of a shared territory for trade and customs law and a uniform set of standards for weights and measures.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> *Idem.*, “La structure juridique.”

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>154</sup> Kartveli, “La Confédération.”

<sup>155</sup> “Pacte,” 3-4.

The Caucasian Confederation, according to M.M., would in practice resemble a slightly tighter, regional version of the League of Nations rather than any of the world's existing federal polities, resting upon the good faith of its members, rather than any mechanisms of overt coercion, to pursue the "common good" and expressly leaving open the possibility of secession without penalties.<sup>156</sup> These principles, according to the pieces featured in *Le Prométhée*, not only reinforced the primacy of nation-states in international affairs but simultaneously challenged the "false" form of Soviet federalism, which allegedly imposed centralized political and economic domination over a collection of largely symbolic national territories while, in effect, upholding the hegemony of ethnic Russians over all others. The developmental logic of Bolshevik ethnofederalism, which, from the time of Stalin's speeches at the Third Congress of Soviets in January of 1918, envisioned the system of union republics and autonomous regions as a transitional structure through which greater coordination among the workers of different nationalities would emerge over time, though this temporariness is best known for becoming indefinite.<sup>157</sup> By contrast, the Caucasian Confederation did not attempt to radically homogenize or otherwise alter the internal contents of its member states, though its framers did propose certain forms of standardization that would make it more straightforward for the exchange of goods to take place across national frontiers as well as with foreign countries. If Stalin's well known formula from the NEP years described Soviet proletarian culture as "national in form, socialist in content," then the Caucasian Confederation, in the eyes of its ideologues, would respect the essentially national contents of its constituent parts

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<sup>156</sup> M.M., "La structure juridique."

<sup>157</sup> See Chapter Two for a discussion of Stalin's federal paradigm.

while providing a loosely internationalist form in which they could more closely cooperate and relate with the “civilized” world.

In this cautious formulation, it was the “national state,” as Rasulgadeh called it, that continued to possess a monopoly over sovereignty, though participation in an international society such as the Caucasian Confederation or the League of Nations served as a valuable mark of culture and development for any people with a country of their own. This approach to balancing nationalism with internationalism, though not surprising for Rasulgadeh or the North Caucasians, is perhaps more striking in the case of Zhordania and the Georgian Mensheviks, who had favored some combination of extraterritorial autonomy on the basis of nationality and territorial decentralization according to regional economic needs for the late Russian Empire.<sup>158</sup> The direction of Soviet policies, however, seem to have made excessive centralization immensely unpopular among the Parisian Prometheans, who embraced an emphatically voluntary kind of confederation that might, in the future, persuade some faction of Armenians as well as the other Caucasian emigre circles to think about joining. Even before 1934, the federalist imagination of *Le Prométhée* had expanded to include the idea of Ukraine’s future alignment with a united Caucasus with the goal of fostering cooperation and mutual security around the Black Sea, while Shokay, a Turkestani exile, also apparently engaged with the idea of a post-Soviet Central Asian federation.<sup>159</sup>

Another important test of the boundaries of the Parisian Promethean imagination came in the form of pan-national ideas calling for closer cooperation and even

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<sup>158</sup> See Chapter Two for a discussion of the Mūsavat and Georgian Menshevik programs for Russia’s territorial reform.

<sup>159</sup> Moustapha Tchokaïeff (Mustafa Shokay), “Le Projet de Fédération d’Asie Centrale,” *LP* 52 (March 1931); 11-15; Dmyto Boug, “La Mer Noire,” *LP* 73 (December 1932); 20-23.

unification among peoples purportedly belonging to a common, ethnically or “racially” defined family. Within the Promethean movement, Finnish nationalists openly claimed intimate ties to other Finnic peoples of northern European Russia, while Shokay saw the inhabitants of Soviet Turkestan as members of a shared, organic folk community whom the Bolsheviks endeavored to divide and conquer through the creation of separate national republics such as Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.<sup>160</sup> Pan-Asian ideas, meanwhile, received some enthusiasm from Zhordania, owing in part to Japan’s prominence as a potential supporter of the separation of the Caucasus from the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union.<sup>161</sup> Perhaps the most central issue in the Caucasian context, however, was pan-Turkism, which Zhordania and Rasulzadeh addressed in a slim volume published by the KNK in 1930.<sup>162</sup> Zhordania, in his brief introductory essay, optimistically contended that the rise of pan-Turkism since the nineteenth century constituted a clear parallel to the formation of pan-German ideas in Europe, demonstrating that the peoples of the “East” were developing the same, universal structures of political thought and organization as their contemporaries in the “West.” Assertions such as these constituted a minor motif in some of Zhordania’s later articles that outlined the spread of a “universal civilization” from the ascendant Japanese Empire across Central Asia and the Caucasus and, finally, into a declining Europe.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> “1930, 21 października. Sprawozdanie Ayasa Ischaki,” 165-169; Tourdi Bek, “Un aperçu de la vie économique du Turkestan,” *Le Prométhée* 12 (November 1927), 23-27.

<sup>161</sup> Zhordania, “Problem światowy,” *Wschód* 5/1 (1933-1934), 1-7. Also see Hiroaki Kuromiya and Georges Mamoulia, *The Eurasian Triangle: Russia, The Caucasus and Japan, 1904-1945* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016).

<sup>162</sup> Rasulzadeh and Zhordania, *O panturanizme, v sviazi s kavkazskoi problemoi* (Paris: 1930).

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, v-viii; Zhordania, “Problem.”

For Rasulzadeh, the principal challenge confronting modern pan-Turkism lay in reconciling visions of pan-national unity with the primacy of the compact, ethnically homogeneous nation-state as the most viable post-imperial structure within which to organize territory and population.<sup>164</sup> Whereas radical “centralists” dreamed of merging the Turkic peoples of Eurasia into a shared polity, Rasulzadeh argued for what he promoted as a “realist” interpretation of pan-Turkism that resigned from grand projects of geopolitical fusion and instead concentrated on fostering cultural cooperation and communication across a network of nation-states. This would leave sovereignty securely in the hands of national governments while opening up the sphere of cultural and intellectual exchange as a common space for pan-Turkic interaction and experimentation.<sup>165</sup> For Rasulzadeh, the disastrous collapse of Eurasia’s major multinational land empires around the end of the First World War had conclusively shown that the future belonged to nation-states such as the Turkish Republic, ruling out the possibility of cobbling together a conglomerate country that would, in theory, stretch from Anatolia and the Caucasus to Crimea, the Volga River, and Central Asia.<sup>166</sup> Responding to Zhordania’s comparison, Rasulzadeh contended that pan-German nationalism had made considerable, if incomplete, progress in forging a German state by the early 1870s precisely because Europe’s Germans were already well connected by shared institutions of economic integration and densely concentrated in a fairly small corner of the world. By contrast, a pan-Turkism preoccupied with territorial unification would inevitably become mired in the same problems that had confounded the advance of pan-Slavism, making Rasulzadeh’s

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<sup>164</sup> Rasulzadeh and Zhordania, *O panturanizme*, 21-25.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 53-62.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 55-60.

“realist” embrace of nation-states a necessary form of “federalism” that respected the distinctiveness of the individual Turkic peoples.<sup>167</sup>

Rasulzadeh’s meditations on pan-Turkism, which also took the form of a lecture delivered to an audience of Parisian Prometheans in March of 1930, were shaped in no small part by the ongoing campaigns against “pan-Turanian” and “pan-Islamic” deviants in the Soviet Union as well as the heated debates that these developments spurred in Francophone emigre circles. Specifically, Rasulzadeh was keenly cognizant of the 1928 arrest and trial of Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev, a former Tatar Bolshevik expelled from the party in 1923 and now accused of planning to overthrow the Soviet government with the aim of creating a united “Turan.”<sup>168</sup> Sultan-Galiev, according to Rasulzadeh, was only the most prominent figure to fall in this campaign, which he characterized as a generalized crackdown on “deviant” nationalists in the Turkic borderlands that would restore the hegemony of the ethnic Russians.<sup>169</sup> Already in January of 1930, *Le Prométhée* had issued a programmatic article vehemently rejecting allegations attributed to Russian and Armenian that the KNK, and, in particular, its Azeri members, wished to wrest the Caucasus from Soviet rule only to place it in the orbit of Turkey.<sup>170</sup> Unlike the fanciful, incoherent concept of a “Turan” occupying vast swathes of Eurasia, the Caucasus, the authors insisted, was a concrete, integrated regional unit whose constituent peoples, Turkic or otherwise, were committed to working with one another rather than soliciting the intervention of neighboring powers. While criticizing the Armenian Revolutionary Federation for

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 60-64.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 62-65.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 15-25.

<sup>170</sup> “Les États-Unis du Caucase et le Pantouranisme,” *LP* 38 (January 1930); 1-4.

allegedly maintaining illegitimate territorial claims to both Turkish and Azeri soil, *Le Prométhée* used this debate as an opportunity to stress the importance of Armenian involvement in the KNK, claiming that the coming of the Caucasian Confederation would mark a new stage in the harmonization of the region's affairs and settle disagreements over borders for good.<sup>171</sup>

If Zhordania had proposed a bloodless dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1928 that embodied the KNK's tendency to focus on a "civilized," European-oriented future for the Caucasus, the idea that an interstate war would play an important part in bringing down the Bolsheviks was far from foreign to the Parisian Prometheans, especially following the Soviet entry into the League of Nations in 1934. Visions of a violent Soviet collapse started to come into sharper focus in *Le Prométhée* in the early to mid-1930s, when the rise of fascist regimes in Europe and East Asia coupled with the dramatic political and economic upheavals unleashed by Stalin generated the impression among some Prometheans that an advantageous historical conjuncture was on the horizon. With the introduction of the First Five-Year Plan in 1928, Prometheans in both Paris and Warsaw began to declare that Stalin had swept away all remaining "national communist" opposition and proven that Moscow intended to openly exploit the non-Russian republics as its internal colonies, fully subordinating their resources and labor to the demands of the center.<sup>172</sup> Though meant to strengthen Moscow's position in the long run, the Prometheans contended that such a brutal and protracted reconfiguration of the Soviet Union's internal energies would expose structural weaknesses and, combined with unexpected shifts in the international

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Wasilewski, " 'Samookreślenie' narodów byłej Rosji," "Ruchy separatystyczne Kaukazu i Turkiestanu," in *Sprawy narodowościowe w teroży i w życiu* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo J. Mortkowicza, 1929), 177-202; 203-232; "Zjazd językoznawczy narodów ujarzmionych Z.S.R.R.," in *Wschód* 2/3 (1936), 53-58; Yuriy Naumenko, "Ukraina sowiecka," in *Wschód* 3 (1935), 1-11.

balance of power, potentially create a scenario of chaos and fragmentation similar to what had arisen in 1917.<sup>173</sup>

While Rasolzadeh praised Hitler and Mussolini as potential allies in overthrowing the Bolsheviks, Zhordania took a more nuanced approach, describing Nazism, with its vicious antisemitism and expansionist “crusade” against the Bolsheviks, as the unfortunate consequence of the post-1918 humiliation of the German nation and the failure of liberal democracy to hold the middle ground in the Weimar Republic.<sup>174</sup> The true catalyst for Hitler’s rise, Zhordania explained, had been the unchecked infiltration of pro-Soviet communists into German political life, which presented the population with an unenviable choice between Stalinism and “Hitlerism” as the more moderate parties proved incapable of keeping the former at bay.<sup>175</sup> Hitler, in Zhordania’s view, was an ideal rival for the Bolsheviks given what he described as the militarist spirit, rigidly hierarchical organization, and ideological fanaticism of the Nazis, a brutish yet potent and potentially destabilizing departure from the impotence of the more “civilized” parliamentary systems of Western Europe in the face of the Soviet threat.<sup>176</sup> Though unwilling to endorse Hitler, Zhordania, in 1934, showed a deep fascination with the ascendant Japanese Empire even before the rise of the Anti-Komintern axis, describing the Far East as a weak point in the Soviet state and boldly forecasting that a new “Pacific civilization” stretching across Central Asia and the Caucasus might overtake the declining Atlantic. While this new “civilization” might

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<sup>173</sup> Gwazana, “La prison”; André Yacouvliu, “Les relations entre l’Ukraine et la Moscovie du point de vue historique et de Droit,” *LP* 126 (May 1937); 11-16; Choulguine (Shul’hyn), “La centralisation en U.R.S.S. et la nouvelle constitution,” *LP* 128-129 (July-August 1937); 1-7.

<sup>174</sup> Mammad Amin Rasolzadeh, “Synteza epoki,” in *Wschód* 12 (1938), 9-10; Zhordania, “L’avènement d’Hitlerisme,” *LP* 104 (July 1935); 1-5.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid*.



eventually develop a “universal” character incorporating the old Atlantic, Zhordania was blunt in his assessment of Europe as a hotbed of imperialist greed and decadence that had shown its moral corruption through its colonial ambitions.<sup>177</sup> Though based in Paris, the KNK’s leading members, as Hiroaki Kuromiya and Georges Mamoulia show, did not limit their alliances to the boundaries of the Promethean network, developing ties with Japanese statesmen in the interwar years as they searched for state-sponsored partners interested in creating a post-Soviet Eurasia.<sup>178</sup>

By 1936, the mood in *Le Prométhée* seemed to be that Stalin’s recent drives for industrialization and collectivization had consumed massive state investment while failing to raise productivity or alleviate the Soviet economy’s structural weaknesses and severe penury, creating a dangerous state of disorder that would come under serious stress in the event of an open conflagration with Germany and Japan.<sup>179</sup>

Mustafa Shokay and Mammad Amin Rasulzadeh were perhaps the most prominent members of the Parisian Promethean circle to openly align themselves with Hitler’s plans for the invasion of the Soviet Union by 1941, which, in seeking the destruction of tens of millions of Slavic and Jewish *Untermenschen*, pragmatically found room for legions of Turkic and Caucasian collaborators.<sup>180</sup> This phenomenon of Promethean-Nazi contacts also grew increasingly common in the Warsaw-based milieu by 1939, with Włodzimierz Bączkowski, a young “Orientalist,” personally

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<sup>177</sup> Zhordania, “Problem.”

<sup>178</sup> Kuromiya and Mamoulia, *The Eurasian Triangle*.

<sup>179</sup> Choulgine (Shul’hyn), “La centralisation.”

<sup>180</sup> Kuromiya and Mamoulia, *The Eurasian Triangle*, 187 ; Enver Altaylı, *A Dark Path to Freedom Ruzi Nazar, from the Red Army to the CIA* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

traveling to Berlin one year before the Wehrmacht's attack on Poland to negotiate a common front against Stalin.<sup>181</sup>

Importantly, though, the growing gravitation of Prometheans towards fascism in the 1930s did not simply displace the more deeply established affinity for liberal internationalism in the ranks of the KNK and other Parisian groups, though the tenor of their correspondence with the League of Nations was palpably different on the eve of the Second World War than what it had been a decade earlier. In 1937, the KNK and its Ukrainian and Turkestani allies submitted a collective petition to Lausanne that denounced the membership of the Soviet Union and, crucially, posited that the global authority and prestige of the League had already been tragically waning for some time. Having deconstructed the recently adopted Soviet constitution of 1936, the document's authors urged the League to recognize that Stalin's empire was neither a federation nor a normal state of any kind, but a deranged, heavily armed camp that had internalized war as a way of life and stood ready to unleash terror upon the world.<sup>182</sup> Nothing about the structure of the Soviet Union, according to this appeal, was compatible with the laws of the "civilized" world, which the League had grown incapable of enforcing by inviting a brutal dictatorship into its ranks. According to one Ukrainian commentator writing for *Le Prométhée* that same year, longstanding Western hopes for the "bourgeois reformation" of the Soviet Union would ultimately be dashed, since the Bolsheviks manifestly preferred a violent breakup driven by an

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<sup>181</sup> Schattkowsky, "Between Science and Politics: Włodzimierz Bączkowski and the Polish Eastern Europe Research," in *History and Politics Remembrance as Legitimation* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: 2017), 231-248.

<sup>182</sup> G.G. (Gwazana), "La voix."

international war to the kind of gradual dissolution that Zhordania had envisioned nine years earlier.<sup>183</sup>

If the civil war years had precipitated a critical shift in how the Parisian Prometheans located their nested nationalist, federalist, and internationalist projects in time and space, the increasingly uneasy coexistence of the liberal internationalism of the League of Nations with the transnational fascism of the Anti-Komintern Pact in the pages of *Le Prométhée* exposed a central tension in the Promethean interpretation of nationalism as a historical phenomenon. While the Caucasian Confederation of 1934 was formulated to exemplify the ability of the “allogeneic peoples” to form orderly nation-states capable of integrating themselves into the progressive mainstream of the “civilized” world, the Parisian Prometheans simultaneously contemplated nationalism’s world-historic role as a disruptive, revolutionary force that could shatter the Soviet Union under the right combination of circumstances. Nationalism, in other words, could be cultured and tamed to abide by international standards of civility, yet it would also have to be weaponized against the Bolsheviks if such nation-states were to have a chance of achieving their independence in the first place. This was arguably the essence of the disagreement between the articles of Scelle, who envisioned the admission of new members into the world as a process to be standardized and stabilized as much as possible, and Siedlecki, whose pieces embraced the eruption of nation-states as a violent and generally unpredictable phenomenon. Zhordania, meanwhile, had attempted to resolve the problem of the Soviet collapse by placing his faith in the eventual victory of reformist currents over the Bolsheviks, yet the possibility of such an internally driven transformation seems to have largely evaporated from *Le Prométhée* over the course of the 1930s, giving

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<sup>183</sup> M. Danko, “La terreur et les nationalités en U.R.S.S.,” *LP* 131 (October 1937); 11-15.

way to a mounting fascination with the aggressive vigor of “Hitlerism” and other strains of far-right nationalism as the forces that would actually challenge Moscow’s domination on the battlefield.

This interest, of course, was not necessarily synonymous with unalloyed admiration, as Zhordania’s critical reflections on Nazism show, yet it seems to have arisen from the growing sense after 1934 that neither the liberal democracies of Western Europe nor any universal laws of history would seize the decisive part in unmaking the Soviet Union. Indeed, although the Prometheans posited a universal trajectory from multinational empires into nation-states, they recognized, and, in different ways, tangled with the question of what short-term factors would actually produce a new and ideally terminal iteration of the geopolitical chaos of 1917. The notion that the “allogeneic peoples” themselves would start a rebellion within the borders of the Soviet Union, meanwhile, gained some traction in *Le Prométhée* in the last three years before the Second World War, though the fundamental assumption of such predictions was that institutional breakdown and economic instability caused by Stalin’s drive for untrammelled centralization and collectivization would have to significantly weaken the hold of the Bolsheviks over their population before such a possibility could arise. While this dialectic of weaponization and integration came into sharper relief in the Parisian Promethean publications in the 1930s, it was certainly present in other areas of the movement’s global network, perhaps most notably in Warsaw, where the conceptualization of nationalism as a destabilizing, mobilizing force evolved into a central motif by the eve of the Second World War.

### **Prometheism, Polish geopolitics, and the turn to “imperialism”**

If the revolutions and civil wars of 1917 to 1922 had denied statehood and territory to the profusion of Promethean governments-in-exile, these upheavals had

simultaneously forged a living, accessible laboratory for the development of weaponized, anti-Soviet nationalism in the form of the Second Polish Republic. Cobbled together from imperial borderlands and abortive nation-states between 1918 and 1921, interwar Poland was hardly the ideal kind of compact, homogeneous, modernizing state that Promethean publications envisioned arising from the ruins of the Soviet Union, yet this ethnically composite and weakly integrated successor to the Romanov realm exemplified the messiness and complexity of actually reworking the fabric of fragmented empires into a novel form of post-imperial polity. From the perspective of Piłsudski and his allies at the height of their eastward campaigns in the spring of 1920, a nominally independent Ukrainian People's Republic and a federalized state encompassing the old Grand Duchy of Lithuania would join Poland in occupying most of the lands between the Baltic and Black Seas, replacing Russian rule with an ostensibly fraternal bloc of nations.<sup>184</sup> Prior to the First World War, Bolesław Limanowski had hoped for such a brotherly "Switzerland" in Eastern Europe as the best alternative to Tsarism, though Piłsudski, in practice, seldom paused to gather the consent of the governed as he subordinated the causes of Ukrainian, Lithuanian, and Belarusian statehood to Polish strategic needs.<sup>185</sup> After being driven back to the outskirts of Warsaw and L'viv by the Red Army, Piłsudski managed to rally his forces and reclaim lost ground, yet it was now the elected government in Warsaw, partly headed by the right-wing National Democrats, that brokered an armistice with the Bolsheviks and decided the course of Poland's eastern frontier in the peace negotiations at Riga. The resulting agreement, finalized in March of 1921, recognized the legitimacy of the Ukrainian and Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republics,

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<sup>184</sup> See Chapter Two for a discussion of these federalist visions.

<sup>185</sup> See Chapter One for Limanowski's social and geopolitical ideas.

with the National Democrats abandoning substantial swathes of territory in the interest of designing Poland as a unitary nation-state in which the East Slavs of the borderlands would be culturally and linguistically Polonized.<sup>186</sup>

Stanisław Grabski, a major National Democratic advocate of a westward, anti-German policy, insisted that Poland's political frontiers should coincide as completely as possible with the ethnographic borders of the Polish nation, a vision that left no space for separate Ukrainian or Belarusian identities among the so-called "Ruthenians," (*rusini*) who formed a "folk" (*lud*) or "tribe" (*szczep*) to be forged into patriotic, disciplined Poles.<sup>187</sup> Grabski's post-1921 bid to win the borderlands through Polonization, however, significantly overestimated the resources of the Polish state, whose short-lived parliamentary coalitions struggled to survive amid economic turmoil and political fragmentation in the first half of the 1920s, famously attempting to outlaw "Ruthenian"-language schools in a move that only deepened resentment among the nationally mobilized Ukrainians of East Galicia.<sup>188</sup> Not only did Poland lack the means to Polonize its minorities, but it also faced a capable and determined competitor in the form of NEP-era national communists in the neighboring Ukrainian and Belarusian SSRs, who funded and supported pro-Soviet communist parties and popular peasant-worker organizations that were particularly effective in gaining a foothold in rural, sparsely settled areas such as Volhynia and Polesie.<sup>189</sup> While this exploitation of cross-border national ties brought its own succession of frustrations to

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<sup>186</sup> See Jerzy Borzęcki, *The Soviet-Polish Peace of 1921 and the Creation of Interwar Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

<sup>187</sup> Stanisław Grabski, *Uwagi o bieżącej historycznej chwili Polski* (Warszawa: Księgarnia Perzyński, Niklewicz i Spółka, 1922), 62-85.

<sup>188</sup> Andrzej Jezierski and Cecylia Leszczyńska, *Historia gospodarcza Polski* (Warszawa: Key Text, 2003), 251.

<sup>189</sup> These cross-border projects and their reception are the subject of Chapter Five.

its Bolshevik architects by the late 1920s, it outmatched any comparable response from the Polish authorities, who were thinly stretched on the ground throughout their own eastern borderlands and generally preferred security over potentially risky and destabilizing attempts to weaponize Ukrainian or Belarusian nationalism against the Soviet Union. Provoking another costly war, as Jan Jacek Bruski writes, was something that both Polish and Soviet elites of the 1920s sought to avoid, even if their stormy rhetoric suggested otherwise.<sup>190</sup>

The idea of inverting the “Piedmont principle” to Poland’s benefit, however, formed a major motif in the intellectual output and, occasionally, the policy pursuits of the Polish Prometheans after 1926, providing many younger members of the movement with a context in which to imagine the restoration of their country’s status as a “great power” (*mocarstwo*), even one with “imperial” aspirations.<sup>191</sup> Owing to the infiltration of Soviet influences in the borderlands and the objections of mainstream parties such as the Ukrainian National Democratic Union (UNDO) against Poland’s annexation of East Galicia, these Prometheans believed that an effective model for the cross-border mobilization and weaponization of nationalism would have to simultaneously consolidate a loyal base of supporters within Poland if it were ever to find its necessary local springboard against the Bolsheviks. While western Belarus was probably the most permeable and prominent site of Soviet penetration after 1921, the Polish Prometheans saw Ukraine as a singularly important terrain for their eastern ambitions, citing its large population, natural wealth, degree of collective national consciousness, and history of statehood as circumstances warranting its primacy in

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<sup>190</sup> Bruski, *Between Prometheism and Realpolitik*, 32-40.

<sup>191</sup> See Lech Wyszczelski, *Polska mocarstwowa: Wizje i koncepcje obozów politycznych II Rzeczypospolitej* (Warszawa: Bellona, 2015).

Poland's strategic calculations.<sup>192</sup> If Piłsudski had seen his native Grand Duchy of Lithuania as the key to unmaking Tsarism before 1914, Leon Wasilewski, one of the leading theorists of nationalism in the PPS, had argued that Ukraine formed the most dynamic and potentially rebellious area under Russian rule, a claim that he continued to advance throughout the interwar period in lectures that he delivered at Promethean centers of knowledge production such as the Eastern Institute and the Ukrainian Scientific Institute in Warsaw as well as the Scientific Institute for the Study of Nationalities in Wilno.<sup>193</sup> For Wasilewski, Ukraine, unlike Belarus, could claim deep, premodern roots of political organization in the time of Kyivan Rus' and the Cossack Hetmanate, while its more recent fate in the First World War and the struggle with the Bolsheviks had demonstrated the extent to which a mass-based Ukrainian identity had rapidly congealed once Eastern Europe became a crucible of crisis.

The main challenge, Wasilewski claimed in 1934, was that the collective demographic, economic, and spiritual energies of a stateless nation would not, on their own, suffice to lift that particular community out of foreign domination, a condition, he contended, that inherently restricted and often sapped all of these vital powers. The cascade of upheavals of 1904 to 1920 had shown, in Wasilewski's mind, that it was the arrival of a favorably disruptive "conjuncture" (*konjunktura*) in international relations that had allowed Poland and a handful of other European countries to regain their statehood by wisely capitalizing on the hostilities among their occupiers.<sup>194</sup> For now, he continued, Ukraine, much like Poland before 1914, had

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<sup>192</sup> Bruski, *Between Prometheism and Realpolitik*, 29-35.

<sup>193</sup> Wasilewski, *Ukraina i sprawa ukraińska* (Kraków: "Książka", 1911); idem., *Ukraińska sprawa narodowa w jej rozwoju historycznym* (Warszawa: J. Mortkiewicz 1925); idem., *Kwestja ukraińska jako zagadnienie międzynarodowe* (Warszawa: Drukarnia Piotr Pyz i Skład, 1934).

<sup>194</sup> Idem., *Kwestja ukraińska*, 142-143.



been removed from the international agenda and reduced to a collection of “internal affairs” of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, and the Soviet Union, yet the goal of liberating “Dnipro Ukraine,” a term encompassing the Ukrainian SSR, could most likely be achieved with the arrival of another major eruption of tumult in Eurasia.<sup>195</sup> The challenge of identifying the structural factors at play in producing this future “conjuncture” and preparing for its arrival now fell to Warsaw’s Promethean community, who, lacking direct access to the levers of state power, devoted themselves to drawing up the foundations for a doctrine of Polish geopolitics that would emphasize the skillful mobilization of cross-border nationalism and turn the tide of the undeclared “cold war” in the borderlands against the Bolsheviks. As Bruski has suggested of the 1920s, such exercises in imagining Polish grandeur and forecasting another wave of nationalist revolutions in Eastern Europe might be interpreted as a “defensive” undertaking that served, in the Promethean imagination, to compensate for Poland’s growing inability to extricate itself from a position of weakness between Hitler’s Germany and Stalin’s Soviet Union in the mid- to late 1930s.<sup>196</sup> The specter of the coming “conjuncture,” in other words, became Poland’s saving grace and path to greatness as both of its populous and powerful neighbors outpaced it economically and militarily.

One of the earliest and most important theorists of the mobilization of nationalism in the interwar Polish-Soviet borderlands was Tadeusz Hołówko, a prominent figure in Piłsudski’s PPS and Polish Military Organization as well as a patron of the Promethean movement whose assassination by the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists in 1931 elevated him to martyrdom. Writing in 1922, Hołówko

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>196</sup> Bruski, *Between Prometheism and Realpolitik*, 295-301.

vehemently opposed National Democratic efforts at turning Poland into an ethnically homogeneous nation-state through the Polonization of the borderlands, arguing that the central government in Warsaw would have to federalize the country by delegating broad administrative and economic powers to predominantly Ukrainian and Belarusian provinces in order to win the loyalty of their inhabitants.<sup>197</sup> The challenge, according to Hołówko, would be especially great in East Galicia, where the Polish authorities would have to convince the local Ukrainians that joining their fold would constitute a substantial improvement from the broad regional autonomy provided by the Austrian monarchy before 1918.<sup>198</sup> Becoming truly post-imperial, for Hołówko, meant recognizing that an independent Poland derived its territory and population from former imperial states and would have to reckon with managing a multinational citizenry in ways that built upon what these predecessors had offered in terms of local and regional self-rule.<sup>199</sup> In addition to forging a pluralistic yet unified Poland, Hołówko predicted that empowering non-Poles in the borderlands would ultimately project Polish influences eastward, ideally weakening the appeal of Soviet rule, which he considered to be unstable and unpopular, while cultivating a new generation of Ukrainian and Belarusian patriots inclined to align themselves with a Polish-led bloc of sovereign states connected by transnational networks of cultural and educational institutions.<sup>200</sup>

Hołówko's plan for the federalization of Poland was complemented by more moderate proposals from fellow Prometheans such as Wasilewski, who proposed a

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<sup>197</sup> Tadeusz Hołówko, *Kwestia narodowościowa w Polsce* (Warszawa: Nakład Księgarnii Robotniczej 1922).

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 22-37.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-18.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 38-43.

combination of territorial autonomy for Ukrainians and Belarusians with extraterritorial self-rule for Germans and Jews in response to the alleged chauvinism of the National Democrats.<sup>201</sup> While neither plan succeeded in changing the policies of the right-wing “government of the Polish majority,” Piłsudski’s *Sanacja* regime also refused to wager on these elaborate yet potentially risky bids to shift the balance of power in the borderlands, opting to deploy the police and military to carry out mass arrests and campaigns of “pacification” that targeted pro-Soviet groupings and separatist organizations charged with sedition.<sup>202</sup> Though these efforts varied in their effectiveness in temporarily disrupting the operations of “anti-state” movements, they generally succeeded in deepening the existing alienation of many Ukrainian and Belarusian peasants from the government, which failed to articulate a comprehensive plan for the reorganization of the borderlands that would present the residents of these contested territories with a pro-Polish alternative to the Soviet “Piedmont” republics that promised an attractive combination of socioeconomic liberation and freedom from ethnically based persecution. Perhaps the most notable and influential exception to this trend, from the viewpoint of Polish Prometheans, was Henryk Józewski’s campaign to integrate Ukrainians hailing from pro-Petliura circles into the administrative architecture of the predominantly Ukrainian-speaking yet nationally malleable Volhynian voivodeship from roughly 1928 to 1935. With an eye to competing with the Soviet model of Ukrainian nationhood, Józewski legalized and encouraged the growth of Ukrainian cultural and political institutions that maintained

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<sup>201</sup> Wasilewski, *Polska dla Polaków czy Polska dla wszystkich obywateli polskich? : (sprawa mniejszości narodowych w Polsce)* (Warszawa: Nowe Życie, 1924); idem., *Sprawa kresów i mniejszości narodowych w Polsce* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Warszawskiego Oddziału Towarzystwo Uniwersytetu Robotniczego, 1925).

<sup>202</sup> See Kathryn Ciancia, *On Civilization's Edge: A Polish Borderland in the Interwar World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020) and Per Anders Rudling, *The Rise and Fall of Belarusian Nationalism, 1906–1931* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, University of Pittsburgh Press, 2014).

loyalty to Warsaw, though the death of Piłsudski in 1935 eliminated one of the project's most important patrons and returned Volhynia to the kind of heavy-handed, anti-Soviet rule practiced in neighboring Polesie and the rest of western Belarus.<sup>203</sup>

Despite the demise of Józewski's signature approach to governing Volhynia, younger Prometheans took up the challenge of defining a framework for a pro-Polish brand of Ukrainian nationalism and nationhood that would not only prevail in the eastern borderlands but also serve as the foundation for a post-Soviet Ukraine. From the time of its foundation in 1932, the Warsaw-based *Biuletyn polsko-ukraiński* (*The Polish-Ukrainian Bulletin*) gathered a community of regular commentators loosely associated with the Promethean movement that encompassed both ethnic Poles and Ukrainians interested in cooperating against Bolshevik rule beyond the Zbruch River. Włodzimierz Bączkowski, who also managed the Circle of Young Orientalists at the Eastern Institute and wrote prolifically for Warsaw's Promethean press, authored many of the *Bulletin's* most iconic programmatic pieces, though his close confidants and fellow Poles Adolf Bocheński and Stanisław Łoś also lent their voices to its pages. Strikingly enough, Bączkowski declared in one of his articles that "we are not Ukrainophiles" (*nie jesteśmy ukrajinofilami*), referring with this phrase to the educated, propertied Polish elites of the southwestern Russian Empire who had taken an interest in nurturing a Ukrainian folk culture at the height of European Romanticism in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>204</sup> For Bączkowski, the time for such tutelage, however earnest in its own day, had ended, giving way to the necessity of developing a rigorous, sober analysis of Polish and Ukrainian geopolitics that could enable serious and disciplined collaboration against the Bolsheviks. The fight for Ukrainian

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<sup>203</sup> Timothy Snyder, *Sketches from a Secret War: A Polish Artist's Mission to Liberate Soviet Ukraine* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005); Ciancia, *On Civilization's Edge*.

<sup>204</sup> Bączkowski, "Nie jesteśmy ukrajinofilami," in *Włodzimierz Bączkowski*, 48-54.

nationhood, he claimed, was now a central feature of European geopolitics that could not be put to rest by the efforts of the National Democrats to Polonize the “Ruthenians,” a demonym that Bączkowski considered to be antiquated, pejorative, and responsible for fanning anti-Polish sentiments among Ukrainians.<sup>205</sup>

Viewing Prometheism as an indispensable tool of Polish foreign policy that negated the material and demographic might of the Soviet Union by targeting its potentially restive borderlands, Bączkowski contended in his piece that Ukrainians with a real interest in independence should turn away from East Galicia, which definitively belonged to Poland, and focus instead on the strategically vital lands around the lower Dnipro and the Donbas.<sup>206</sup> The “real center of Ukraine,” in his mind, was bounded by a polygon that took the southeastern cities of Mariupol, Luhansk, Donetsk, and Odessa as its vertices, while Poland’s most vital interests lay within a triangle connecting the Baltic corridor, Upper Silesia, and Warsaw.<sup>207</sup> If Poles and Ukrainians could eliminate their fratricidal confrontation over the impoverished, peripheral, and relatively unimportant territories lying along the Zbruch, Bączkowski believed that they could remove the foremost source of internal weakness in a prospective bloc of independent nations between the Baltic and Black Seas and concentrate on projecting power through their external borderlands, whether against Germany in the west or “Russia” in the east. Unlike Galicia, the Soviet-dominated areas of Ukraine abounded in coal and heavy industries which, for the time being, were manipulated according to the needs of Moscow and shunted away from the

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<sup>205</sup> Ibid., 54-56.

<sup>206</sup> Bączkowski, “Zarys podstaw rozwiązania problemu ukraińskiego w Polsce,” in *Włodzimierz Bączkowski*, 70-72.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 70-73.

nearly thirty million Ukrainians living beyond Poland's southeastern boundary.<sup>208</sup> Seizing these southeastern wellsprings of natural wealth, according to Bączkowski, would allow Ukrainians to eliminate the system of exploitation forced upon them by the Bolsheviks, all while winning Poland a rich and vast ally that would turn Warsaw into a major center of power between the Baltic and Black Seas. The point, for Bączkowski, was that Ukrainian sovereignty and Poland's "great-power" ambitions aligned promisingly in this case, liberating the former while bringing the latter the large demographic base and territorial expansiveness necessary for escaping its seemingly perennial captivity between the aggression of Berlin and Moscow.<sup>209</sup>

Ukraine, in this analysis, could not realistically enjoy independence without Polish support, while Poland, without the greater part of Ukraine in its orbit, would remain encircled and devoid of outlets for material growth, striking a liveable and ultimately necessary balance between Warsaw and Kyiv. Recognizing this harsh yet incontrovertible truth, Bączkowski contended, was an essential step by which Poles and Ukrainians could ensure their survival in a world of great powers with dwindling room for small, weak nations. Polish-Ukrainian equality, for Bączkowski, was not the real point, and he openly embraced Poland's pursuit of aggrandizement as a natural phenomenon and an integral dimension of the Promethean project, which, after all, flowed naturally from the centuries-old struggle of Polish statesmen, from Stefan Batory to Piłsudski, to rein in the relentless Muscovite drive for domination across the Eurasian borderlands.<sup>210</sup> Whichever side succeeded in harnessing and channeling the separatist tendencies of Ukrainians and Belarusians towards the achievement of its

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<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 72-74.

<sup>210</sup> Bączkowski, *Zagadnienie kresów wschodnich na tle dziejów polsko-moskiewskich*, in *U źródeł upadku i wielkości* (Warszawa: Nakład Księgarni F. Hoessicka, 1935), 60-71.

own strategic ends, in Bączkowski's view, would emerge as the victor, and Poland, as of the mid-1930s, had not done nearly enough to counter the Soviet version of Ukrainian and Belarusian nationhood that was already seeping across the border.<sup>211</sup>

While Bączkowski readily shared his judgement that Ukraine, as a predominantly peasant nation with a historically meager intelligentsia, was very much the “inert,” unformed mass that Poland and the Soviet Union fought to mold, he did not describe it as a future colony, though the “imperial” quality of Polish designs in the east, in his view, was still something to be embraced.<sup>212</sup> If older Prometheans had attempted to neatly reconcile their pursuit of Polish geopolitical goals with the ostensibly equal status of post-imperial allies such as Ukraine, Bączkowski found little use for such exercises and did not consider the Poland of the 1930s to be exempt from the ruthless laws of geopolitics because of its messianic aspirations. Writing for the *Bulletin* in 1937, Bączkowski argued that the post-1918 world had yielded two essential prototypes of modern nationalism from which Poland, in fashioning itself as a great power, could choose.<sup>213</sup> The first of these options was embodied in the Turkish Republic, which had purged itself of the imperial Ottoman legacy by restricting itself to a compact, ethnically distinct territory, striving with brutal determination to ensure the solidarity of the Turkish population while pursuing the assimilation or eradication of Kurds, Armenians, and any other minorities that threatened the integrity of the state.<sup>214</sup> The second option, meanwhile, was the neo-imperial fascism of Mussolini's Italy, which aimed to recapture the greatness of the old Roman Empire by reclaiming

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<sup>211</sup> Idem., “Prometeizm polski,” in *Problem polsko-ukraiński w ziemi czerwieńskiej*, Second Edition (Warszawa: Polityka, 1938), 225-240.

<sup>212</sup> Idem., “Zarys podstaw,” 61-64.

<sup>213</sup> Idem., “Jaki ma być polski nacjonalizm?,” *Biuletyn polsko-ukraiński* 6.27 (1937); 1-3.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2.

its expansive territorial scope and placing diverse peoples under Italian hegemony.<sup>215</sup> According to Bączkowski, the Turkish type of nationalism most closely overlapped with the ideology of the National Democratic movement in Poland, whose leaders, chief among them Grabski, had fought without much success to Polonize Ukrainians and Belarusians while encouraging Jews to emigrate. This campaign for ethnic purity, however, was fundamentally misguided in Bączkowski's view because it vastly underestimated the distinctiveness and capacity for resistance of Ukrainians while artificially limiting the scope of Poland's expansion to whatever small corner of Europe could be made into an ethnically Polish homeland.<sup>216</sup>

If Rasulzadeh had vocally endorsed Kemalism and the Turkish Republic as ideal blueprints from which to construct a future Azeri state within the Caucasian Confederation, Bączkowski rejected the viability of such models in the Polish case.<sup>217</sup> A truly great Poland, Bączkowski maintained, would have to effectively deal with diversity at home while striving for geopolitical security by pushing Moscow's reach as far east as possible with the support of movements for Ukrainian and Belarusian statehood. This, however, did not mean adopting the expansionism of Mussolini, but selectively integrating the supposedly "productive," progressive spirit of British "imperialism" into Poland's quest for supremacy, which would have to bring substantial material and geopolitical benefits to the Ukrainians and the other nations of the Promethean movement once the Soviet threat could be rolled back.<sup>218</sup> Poland, Bączkowski argued, would have to distinguish itself from both Germany and the

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<sup>215</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., 1-2.

<sup>217</sup> *LP*, 0071.

<sup>218</sup> Bączkowski, "Jaki ma być," 2-3.



Soviet Union by raising living standards, economic productivity, and cultural development in the east, all achievements, in his mind, that Britain had delivered to its overseas possessions since the eighteenth century.<sup>219</sup> The implication, of course, was that Poland should never shy away from maintaining political and economic hegemony in Ukraine or Belarus while, just as importantly, ensuring that the residents of these countries would benefit from Polish-driven development programs in exchange for their continuing alignment with Warsaw. Unlike the barbaric, “Asiatic” mode of conquest with which Moscow suffocated its subjects, Poland’s “imperialism” would be rooted in the allegedly collaborative, dynamic ideals of the early-modern Jagiellonian Dynasty, supposedly assisting Ukraine in maximizing its latent energies and advancing a modernizing agenda in the east.<sup>220</sup>

Interestingly enough, Bączkowski’s argument for an allegedly civilized Polish “imperialism” was hardly the first of its kind, emerging most clearly and fairly recently in the writings of Zygmunt Balicki, an early National Democratic thinker who contended in 1902 that Poland, as a “spiritually rich” nation, belonged to the Anglo-American fold rather than the barbaric ranks inhabited by Germany and Russia.<sup>221</sup> Britain and the United States, Balicki had claimed, managed to conquer foreign lands without descending into excessive tyranny or exploitation, a standard to which Poles should also hold themselves while indulging their natural, healthy drive for national aggrandizement.<sup>222</sup> Importantly, early National Democrats like Balicki, as Brian Porter shows, vigorously rejected the idea of limiting Poland’s reach on the

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<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>221</sup> Zygmunt Balicki, *Egoizm narodowy wobec etyki* (L’viv: Nakład Towarzystwa Wydawniczego, 1902).

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., 52-55.

basis of ethnic boundaries, a development driven in part by Roman Dmowski following the Revolution of 1905.<sup>223</sup> In this sense, Bączkowski and Balicki, in their own ways, belonged to what Lech Wyszczelski describes as the strain of Polish political thought obsessively concerned with attaining “great power” status.<sup>224</sup>

Bączkowski’s geopolitical vision, by 1939, stressed the necessity of turning Poland into a “great power” with forceful, though civilized and tempered, “imperialist” ambitions across the “land between the [Baltic and Black] Seas,” or *Międzymorze*.<sup>225</sup> The success of Poland’s plans for Soviet Ukraine, however, still hinged upon Warsaw’s ability to solidify a significant army of loyal, disciplined Ukrainians within Polish borders, a goal to which Józewski had devoted himself in Volhynia for the better part of a decade following *Sanacja*’s formation. While categorically opposing any modifications to Poland’s frontiers that would involve relinquishing East Galicia, Volhynia, or the Chełm region (Kholmshchyna), Bączkowski simultaneously dismissed National Democratic arguments for the Polonization of Ukrainians, insisting that such a program treated the “Ukrainian question” as a narrowly internal affair of the Polish state and failed to appreciate that the formation of an independent and potentially hostile Ukraine on the Dnipro would vastly complicate Poland’s situation if Warsaw insisted upon denationalizing its “Ruthenians.”<sup>226</sup> The solution, according to Bączkowski, was not to repress Ukrainian national institutions, but to pursue a determined campaign to bring them under the sponsorship of the Polish state and turn them into organs of anti-Soviet mobilization, a move that would reproduce

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<sup>223</sup> Brian Porter, “Who is a Pole and where is Poland? Territory and Nation in the Rhetoric of Polish National Democracy before 1905,” *Slavic Review* 51 (Winter, 1992); 639-53.

<sup>224</sup> Wyszczelski, *Polska mocarstwowa*.

<sup>225</sup> Bączkowski, “Jaki ma być,” 3.

<sup>226</sup> Idem., “Zarys podstaw,” 80-84.

Józewski's experiment in Volhynia on a national scale.<sup>227</sup> Bączkowski and his colleagues had arguably created one such forum for pro-Polish Ukrainians in the form of the *Bulletin*, while Warsaw, since 1930, had been home to a Ukrainian Scientific Institute with Promethean activist Roman Smal-Stocki among its leaders, yet Piłsudski's death in 1935 renewed openly repressive policies towards Ukrainians and Belarusians in the borderlands.<sup>228</sup>

It was in this atmosphere that Bączkowski despaired over the increasing “ghettoization” of Ukrainian political parties, religious organizations, and schools in response to Polish policies, criticizing both the government and the National Democrats for renewing their regressive and misinformed persecution of the “Ruthenians.”<sup>229</sup> Only a powerful Polish state that legitimized Ukrainian national life and integrated its architecture into the sphere of Warsaw's control could hope to challenge the Soviet Union while “saturating” the Ukrainians with state-sponsored opportunities through which to conduct their affairs, thereby minimizing the ability of secessionist groups, whether pro-Soviet or right-wing nationalist, to take advantage of popular grievances.<sup>230</sup> Most fundamentally, though, Bączkowski emphasized that the Polish government would have to convince Ukrainians of its commitment to their best interests and the urgent challenge of creating an independent Ukraine on the Dniπρο by producing palpable improvements in the cultural and socioeconomic conditions that prevailed in the impoverished borderlands, a project that seemed to be losing ground after 1935.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, 66-68; 81-82.

<sup>228</sup> Ciancia, *On Civilization's Edge*.

<sup>229</sup> Bączkowski, “Zarys podstaw,” 70-80.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, 72-80.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, 75-77.

In outlining the contours of his response to the “Ukrainian question” within Poland’s borders, Bączkowski often cited the work of his contemporary and fellow *Bulletin* organizer Aleksander Bocheński, who shared the overarching view that only an alliance with Ukraine could deliver Poland from its unenviable position between Berlin and Moscow. Writing in response to renewed National Democratic calls for the Polonization of the “Ruthenians” in 1938, Bocheński claimed that one of the first and most important steps in integrating the borderlands with the rest of Poland was to legitimize the terms “Ukraine” and “Ukrainian” in public discourse and recognize their connection to a distinct people and territory with its own history, traditions of statehood, and need for independence.<sup>232</sup> Making the case that this independence would be most fruitfully pursued on the Dnipro rather than the Zbruch would inevitably be a more protracted process, yet eliminating the derisive, condescending references to “Ruthenia” and “Ruthenians” among Polish elites would help with breaking the initial “psychological” barrier that allegedly prevented Ukrainians from feeling at home within Poland.<sup>233</sup> Bocheński likewise recommended establishing the full parity of the Ukrainian and Polish languages in ethnically mixed areas, placing Ukrainian-language signs on state buildings, legalizing the display of Ukrainian flags and banners, purging schoolbooks of derogatory references to “Ruthenians,” and honoring Ukrainian military holidays, particularly those commemorating joint victories with Poles against Russian and Soviet foes, as essential steps in encouraging Ukrainians to accept an inclusive “state integration” as an alternative to both forceful Polonization and militant secessionist ideologies.<sup>234</sup> On the “educational” front,

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<sup>232</sup> Aleksander Bocheński, “Problem polityczny ziemi czerwieńskiej,” in *Problem polsko-ukraiński*, 106-111.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*, 106-107.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, 107-111.

Bocheński wrote that bilingual public schools had been a failure that merely alienated Ukrainians, necessitating the expansion of Poland's network of Ukrainian-language schools for Ukrainian pupils alongside the opening of Ukrainian-language high schools and universities that the state would directly manage to enable "better control."<sup>235</sup> Bocheński's "political" suggestions, meanwhile, were relatively modest, entailing an easing of centralized control over organs of local self-rule and the restructuring of these bodies along the lines of national "curiae" that would guarantee equal representation to Poles and Ukrainians living in "mixed" zones as a means of calming national antagonisms.<sup>236</sup>

In 1934, Aleksander Bocheński's brother and fellow geopolitical thinker Adolf predicted that Ukrainians living within Poland would occupy a position loosely analogous to ethnic Germans living in Switzerland, enjoying the freedoms of their ethnically composite fatherland while benefiting from the broad right to interact with their compatriots living in neighboring "Dnipro Ukraine."<sup>237</sup> Like Bączkowski, both Adolf and Aleksander Bocheński denounced any calls for the redrawing of borders between Poland and Ukraine, though he also described a Polish-Ukrainian "federation" as the best way in which to ease disagreements over frontiers by making it as straightforward as possible for people and goods to flow across the Zbruch.<sup>238</sup> Again, the Bocheński brothers were no naive, romantic "Ukrainophiles," but self-proclaimed theorists of geopolitics whose endorsement of Ukrainian statehood, ideally under the leadership of a new Symon Petliura, was predicated upon the calculation that the

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<sup>235</sup> Ibid., 134-170.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid., 171-187.

<sup>237</sup> Adolf Bocheński, *Sprawa ukraińska jako problem międzynarodowy* (Warszawa: Biuro Organizacji "Myśli Mocarstwowej," 1934), 24.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid., 22-24.

fragmentation of the Soviet Union along national lines would immensely relieve Poland of the pressure of lying between two large, aggressive neighbors.<sup>239</sup> The apex of Prometheus's reach, Bączkowski and the Bocheńskis concurred, had arrived when Piłsudski and Petliura fleetingly captured Kyiv in the spring of 1920, demonstrating that the road to a powerful Poland and the key to the Promethean unmaking of the Soviet Union ran through a resurgent Ukraine supported by Poland.<sup>240</sup> Yet if Piłsudski and his comrades had attempted to veil the deep strategic and economic inequalities between the Poland and Ukraine of that time by adopting the language of leading "the free with the free, equals with equals," neither Poles such as Bączkowski and the Bocheńskis nor their particular circle of Ukrainian allies in Warsaw attempted to disguise the brutal, even "imperialist" considerations that informed their sense of the necessity of Polish-Ukrainian interdependence. This approach, of course, meant that Prometheus's Ukrainian allies came from a small, elite, and self-selected group that generally struggled to find a mass following or gain access to the levers of power in the Polish government.

While the exact "conjuncture" that would destabilize the Soviet Union and weaponize Ukrainian nationalism remained to take shape, the *Bulletin* of the late 1930s, like other Promethean periodicals in Warsaw and Paris of the time, expressed the sense that a generalized European or even Eurasian war was impending as the continent's fascist regimes challenged the authority of its liberal democracies. In 1936, one author by the name of Józef Iskierka explained that Japan's rise was forcing the Soviet government to adapt the ethnonational structure of its Far Eastern lands in response to the threat of pan-Asianism, a potentially crucial factor in challenging

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<sup>239</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.; Bączkowski, "Europa wschodnia a obrona państwa," *Sprawy Europy wschodniej* 1.2 (1939); 86-88.

Moscow's hold over the Yakut and Buryat populations.<sup>241</sup> "Fascism and Hitlerism" in Europe, meanwhile, were reportedly on the offensive against the Komintern, a situation that Bączkowski attempted to exploit in 1938 by proposing an alliance between the Polish Prometheans and Nazi contemporaries interested in bringing down the Soviet Union by mobilizing its "captive nations."<sup>242</sup> Poland's room for maneuvering between its mighty neighbors, however, had grown narrower over the previous decade, which had inflicted tremendous economic ruin on the country while limiting its capacity to undertake military action in any direction. Writing in the last issue of *Wschód: Orient* published in the spring of 1939, Bączkowski characterized the late Piłsudski as the most recent bearer of the insurgent "idea of freedom" stretching back to Hannibal's campaign against Rome and Napoleon's march on Moscow, both of which, though unsuccessful, had demonstrated that ideas of rebellion, and not just weapons, played a decisive part in warfare since the early development of Western civilization.<sup>243</sup> Lacking the conventional means to conquer the territory necessary for Poland's ascent as a "great power," the Prometheans in Warsaw, on the eve of the Second World War, continued to believe that the ideas of Eurasian reorganization that their movement had fought to spread globally would soon find traction with coming insurrections in the Soviet borderlands.

### **Promethean Orientalism as proto-Sovietology**

In his piece on the Soviet-Japanese rivalry, Iskierka described Prometheism as part of a wider "security chain" (*łańcuch bezpieczeństwa*) encompassing Moscow's borderlands, illustrating that he and contemporaries such as Bączkowski thought of

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<sup>241</sup> Józef Iskierka, "Prometeizm w łańcuchu bezpieczeństwa," *Biuletyn polsko-ukraiński* 5.50 (1936); 513-514.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, 513; Schattkowsky, "Between Science and Politics," 245.

<sup>243</sup> Bączkowski, "Od Hannibala do Piłsudskiego," *Wschód: Orient* 10.1 (1939); 1-8.

Poland's immediate eastern neighborhood within a much broader Eurasian geopolitical context. At the same time as he wrote extensively on Ukraine, Bączkowski, himself a native of Chita near Lake Baikal who had attended secondary school in Harbin before immigrating to Poland in the 1920s, distinguished himself at Warsaw's Eastern Institute (*Instytut Wschodni*), a critical institutional crossroads for Promethean exiles and center of intellectual activity within the movement's Eurasian network. According to the first article of an official statute published in 1928, the mission of Warsaw's Eastern Institute lay in "the research of Eastern countries and nations as well as spreading knowledge about them, namely in the fields of linguistics (concerning living languages), geography, cultural history, and political history." This brief summary was accompanied by an even more laconic note clarifying that "the words 'Eastern countries' are to be understood as meaning those countries lying to the East of the borders of the Polish state."<sup>244</sup>

In practice, however, the Eastern Institute was not just another center for the study of the "East" that conformed to the conventions of traditional Polish Orientalism, with its emphasis on philology and ancient history, but evolved into a vibrant hub for the worldwide Promethean movement, sustaining a diverse community of scholars, soldiers, students, politicians, and emigres who collaboratively created an intellectual milieu that can best be described as an early school of Sovietology, to use Marek Kornat's phrase.<sup>245</sup> Though the Eastern Institute's financial circumstances and geographical reach were limited at the time of its initial formation in March of 1926, the rise of Józef Piłsudski's *Sanacja* regime just two months later opened the way for expanded funding from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MSZ) and the Second

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<sup>244</sup> *Statut Instytutu Wschodniego*, (Warszawa: 1928), 1-2.

<sup>245</sup> Kornat, *Polska szkoła*.



Division of the Polish army's General Staff (colloquially known as *Dwójka*).<sup>246</sup> From its inception until its forcible closure in 1939, the Eastern Institute emerged into an intellectual crucible situated at the confluence of worlds and currents of migration, serving as a key institutional confluence for the flows of ideas and intermediaries across the Promethean network. Importantly, however, the Eastern Institute's ideological and organizational foundations antedate the rise of *Sanacja* in 1926, stretching back to the chaotic, fluid landscape of war, revolution, and displacement that brought the disparate elements of the future Promethean movement to the territory of the Second Polish Republic between 1918 and 1926.

In the first place, many of the Eastern Institute's founders included prominent, ethnically Polish Prometheans who had belonged to Piłsudski's Revolutionary Faction before 1918, such as its longstanding director, Stanisław Siedlecki. Major affiliates of the Eastern Institute, such as Wasilewski, had already imagined a Polish-led alliance of borderland peoples that would bring down the Russian Empire in the 1890s, and their visions, though focused on the "western borderlands," also included "southern borderlands" like Crimea, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. Though direct contacts with these regions were limited or nonexistent prior to the First World War, the situation shifted significantly between 1918 and 1921, when many of these same elites negotiated Poland's ties with the breakaway nation-states of the former Russian Empire, among them the Ukrainian People's Republic, the Crimean People's Republic, and the countries of the Caucasus.<sup>247</sup> During these years of open military hostilities with the Red Army, members of the Revolutionary Faction published journals such as *Wschód Polski (Poland's Orient)* and *Przymierze (Alignment)*, which featured articles

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<sup>246</sup> Ireneusz Piotr Maj, *Działalność Instytutu Wschodniego w Warszawie 1926-1939* (Warszawa: Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, 2007).

<sup>247</sup> Charaszkiwicz, "Referat," 43-47.

strongly calling for a broad alliance of nation-states situated between the Black, Baltic, and Adriatic Seas, drawing inspiration from the loose “Jagiellonian” model of the fifteenth century.<sup>248</sup> Though officially devoted to equality among all of the newly independent nations of the German, Austro-Hungarian, and Russian borderlands, including the Crimean Tatars, the Kuban’ Cossack hosts, and the Caucasus, both of these papers envisioned Poland as the heir to a unique historical role in driving the ongoing geopolitical transformation, emphasizing the necessity of Polish messianic nationalism in freeing the peoples of the peripheries from the yoke of multinational empires.<sup>249</sup> The project of promoting an anti-Russian, anti-Soviet internationalism headed by Poland was advanced by these allies of Piłsudski in 1921 to 1923 through the ZZNO.<sup>250</sup>

In the years between the Peace of Riga in 1921 and the rise of *Sanacja* in 1926, the future Promethean elites from the former Revolutionary Faction, as Maj emphasizes, worked together with a wider coalition of academics, politicians, and businessmen interested in the “East” to lay the foundations for the Eastern Institute. While supporters of Promethean ideas already occupied an important position in the Second Division of the General Staff, the creation of the Eastern Institute was an incremental and apparently divisive project that involved personalities from beyond the ranks of Piłsudski’s camp, and disagreements over questions of funding, structure, and ideology arose during the first half of the 1920s. After the rise of *Sanacja*, however, Maj emphasizes that the Promethean project, though by no means totally hegemonic, grew

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<sup>248</sup> “Orjent Polski,” *Wschód: Orient* 3 (1932); 82-85.

<sup>249</sup> See Chapter 2 for analyses of both journals.

<sup>250</sup> Kornat, “U źródeł idei prometejskiej. Związek Zbliżenia Narodów Odrodzonych (1921-1923),” <http://nowyprometeusz.pl/u-zrodel-idei-prometejskiej-zwiazek-zblizenia-narodow-odrodzonych-1921-1923/>; Maj, *Działalność*.

into the driving force behind the work of the Eastern Institute, providing much of its financial support while heavily influencing the character of the knowledge that it produced about the “East” as well as the composition of the representatives of “Eastern” societies that it hosted.<sup>251</sup> Perhaps most tellingly, the spatial scope of the “East,” as defined in the Eastern Institute’s statute and amply reflected in its publications, did not overlap with a strictly geographical definition of “Asia,” but included the entire western section of the Soviet Union encompassing the Ukrainian and Belarusian SSRs along with the Russian SFSR and all of its autonomous national units. The entire Soviet space, as well as the chain of independent states lining its western and southern borders, constituted the primary focus of the Eastern Institute’s work in training diplomatic and military cadres in “Eastern” languages while spreading Promethean visions of Eurasian geopolitics in its main journals. While the Prometheans at the Eastern Institute described themselves as Orientalists and characterized their pursuits as a form of Orientalism, their overall project, which combined anti-Soviet geopolitical aims with the production of strategically useful knowledge about the Soviet enemy, might be more accurately described today as a form of proto-Sovietology.

As Bączkowski commented in 1931, the most meaningful distinction in the Promethean imagination lay between the Soviet-dominated “East,” meaning everything under Moscow’s direct control from Belarus and Ukraine to the Pacific coast, and the non-Soviet “East,” primarily meaning Arabic-speaking southwest Asia, Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, India, China, and Japan.<sup>252</sup> Studying the history, culture, and economics of the Soviet Union’s “captive nations” under a shared rubric, for the Prometheans, made sense because the character of Bolshevik rule was supposedly

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<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

<sup>252</sup> Bączkowski, “Stanowisko.”

consistent across the ethnically non-Russian regions, meaning, just as importantly, that the exiled nationalists who joined the Promethean movement shared a common rival and should adopt a coordinated strategy to win their independence. The Eastern Institute's Promethean leaders, with substantial backing from the Second Division, worked to gather stateless emigres from across the Soviet Union behind their cause, offering scholarships, fellowships, lecturing posts, and publishing opportunities to weave members of non-Russian emigre communities into their inner circle, which included Warsaw's separate Promethean Club founded in 1931.<sup>253</sup> Most of the senior emigres who spent the most time at the Eastern Institute and wrote articles in *Wschód: Orient*, such as Rasulzadeh from Azerbaijan and Ayas İshaki from the Volga Tatar community, shared the experience of having briefly led independent nation-states that were incorporated into the Soviet Union by 1922, receiving recognition from the Promethean movement as expert witnesses on the brutal "Russification" and merciless repression carried out by the Bolsheviks. While Rasulzadeh and İshaki lived and published in Warsaw the longest, most of the elite exiles affiliated with the Promethean movement traveled around the movement's other centers in Eurasia and, just as often, lent their voices to other anti-Soviet camps, increasingly aligning themselves with fascist causes after the formation of the anti-Komintern Pact in 1936.<sup>254</sup> What linked these "Easterners" to the Prometheans was their embrace of the idea that the socioeconomically pluralistic and stratified nation-state, also referred to as the "national state," constituted the highest and most preferable form of human social organization available. The Promethean response to the Soviet Union's efforts at spreading the "socialist revolution" abroad was to launch a "national revolution" aimed

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<sup>253</sup> Charaszkiewicz, "Referat."

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*, 65-67.

at the “captive nations,” an idea that appealed to the “Eastern” exiles who spent time at the Eastern Institute in the interwar period.<sup>255</sup>

For the Prometheans, the spread of the “national revolution” within the Soviet Union could be accelerated through cooperation among the “independent” countries of the “East,” particularly those, like Iran or Afghanistan, that shared Poland’s quandary of being sandwiched between two larger, more powerful neighbors.<sup>256</sup> While the Eastern Institute’s leaders could bring exiled nationalists into their fold on the basis of shared experiences, ideological affinities, and material incentives, exercising a direct influence over the foreign policy of the Polish state was another matter, though the Prometheans made use of Poland’s growing worldwide network of embassies, consulates, and military missions to coordinate alliances with emigre colonies abroad.<sup>257</sup> Yet, if the Prometheans, as an internationalist movement with properties and publications in multiple countries, could openly agitate against the Soviet Union, the Polish government, even under *Sanacja*, took a much more cautious line in waging its “cold war” with Moscow, appreciating that the settlement at Riga could give way to another bloody conflict over Belarus and Ukraine given the right combination of provocations and pressures.<sup>258</sup> Still, the Eastern Institute offered its young affiliates training in “Eastern” languages, including Chinese, Georgian, Japanese, and Turkish, in preparation for posts in the Polish military and diplomatic service, while the Institute’s youth wing, the OKM, along with a welter of organizations concerned with

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<sup>255</sup> This idea was articulated especially forcefully in the pages of *Młody Prometeusz* in the 1930s.

<sup>256</sup> Bączkowski, “Stanowisko.”

<sup>257</sup> Libera, “Zarys historyczny,” in *II Rzeczpospolita*.

<sup>258</sup> This is one of the key arguments in Bruski, *Między Prometeizmem a Realpolitik*.

improving Poland's foreign relations with countries neighboring the Soviet Union, formed transnational networks spanning Eurasia.<sup>259</sup>

Here, it is important to highlight that it was not only "Easterners," but also ethnic Poles "returning" from around the Eurasian borderlands of their birth, whose knowledge of the "East" and personal connections to places as far afield as Chita and Harbin contributed to the establishment of the Eastern Institute as a center of Promethean internationalism. Stanisław Siedlecki himself was born in Kyiv, while Bączkowski and Konstanty Symonolewicz both came to Warsaw from Harbin, maintaining their ties to fellow Poles in Manchuria throughout the interwar period.<sup>260</sup> Members of Poland's Lipka Tatar minority, meanwhile, had been scattered around the Russian imperial space throughout the nineteenth century, and many of the Turkic Muslim emigres who came to the Eastern Institute had political or familial ties with these Polish-speaking Muslims that preceded the revolutions of 1917.<sup>261</sup> Even if the group of Promethean activists gathered at the Eastern Institute was very much ideologically self-selected, it nevertheless provides a fascinating glimpse into the global networks upon which their school of proto-Sovietology was built.

By the start of the 1930s, the Eastern Institute was taking shape not only as a center for the study of the Soviet Union and its neighbors, but also as a globally networked intellectual and political milieu in which ethnically Polish Prometheans, Promethean exiles from across Eurasia, and Polish "returnees" from abroad mingled in the same lecture halls, clubs, and dormitories. This encounter of ethnically, religiously,

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<sup>259</sup> "Z Instytutu Wschodniego," *Wschód: kwartalnik* 1 (1930).

<sup>260</sup> Tadeusz Szukiewicz, "Polska emigracja w Chinach," *Wschód: kwartalnik* 3 (1931); Konstanty Symonolewicz, "Kolonje polskie w Charbinie," *Wschód: Orient* 5.1 (1934); 70-75.

<sup>261</sup> See Ali Miśkiewicz, *Tatarzy polscy, 1918-1939: życie społeczno-kulturalne i religijne* (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1990).

and, to a lesser extent, ideologically diverse minds produced a profusion of lectures, articles, and monographs on Eurasian geopolitics, history, ethnography, and economics by 1939, generating one of interwar Europe's most geographically and thematically expansive bodies of knowledge on the Soviet Union. For the Prometheans, understanding the inner workings of the Soviet state, specifically its system of maintaining control over the "captive nations," was crucial to devising a strategy by which to advance the "national revolution" in the "East." Most of the works written to this end shared the common argument that Russian and later Soviet rule had prevented a healthy, properly modern form of nationalism from maturing among the "captive nations" of the borderlands, keeping them in a state of artificial underdevelopment for the aggrandizement of Moscow.<sup>262</sup>

**"Attempts at a synthesis": the "East" in the ideas of Włodzimierz Bączkowski**

Most of the articles published in *Wschód: Orient*, the main journal of the Eastern Institute, and *Wschód: kwartalnik*, the paper of the OKM, tend to deal with individual "captive nations" rather than attempting to draw broader analyses on a global scale, though the writings of Bączkowski from the 1930s form a notable exception. Though Bączkowski was still relatively young, he had served as the primary editor of three Promethean journals, *Wschód: kwartalnik* (*The East: quarterly*), *Biuletyn polsko-ukraiński* (*The Polish-Ukrainian Bulletin*), and *Problemy Europy wschodniej* (*Problems of Eastern Europe*) by the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939.<sup>263</sup> Bączkowski strongly emphasized Poland's centrality to the entire Promethean project in his writings, and he had few qualms about privileging Polish geopolitical imperatives over the demands of the country's national minorities for greater

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<sup>262</sup> Smal-Stocki, "Ukraina."

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-18.

autonomy, so his articles reflect not only the fundamental tenets but also some of the important contradictions of the Promethean project.<sup>264</sup> Though his publications do not capture the entire complexity of the Promethean understanding of the “East,” they nevertheless provide a starting point from which to examine the mental map of the Soviet space and its neighbors that took shape in the pages of the Eastern Institute’s publications in the interwar period.

In 1934, Bączkowski published an article in the pages of *Wschód: Orient* titled “Poland and the East,” setting out to place the struggle between Poland, the Soviet Union, and the “captive nations” within a wider geopolitical and historical context that, in his view, had not yet been fully established.<sup>265</sup> According to Bączkowski, the Polish-Russian antagonism, which he treated as the most important axis around which the wider problem of the “captive nations” revolved, was not so much a conflict between two rival nations as it was a clash of “Eastern” and “Western” civilizations unfolding on the battleground of the Eurasian steppe, a territory stretching from the Black Sea to Lake Baikal. More specifically, Bączkowski contended that the struggle in question took place at the contested, unsteady confluences of the “Polonosphere” and the “Mongolosphere,” two contrasting geographical and cultural realms represented, respectively, by Poland and Russia, whose political cultures had grown from contrasting relationships with the steppe ever since the Mongol conquests of Eurasia in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.<sup>266</sup> The steppe, Bączkowski emphasized, was a remarkable and distinct space that historically facilitated the flow of ideas, cultures, and political systems across vast distances, even begetting a common “steppe

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<sup>264</sup> A representative text is Bączkowski, “Uwagi na czasie,” *Wschód: Orient* 6.1/2 (1935).

<sup>265</sup> Idem, “Wschód a Polska.” *Wschód: Orient* 5.2/3/4 (1934); 17-52.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*, 17-19.



personality” supposedly embodied in the mystical yearning of its nomadic inhabitants for constant, vigorous expansion and movement. While these “Eastern” peoples of the steppe, according to Bączkowski, embraced fluidity, wandering, and instability as a way of life, the sedentary societies of the “West” supposedly possessed a more rooted, rational character, taking a less rebellious and romantic but ultimately wiser and more calculated approach to organizing their affairs.<sup>267</sup>

While these contrasting relationships to space and time might exist in equilibrium for brief periods, the insatiable restlessness of the peoples of the “Mongolosphere” for greener pastures and new conquests made violent clashes structurally inevitable, and the “Polonosphere,” as the easternmost outpost of western Christendom and Latin culture, had inherited the world-historical mission to function as a “bulwark,” or *antemurale*, between the “West” and the “East.” A similar idea had already been circulating in Polish political thought since the anti-Ottoman polemics of Stanisław Orzechowski appeared in vernacular Polish in the sixteenth century, while Oskar Halecki, a historian and supporter of Piłsudski’s regime, popularized the concept of “East-Central Europe” as the “borderlands of Western civilization” in the postwar Anglo-American world.<sup>268</sup> Bączkowski, however, emphasized that the “Polonosphere,” though essentially a part of the “West” that was firmly tied to Rome in culture and faith, had absorbed elements of the “Mongolosphere” over the centuries, particularly in those “transitional” territories of present-day Ukraine and Belarus where these domains of humanity not only clashed but also intermingled.<sup>269</sup>

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<sup>267</sup> Ibid., 38-40.

<sup>268</sup> For a recent anthology documenting the many incarnations of the *antemurale* idea, see *Rampart Nations: Bulwark Myths of East European Multiconfessional Societies in the Age of Nationalism*, ed. Liliya Berezhnaya and Heidi Hein-Kircher (New York: Beghahn Books 2019). Also see Oskar Halecki, *Borderlands of western civilization: a history of East Central Europe* (New York: Ronald Press, 1952).

<sup>269</sup> Bączkowski, “Wschód,” 20; 23-24.

Bączkowski argued, for instance, that the East Slavic peoples of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth had always fielded Poland's bravest, most daring heroes while exhibiting a cultural syncretism that captured the dynamism and unpredictability of the "Mongolosphere," without which the "Polonosphere" would not have been capable of holding back the peoples of the steppe. The Lipka Tatars, as storied horsemen who arrived to the fringes of the "Polonosphere" from the steppe, had also played a key role in Poland's historic mission, in Bączkowski's mind, meaning that the mixing of "East" and "West," to a certain extent, was a normal part of Poland's position at the confluence of worlds.<sup>270</sup> Representatives of the interconnected, mobile, and multilingual Lipka Tatar elite often embraced this role as the intermediaries between Poland and the "Muslim East" (*Wschód muzułmański*) in the 1930s, helping to bring Tatar and Azeri emigres to Warsaw and Wilno while participating in international Islamic congresses as far away as Jerusalem.<sup>271</sup> A permanent settlement between the "Polonosphere" and the "Mongolosphere," accordingly, would never be struck, since instability and uncertainty lay in the very physical architecture of the steppe environment and the cultures that had risen from it, meaning that Poland should always anticipate future conflicts and take an active, expansionist policy in the east whenever possible.<sup>272</sup>

If the "Mongolosphere" had injected positive, vital elements of the "East" into the fabric of Polish culture and civilization, Bączkowski argued that it was just as capable of begetting, or more accurately, spreading extreme despotism, most notably in the form of the Muscovite, Russian, and, most recently, Soviet states. As a space for

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<sup>270</sup> Ibid., 24-25.

<sup>271</sup> Miśkiewicz, *Tatarzy*; for an account penned by a leading Lipka Tatar in interwar Poland, see Leon Najman Mirza Kryczyński, "Tatarzy polscy a Wschód muzułmański," *Rocznik tararski* 2 (1935); 1-30.

<sup>272</sup> Bączkowski, "Prometeizm polski a idea słowiańska," *Wschód: Orient* 4.4/1 (1935-1936); 1-16.

cultural and intellectual exchange, the “Mongolosphere,” according to Bączkowski, had brought the worst forms of “Eastern” despotism to the embryonic Muscovite polity in the thirteenth century, compounding Muscovy’s vernacular political culture of collectivism and submission and the preexisting influences of Byzantine tyranny that had already taken root over the previous centuries with inspirations from “Chinese” and “Indian” philosophies of war and statecraft.<sup>273</sup> Lacking geopolitical strength or economic might, Muscovite leaders embraced the darkest arts of the “East,” brought to them by the hordes of Genghis Khan, learning, during their time in Mongol tutelage, to deploy deception, betrayal, and misinformation in order to defeat stronger enemies by sowing uncertainty in their ranks. Here, Bączkowski contends that it was only with the passing of the “Mongol yoke” in the fifteenth century that Muscovy unleashed such approaches to warfare, which relied upon propaganda and other unconventional weapons in a manner that would have made Clausewitz proud.<sup>274</sup> Starting from the times of Ivan the Terrible, Bączkowski contended, Muscovy and later Russia had waged an almost uninterrupted succession of offensive wars, bringing a growing diversity of non-Russians under the rule of the Tsars and, in turn, giving rise to a distinct regime of national oppression that followed the same general principles, or, more precisely, lack thereof, that had proven effective in warfare.<sup>275</sup>

Overtaking the Mongols as the masters of their own “Mongolosphere,” Russia’s rulers, according to Bączkowski, cobbled together a vast empire across Eurasia, focused only on maximizing the territory, population, and wealth under their control,

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<sup>273</sup> Idem., “Wschód,” 32-37.

<sup>274</sup> Idem., “Uwagi o istocie siły rosyjskiej,” *Wschód: Orient* 9.4 (1938); 1-3.

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-14.

much in the style of typical “Eastern” despots.<sup>276</sup> This drive to fill the “Mongolosphere,” however, encountered its most formidable enemy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when Muscovite armies collided with an expanding “Polonosphere” that was then at the height of its power in Central and Eastern Europe. The antagonism that arose from these first confrontations, Bączkowski emphasized, was different because the “Polonosphere” represented a much more mature and better crystallized sphere of “Western” civilization than Muscovy had ever encountered, and its representatives fought not only with conventional weapons but also with an attractive, inclusive high culture that had built a multicultural stratum of nobles, the *szlachta*, where the Tsar had only reigned with terror.<sup>277</sup> This thread of Bączkowski’s analysis reemerges repeatedly in other articles by Polish Prometheans, among them Edmund Charaszkiewicz and Tadeusz Radwański, who emphasized the essentially consensual, democratic, and integrative qualities of Polish political culture as Poland’s most powerful response to the Muscovite, Russian, and Soviet reliance on coercion and misinformation to keep the “captive nations” under control.<sup>278</sup> It was the organic ideas and practices of freedom and fraternity that defined Poland and the “Polonosphere,” these authors contended, in stark contrast to the mechanistic, forceful policies of the Tsars and the Bolsheviks, providing a welcome alternative to the rule of Moscow or Saint Petersburg. Ethnic Russians, however, remained an exception in this regard, since the Prometheans claimed that their vernacular culture of collectivist despotism, embodied in the peasant *obshchina*, made them the perfect material from which Russian rulers could mold their

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<sup>276</sup> Idem., “Wschód,” 37-38.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>278</sup> Illustrative examples include Charaszkiewicz (writing as Eugenjusz Wiśniowski), “Istota mocarstwa polskiej,” *Wschód: Orient* 5.2/3/4 (1934); and Tadeusz Radwański, *Idea prometejska na tle geopolityki Polski*, *Wschód: Orient* 5.4 (1935-1936).

military and bureaucracy.<sup>279</sup> While it may not have been clear in early-modern times, the rise of modern national identities in the long nineteenth century would collide with the Russian tradition of statecraft, asserting that voluntary communities of citizens connected by culture, language, and traditions should replace a multinational system of governance premised upon aggressive Russification and cynical manipulation. The point, for Bączkowski, was that this concept was already embodied in the “Polonosphere” long before the French Revolution took place, meaning that Poland, as the “bulwark” of the “West,” stood specially equipped to bring the “national idea” to the “captive nations” of the “East” in the twentieth century.

While the Bolsheviks had replaced the outward trappings of Tsarism, Bączkowski and his fellow Prometheans insisted that the deep structures of Russian political culture remained continuous. Much as the Romanov dynasty had replaced the last Riurikid rulers in the midst of the early seventeenth-century “time of troubles,” Lenin and his comrades had survived imperial Russia’s descent into chaos and fragmentation precisely because they were the most ruthless, unprincipled competitors to fill the vacuum, beating out the Whites and resisting foreign interventions. For Bączkowski, the Bolshevik victory arose not because of any inherently superior approach to combat in the ranks of the Red Army, but mostly due to the Bolsheviks’ ability to mobilize powerful yet ultimately deceptive slogans of social liberation and national emancipation, relying upon their mastery of deceptive, conspiratorial tactics to divide and outmaneuver opponents who were supposedly better equipped yet made the fundamental mistake of observing the standard “Western” conventions of warfare.<sup>280</sup> Bączkowski and his colleague, Tadeusz Radwański, also compared Tsarist uses of pan-

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<sup>279</sup> Zhordania, *Nashi raznoglasiia* (Paris: 1928).

<sup>280</sup> This argument is made most forcefully in Bączkowski, “Uwagi.”

Slavic ideas to gain a foothold in the Balkans with the ongoing Soviet campaign to spread communist sympathies in Poland's eastern borderlands, comparing these cross-border incursions to Muscovy's longstanding impulse to "gather the Russian lands."<sup>281</sup> This was no coincidence, according to Bączkowski, because the Belarusian and Ukrainian borderlands were still the same contact zone between the "Polonosphere" and the "Mongolosphere" centuries later, straddling the unpredictable rift that persisted between these worlds despite the postwar changes in the state frontiers that crossed it. This underlying antagonism, in other words, was a structural feature of Eurasian geopolitics that marked the true zone in which "East" and "West" overlapped, and Bączkowski anticipated all the way up to 1939 that the peace struck at Riga in 1921 would prove ephemeral.

Bączkowski's theory of an essential continuity in Russian and Soviet nationalities policies, as well as his emphasis on the enduring legacies of the "Mongolosphere" in shaping Russia's malignant *Sonderweg*, was not only shared but extended further back into the Muscovite period by Ignati Mõššeg (sometimes rendered as Mossegov), an ethnically Komi nationalist and affiliate of the Promethean movement based in Finland who authored a volume on the "nations of northeastern Europe" as part of a monograph series issued by the Eastern Institute. Mõššeg specifically focused on what he argued were clear continuities in the treatment of Komis, Mordvins, Udmurts, and Maris by the Muscovite, Russian, and Soviet states, contending that these Finnic peoples had been the first victims of an essentially Muscovite proclivity for terror, plunder, and denationalization.<sup>282</sup> A proponent of the overarching unity of Finnic nations, Mõššeg insisted that medieval Novgorod, with its considerable successes in

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<sup>281</sup> Ibid., "Uwagi na czasie," 7-8.

<sup>282</sup> Ignati Mõššeg, *Moskwa dawna i dzisiejsza a narody podbite północno-wschodniej Europy* (Warszawa: Instytut Wschodni, 1931).

trade, treated these inhabitants of “Great Perm’ ” with relative tolerance, something that dramatically changed for the worse when despotic, backward Muscovy came to power. Mösšeg even went so far as to insist that the “Mongol yoke” of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was essentially a fiction when it came to Muscovy, whose grand princes, he wrote, enjoyed broad autonomy so long as they paid tribute to their overlords.<sup>283</sup> This situation, in turn, allowed Muscovite rulers to viciously oppress the Finnic peoples under their rule, possibly with Mongol inspiration, claiming their first victims in what, Mösšeg wrote, would unfold into a continuum of violence, denationalization, and “Russification” against successive “captive nations.” While other “Russian” polities, most notably republican Novgorod, had resisted Muscovy and presented an early alternative to despotism, they shared the fate of the Finnic peoples and soon lost their distinctive political traditions.<sup>284</sup>

To underline this point, Mösšeg included a table charting the historical growth of Russia’s territory that was similar to what Bączkowski featured in another article in *Wschód: Orient* three years later in support of a nearly identical argument.<sup>285</sup> This overarching conceptual consensus between Mösšeg’s book and Bączkowski’s “synthetic” articles was also apparent in the Eastern Institute’s other officially endorsed volumes on Crimea, written by Jafar Seydamet, a Crimean Tatar diplomat and politician with close ties to the Lipka Tatar statesman Aleksander Achmatowicz, and Georgia, penned by the military officer Jan Katwaradze (Katvaradze) who relocated to Poland during the civil wars. Siedlecki, the Eastern Institute’s director, lent a few pages of his own praise to preface each of these works, giving credence to

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<sup>283</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid., v.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid., 12-14.

their authors' positions in the Promethean movement as the authoritative representatives of their "Eastern" nations. What all of these books had in common, of course, was that they packaged the messy histories of ethnically and religiously diverse regions of the Soviet Union into comprehensible, linear stories of national mistreatment that formed a common narrative conducive to the popularization of Promethean interpretations of Muscovite, Russian, and Soviet history.<sup>286</sup>

### **"Eastern" agency and the problem of structural change in the Soviet Union**

Bączkowski's articles on Eurasian geopolitics leave few doubts about the leading role of Poland and the "Polonosphere" in the struggle against the Soviet Union, taking for granted that substantial territories with ethnically Belarusian and Ukrainian majorities should remain under Warsaw's rule for the sake of pushing back Moscow's aspirations. His characterizations of the divide between "East" and "West," meanwhile, are replete with broad generalizations about the mentalities of entire nationalities and even "races," echoing the conventional rhetoric of the European Orientalists denounced by both Saïd and Pavlovich, yet Bączkowski insists that Poland, though definitely a "Western" nation, is thoroughly imbued with robust "Eastern" influences that tie it to the broader world of the Eurasian steppe and give it a special role to spread the "national revolution" throughout this space. Bączkowski, of course, still presented this Eurasian context in a manner that distinguished between the "West" as a cultured, sedentary civilization and the "East," in the case of the steppe, as an open, wild territory, suggesting that partial traces of "Easternness" might, at best, infuse a "Western" nation like Poland with a kind of vitality and strength with which the "West" had lost touch in the course of its maturation. The "Eastern" civilizations of medieval

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<sup>286</sup> In chronological order of their publication, these monographs were Marjan Uzdowski, *Afganistan na tle współzawodnictwa rosyjsko-angielskiego* (Warszawa: 1928); Jan Katwaradze, *Gruzja w zarysie historycznym* (Warszawa: 1929); and Dżafar Sejdamet (Jafar Seydamet), *Krym: przeszłość, teraźniejszość i dążenia niepodległościowe Tatarów krymskich* (Warszawa: 1930).



East and South Asia, meanwhile, emerge principally as the sources of Muscovite tyranny, and Bączkowski, who spent part of his youth in present-day China, applies the generic concept of Oriental despotism to these parts of the world. Poland, in this geopolitical model, emerges less as the meeting point of “two equal “civilizations” and more as a transitional frontier zone in which the “West,” a settled, stable, cultured domain, is beneficially pollinated, in moderation, with the rawness and inscrutable mysticism of the “East.”

While Bączkowski describes the Polish state as the place in which these influences have historically converged, it is not ethnic Poles, but Ukrainians, who form the permeable human barrier through which influences can flow on an “East”-“West” axis as well as the ethnolinguistic community divided between the “Mongolosphere” and the “Polonosphere.” While Polish Prometheans offered their support for a Ukrainian state carved out of the Soviet Union, they equally stressed the necessity of a pro-Polish orientation in such a polity and under no conditions were willing to revise Poland’s southeastern border to Ukraine’s advantage.<sup>287</sup> In Bączkowski’s thought, and in the ideas of Polish Prometheans of his time, a commitment to claiming a Eurasian role for Poland appears alongside commentaries on the relationship between “East” and “West,” most immediately in the case of Polish-Ukrainian ties, that rely upon problematic, sometimes overtly hierarchical generalizations about the different human societies, from entire civilizations, “races,” and religious communities to individual nationalities, that occupied this vast space. As much as Polish Prometheans declared a commitment to equality and understanding with the “East,” the kinds of “Easterners” with whom they collaborated and, ultimately, whom they admitted to the Eastern Institute belonged to a fairly narrow, self-selected class of political elites who were committed

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<sup>287</sup> Bączkowski, “Pro domo sua. Sprawa ukraińska,” in *Włodzimierz Bączkowski*.

to creating nation-states upon the wreckage of the Soviet Union. In terms of a shared, post-Soviet future, little more was agreed upon in certain terms, though Bączkowski made it clear that Poland, as the leading nation in the Promethean movement, would play the dominant part in structuring ties with Ukraine.<sup>288</sup> Bączkowski, meanwhile, offered few conclusive statements in support of the emancipation of the hundreds of millions of people colonized by Western European empires, noting only that he would support greater self-determination for India because the destabilization of British hegemony would be beneficial for Poland's ability to market finished goods in Asia.<sup>289</sup> The Prometheans, in general, displayed significant tolerance for the "liberal imperialism" of the British and French, treating it as less exploitative than the distinct form of despotism practiced in the Soviet Union.<sup>290</sup>

Yet, Bączkowski's writings are not the only place in which to find such constructions of the "East"- "West" divide, and invocations of a distinctly Eurasian national mission were not unique to how ethnically Polish Prometheans thought of themselves. Representatives of the "East" who were included in the Promethean project, and who wrote and spoke at the Eastern Institute alongside Bączkowski, employed similar characterizations of the Soviet Union as a backward despotism with Mongol roots, yet they invented a way to escape the application of this same crude model to their own "Eastern" homelands by fashioning themselves as enlightened, historically progressive "Easterners" willing to learn from the "West." Mammad Amin Rasulzadeh, an Azeri exile aligned with the national liberal Musavat Party,

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<sup>288</sup> Ibid.

<sup>289</sup> Idem., "Stanowisko."

<sup>290</sup> An explicit argument for the less exploitative character of Western European maritime empires can be found in A. Czaplicki, "Źródła i rozwój nacjonalizmu indyjskiego," *Wschód: kwartalnik* 3-4 (1931). This perspective became even more prevalent among Promethean exiles in the West after 1945.

exemplified this tendency among the “Eastern” Prometheans by envisioning a future for an independent Azerbaijan that would follow the path of the modern Turkish Republic. Like other Prometheans from the Caucasus, Rasulzadeh prided himself upon the transitional place that his region and nation occupied between “East” and “West,” yet he left no ambiguity that Azerbaijan, along with Georgia and the North Caucasus, was completely prepared to embrace the nation-state as the best form of collective social organization, joining the “civilized” world and standing on par with the “West” while maintaining its own Turkic identity and Islamic faith.<sup>291</sup> If anything, it was allegedly the tyranny of Moscow, and not Islam or some “Eastern” inability to evolve, that kept Azerbaijan and the other “captive nations” in a state of artificially stunted development, as Wasilewski had argued as early as 1901.

For Rasulzadeh, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk had struck an admirable balance between the construction of a modern Turkish identity that shed the burdens of the outmoded Ottoman Empire while protecting the economy and territory of the nation-state from outside intervention.<sup>292</sup> Writing in the mid-1930s, Rasulzadeh also considered the latest Italian and German incarnations of fascism to represent positive developments in the “national revolution,” opining, like Bączkowski in later years, that there existed no middle ground between the rising specter of Soviet imperialism and the forces of “nationalism.”<sup>293</sup> Like Rasulzadeh, Prometheans of diverse nationalities looked to existing states along the southern borders of the Soviet Union for inspiration, praising the Afghan and Iranian monarchies for “Europeanizing” an encircled country in the

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<sup>291</sup> Rasulzadeh, “Rzeczpospolita Azerbajdżańska,” *Wschód: kwartalnik* 2 (1930). Rasulzadeh enumerates all of the essential characteristics of a proper nation, from a history of independent statehood to a national literary canon, and argues that Azerbaijan clearly possesses all of these features. Katwaradze’s monograph on Georgia likewise contends that the country, if left out of the Soviet Union, would have converged with Europe in its social, economic, and cultural development.

<sup>292</sup> Idem., “Śmierć Kemala Ataturka,” *Wschód: Orient* 9.4 (1938).

<sup>293</sup> Idem., “Synteza.”

1930s while celebrating the Chinese Kuomintang as a “Kemalist” precedent to which other “Eastern” nationalists could aspire.<sup>294</sup> Japan, likewise, entered Promethean conversations as a potential pan-Asian leader in the Far East, attracting the attention of emigres from the Caucasus and Central Asia who, like Piłsudski in 1905, looked to Tokyo for a powerful ally against the Soviet Union.<sup>295</sup> Poland itself, meanwhile, stood out as a prime example of a nation-state forged along the “East”-“West” divide to Rasulzadeh and Mahomet-bey Chukua, a Chechen student deeply involved in the work of the OKM, while the Lipka Tatars who helped bring Promethean emigres to Warsaw prided themselves on serving as Poland’s living link to the “East.”<sup>296</sup>

The kinds of “Eastern” subjectivity and agency that were possible in the Promethean movement were shaped, to a great extent, by the kind of “East” that the Prometheans were interested in imagining, and few exiles with interests in projects that did not emphasize the formation of nation-states could find much of a welcoming home at the Eastern Institute. The language of “modernization” and the “national revolution,” as well as the prominent role of the Soviet Union as a common, despised “Other,” provided “Eastern” Prometheans with a way of envisioning themselves as equals of the “West” that, unsurprisingly, involved pointing to ethnic Russians as a backward people trapped in perpetual tyranny.<sup>297</sup> While the Prometheans prided themselves on their inclusiveness and, for the most part, were willing to form pragmatic alliances with exiled politicians and soldiers who shared a broad

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<sup>294</sup> On Afghanistan, see Uzdowski’s monograph from 1928; on Iran, see L. Kielski, “Rozwój ekonomiczny Iranu i jego skutki polityczne,” *Wschód: Orient* 6.3 (1935); on China, see Władysław Pelc, *Polska a Chiny*, *Wschód: kwartalnik* 2.1 (1931).

<sup>295</sup> See Hiraoki Kuromiya and Georges Mamoulia, *The Eurasian Triangle*.

<sup>296</sup> Mahomet Bej Czukua, “Kaukaz a Rosja,” *Wschód: kwartalnik* 1.2 (1930).

<sup>297</sup> Examples from Caucasian students in Warsaw included Murat Bej Baragun, “U bram wolności Kaukazu,” *Wschód: kwartalnik* 1.2 (1930); and A. Barasbi Baytugan, “Kwestja narodowościowa w Rosji Sowieckiej,” *Wschód: kwartalnik* 2.1 (1931).

commitment to unmaking the Soviet Union, the pantheon of “captive nations” that they constructed also had its notable absences. Jews, for instance, were never recognized as a proper Promethean nation, and the only real coverage of them in the pages of Promethean periodicals comes in the form of vaguely positive coverage of the Zionist emigration to Palestine.<sup>298</sup> While Bączkowski named Jews as one of the minorities that tied Poland to the “East,” the absence of a widely recognized Jewish national territory, save for the Jewish Autonomous Region created by the Bolsheviks on the Amur River, rendered them illegible on the grand map of the “captive nations” printed in 1932. While Belarusians claimed a place on this same illustration, they were all but absent from Promethean circles throughout the interwar period, most likely because Piłsudski’s gamble on resurrecting the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in 1918 to 1920 had fallen flat, giving way to a policy of assimilation in western Belarus.<sup>299</sup> East of the Ural mountains, only the Yakuts, Buryats, and “Turkestanis” appear on the Promethean mental map, leaving entire non-Russian areas unmarked or lumped together with recognized nationalities. While the Prometheans were increasingly interested in spreading the “national revolution” to “crystallizing” peoples who occupied a supposedly earlier stage of historical development in relation to the established “historical” nations, it was still nations with clear territorial homelands, standardized languages, traditions of statehood, and national literary and artistic heritages that received recognition on the Promethean map of Eurasia.<sup>300</sup>

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<sup>298</sup> One of the few pieces on Zionism in Palestine appears among other short news articles in the closing pages of *Wschód: Orient* 1/2 (1932-1933).

<sup>299</sup> See Chapter Five for a detailed discussion of Polish nationalities policies in western Belarus during the interwar years.

<sup>300</sup> See Chapter Four for commentary on the crises that shook Prometheism in the late 1930s and the calls of Władysław Pelc to wager on the “crystallizing” nations of the Soviet Union as potential allies.

If the Promethean vision of the “East” allowed space for agency and historical progress so long as it took place within a familiar national paradigm, the movement’s thinkers also recognized that the Soviet “Other,” too, could change over time. While members of Piłsudski’s Revolutionary Faction had, prior to 1918, generally held the view that even the more “progressive” elements within the Russian revolutionary movement would reconstitute Tsarist nationalities policies in a new form by refusing to let go of the borderlands, there was nevertheless a fleeting moment in early 1920 when the possibility of a “third Russia” (*trzecia Rosja*), neither “White” nor “Red,” entered their imaginations. Before the war with the Red Army intensified, Piłsudski’s camp engaged in inconclusive talks with the Russian National Committee in Paris who were willing to renegotiate the boundaries of a future democratic Russia to Poland’s advantage by relinquishing some of the western borderlands of the former empire and limiting the frontiers of their state to an ethnically Russian territory.<sup>301</sup> Around the same time, the organizers of the ZZNO appealed to “true” Russian nationalists to let go of the old imperial peripheries and accept that Russia would, in the future, constitute one nation-state among others rather than a historically unique empire, completing, in effect, the spread of the “national revolution” to the very heart of Muscovite despotism.<sup>302</sup> The victory of the Bolsheviks in the civil wars, however, meant that projects for Polish-Russian coexistence along such models were shelved as the Prometheans turned their focus to containing Soviet expansionism while working to spread the “national revolution” to the “East.”

It was the ethnically non-Russian borderlands, according to Edmund Charaszkiewicz and Leon Wasilewski, that housed most of the Soviet Union’s prized

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<sup>301</sup> Oleg Łatyszonek, *Białoruskie formacje wojskowe: 1917-1923* (Białystok: Białoruskie Towarzystwo Historyczne, 1995), 159.

<sup>302</sup> *Przymierze*

natural resources and a considerable part of its labor force, meaning that the intensification of national antagonisms and the outbreak of “national revolutions” in peripheral but demographically dynamic places like the Caucasus and Central Asia could bring Moscow to its knees and open the way for Polish intervention.<sup>303</sup> Modern nationalist movements had already gained momentum in Russia’s western borderlands during the First World War and the ensuing civil wars, allowing Finland, the Baltic nations, and Poland to emerge as independent nation-states. The next frontier in completing this “national revolution,” which had already swept away the feeble Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires, lay across the border in Ukraine but, just as importantly, along the Soviet “southern borderlands” of the Eurasian steppe, which Wasilewski saw as the vulnerable Islamic underbelly of the Bolshevik empire.<sup>304</sup> Yet, if Tsarist rulers had relied heavily upon ethnic Russians, as the most servile people under their control, to hold together a multinational empire, Wasilewski and other Promethean commentators appreciated that the Bolsheviks had made some notable innovations in managing the borderlands more effectively. The creation of an ethnofederal system that promoted national languages, cultures, elites, and territories, which Terry Martin terms the “affirmative action empire” and the Prometheans dubbed “Leninist liberalism,” registered deeply in the minds of the Prometheans in the 1920s, and the shifts away from national communism and towards the rehabilitation of Russian nationalism under Stalin appears prominently in the publications of the Eastern Institute throughout the 1930s.<sup>305</sup>

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<sup>303</sup> See Chapter 2 for a discussion of geopolitical ideas in *Przymierze*.

<sup>304</sup> Wasilewski, *Sprawy narodowościowe w teorii i w życiu* (Kraków: 1929).

<sup>305</sup> See R.D., “Naprzekór prawom historii,” *Wschód: Orient* 5.1 (1934).

The point, however, was not that the Bolsheviks had introduced any fundamental changes by giving Ukraine, Belarus, the Caucasus, and numerous territories within the Russian SFSR their own structures of self-rule, but that the central authorities in Moscow had made temporary concessions to “patriot Bolsheviks” in order to recover from the devastation of the civil wars.<sup>306</sup> Writing in the 1930s, Promethean exiles from Ukraine, Georgia, and Azerbaijan, among other territories, interpreted the growth of national “deviations” in the ranks of the borderland Bolsheviks during the 1920s as proof of the resurgence of separatist tendencies from the civil war years that could challenge the integrity of the Soviet Union if left unchecked.<sup>307</sup> Strikingly, the national communists of the NEP years received a fairly sympathetic and balanced response from Promethean commentators, some of whom, for instance, praised the Ukrainization campaigns of the early to mid-1920s for genuinely deepening the presence of the Ukrainian language within the Ukrainian SSR. With the denunciation of Shums’kyi and the disbandment of the Communist Party of Western Ukraine in 1927, however, the Prometheans argued that the essentially Russian character of the Bolshevik Party and the Soviet Union had reemerged with a vengeance, allegedly finding popular support among ethnic Russians in the Donbas region who resented Ukrainization measures.<sup>308</sup> By the middle of the 1930s, Promethean conferences resolved that a full return to the traditional style of Russian chauvinism was underway in the Soviet Union, brutally reversing the linguistic, artistic, and political

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<sup>306</sup> Wasilewski, *Sprawy*.

<sup>307</sup> On national communism in Ukraine, see R.D., “Naprzekór”; on Georgia, see the conclusion of Katwaradze’s monograph; on Azerbaijan, see Rasulzadeh, “Prądy narodowe w Azerbajdzanie Sowieckiej” 6.1/2 (1935); on Sultan-Galiev and “Muslim national communism,” see Mustafa Shokai, “O Turkestanie” and Kowalewski, “Gigantyczna walka,” both in *Wschód: kwartalnik* 2.2 (1931).

<sup>308</sup> R.D., “Naprzekór.”



achievements of the non-Russians and reintroducing a general policy of “colonialism” and “Russification.”<sup>309</sup>

When Mykola Skrypnyk committed suicide in 1933, he was given an obituary in the pages of *Biuletyn polsko-ukraiński* that, though hardly laudatory, offered him recognition as a determined figure who had fought for Ukrainian interests within an increasingly rigid, dictatorial Soviet Union under Stalin.<sup>310</sup> Altogether, the brief experiments in national communism that had unfolded in the 1920s constituted, in the Promethean mind, a calculated, cruel, and deceptive maneuver on the part of the Bolsheviks, who reasserted centralized “colonial” control over the borderlands as soon as an opportune moment arose, maintaining the national republics in form but hollowing them of their national content. Still, Prometheans such as Charaszkievicz concluded that the Bolshevik policies of the 1920s had worked to deepen national identities in the peripheries, making these regions potentially combustible and actually preparing much of the groundwork for a Promethean “national revolution.”<sup>311</sup>

This ability of the Soviet state to mutate, for the Prometheans, was not a sign of true historical progress, but an embodiment of the dangerous capability of the deep structures of Russian political culture to take on new and increasingly oppressive forms that deepened the bondage of the “captive nations.” While nationalities policies held the most interest for Promethean proto-Sovietologists, the development of the Soviet economy and the structure of the Bolshevik Party received notable and fairly creative analyses in the pages of the Eastern Institute’s publications, particularly from Soviet experts who were not particularly closely affiliated with the Promethean movement. At

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<sup>309</sup> Yuriy Naumenko, “Ukraina Sowiecka,” *Wschód: Orient* 6.3 (1935); “Zjazd Językoznawczy narodów uciemżonych ZSSR,” *Wschód: Orient* 7.2/3 (1936).

<sup>310</sup> See *Biuletyn polsko-ukraiński* 2.13 (1933).

<sup>311</sup> R.D., “Naprzekór”; Charaszkievicz gives a retrospective assessment in his “Referat” from 1940.

the start of the 1930s, Stanisław Glass, a specialist in Soviet economics and the editor of several major Polish-language Sovietological journals such as *Rosja Sowiecka* (*Soviet Russia*), penned a few articles on the changes in the structure of the Soviet system that had been unfolding since the initiation of the first Five-Year Plan. According to Glass, the uncertainties of the NEP years were rapidly giving way to a new social and economic order premised upon the authority of Stalin, one in which power was supposedly being decisively transferred from traditional “political-territorial” Party organs to managerial, economically oriented structures operated by a newly uplifted stratum of technically educated but ideologically unprincipled Soviet people. At all levels, traditional Party headquarters, Glass wrote, were being eclipsed by economically oriented formations, such as the collective farm and the Machine Tractor Station, which he saw as rising centers of power under Stalin.<sup>312</sup> The freshly recruited agents of the Stalinist system, as Glass described them, reflected the growing obsession of the Bolsheviks with maximizing economic growth and technical progress through state-engineered “plans” meant to achieve parity with the capitalist world, and they exhibited a degree of discipline and devotion to Stalin’s program that made them preferable to the more intellectually unruly Party elites.<sup>313</sup>

These armies of industrial “shock workers” might be compared to the ascendant *vydvizhentsy* (“uplifted ones”) who, according to Sheila Fitzpatrick, replaced better established Party cadres during the “cultural revolution” and purges of the late 1920s and the 1930s.<sup>314</sup> Yet, Glass insisted that the Soviet approach to industrialization had

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<sup>312</sup> Stanisław Glass, “Z zagadnień rozwojowych bolszewizmu,” *Wschód: Orient* 4.3/4 (1933).

<sup>313</sup> Ibid.

<sup>314</sup> For this concept, see Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Education and Social Mobility in the Soviet Union 1921–1934* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1979); and idem., *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992).

made little progress beyond the traditionally fervent and passionate but excessively sloppy, inefficient, and wasteful “Slavic” mode of production, seeking to emulate the developed nations of the West by fulfilling grand quotas and norms yet lacking the precision and organization to do so effectively. He also raised the question of what would become of Stalin’s army of industrial workers and managers once the “plan” had been fulfilled, suggesting that the emerging hierarchy of economic management would also be subject to transformations once its purpose in the Bolshevik project had been served.<sup>315</sup> Glass’s colleague, Czesław Bobrowski, also commented on the historical evolution of the Bolshevik Party in a similar light, tracing its development from a closed, “nihilistic,” conspiratorial cell in pre-1917 times into a mass movement during the revolutions and civil wars of the following five years.<sup>316</sup> Yet, Bobrowski, like Glass, sensed that the ongoing economic transformation of the Soviet Union was unfolding in tandem with structural shifts within the Party, whose established elites stood to be replaced by a new class of industrial managers loyal to Stalin and unconcerned with ideological debates. While senior figures at the Eastern Institute, such as Wasilewski, mostly focused on the transition from the fluid “Leninist liberalism” of the 1920s to a harder Stalinist line on the “national question,” Glass and Bobrowski, as scholars and proto-Sovietologists associated chiefly with non-Promethean institutions, focused on the overarching economic and structural characteristics of what they saw as a distinct Stalinist incarnation of the Bolshevik system.

By the time that Józef Piłsudski died in May of 1935, the Eastern Institute had grown into a school of Promethean proto-Sovietology in its own right, hosting emigres

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<sup>315</sup> Glass, “Z zagadnień.”

<sup>316</sup> Czesław Bobrowski, “Aktywiści sowieccy,” *Wschód: Orient* 4.3/4 (1933).

from across Eurasia, publishing multilingual journals concerned with the “East,” and generating theories about the origins and evolution of the Soviet system, particularly its nationalities policies. As a meeting place for exiled nationalists, Polish military officers, professional scholars, *Sanacja* politicians, and students, the Eastern Institute emerged as one of the most vibrant centers of Promethean activism in the interwar years, training diplomatic and military cadres for the Polish state while providing a stage from which the representatives of the “captive nations” of the Soviet Union could operate. The Eastern Institute also produced hefty journals concerned with the ethnography, politics, history, and, occasionally, economy of the Soviet Union and its neighbors, though most of this work, as Edmund Charaszkiwicz commented, was intended to win new members for the ranks of the Promethean movement, both in Poland and abroad, rather than to directly influence the policies of the Second Division or the MSZ.<sup>317</sup> Ensuring a continuity of cadres, in fact, was a central concern and a major anxiety shared by Promethean elites in the 1930s, and significant efforts were made to attract young nationalists to the ranks of the OKM and provide funding for exchange programs that would connect Polish students with the “East.” As much as the Promethean proto-Sovietologists of the Eastern Institute may have envisioned themselves as the voices of “knowledge” informing institutions of “power,” much of their work consisted in what might be called the projection of “soft power” around the world, namely by propagating Promethean ideas in print and working to expand the movement’s ranks, especially as fascist anticommunism gained mass followings in Germany, Italy, Japan, and their allies. When a Polish-Soviet nonaggression agreement came into effect in 1932, however, the Second Division and the MSZ dramatically reduced funding for Promethean projects, and the passing of Piłsudski, a major patron

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<sup>317</sup> Charaszkiwicz, “Referat.”

of the Eastern Institute, three years later allowed Poland's leaders to impose serious funding cuts and changes in personnel. For a relatively brief time, particularly from 1928 to 1932, the Eastern Institute ascended to the heights of its prestige as a Promethean institution, a center for Promethean intermediaries, and a producer of Promethean ideas before the complex relationship between Prometheism and its state supporters entered a period of growing uncertainty and austerity up until the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939.<sup>318</sup>

### **Structural reform and “national radicalism”**

The ability of the Promethean movement to accommodate a diverse spread of political and intellectual projects, from the liberal internationalism embodied in the Parisian Caucasian Confederation to the geopolitics of Bączkowski and Bocheński at the Eastern Institute, demonstrates its ideological flexibility, multifocal structure, and attractiveness to a wide community of borderland nationalists seeking the organizational, intellectual, and financial benefits of a common anti-Soviet internationalism. For Prometheism's Polish patrons in Warsaw, however, creating an internationalist intellectual milieu was not an end in and of itself, and the worldwide Promethean republic of emigres that emerged between 1926 and 1939 was far from ideal in the eyes of many of its most important architects. Beginning in the early 1930s, leading figures in the Second Division and the Polish diplomatic corps, among them Edmund Charaszkiewicz, Tadeusz Schaetzel, and especially Władysław Pelc, expressed mounting dissatisfaction with the direction in which Prometheism was heading, criticizing the emigres for being too ideologically lax, loosely organized, and poorly disciplined to actually threaten the Soviet Union.<sup>319</sup> As Poles, these men also

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<sup>318</sup> On Prometheism's chronic crisis in the post-1935 years, see Maj, *Działalność*.

<sup>319</sup> CAW, I.303.4.5693, “Uwagi w kwestii reorganizacji pracy prometeuszowskiej w Paryżu,” 1-4.

saw Prometheism as a fundamentally Polish project that had grown organically out of the messianic nationalism of the nineteenth century, and therefore felt compelled to reclaim and restructure the movement before it lapsed into obscurity.<sup>320</sup> Poland, as the “first among equals” in the Promethean camp, should enjoy the right to set the dominant tone both ideologically and organizationally.<sup>321</sup> Charaszkiewicz in particular worried that an alliance of aging elite emigres, some of whom possessed sympathies for non-Bolshevik Social Democrats, would soon become too narrow and insignificant in a world of growing mass political mobilization, particularly on the ascendant fascist right.<sup>322</sup> In Germany, Italy, and Japan, the governments that formed the anti-Komintern Pact in 1936 were making immense strides in turning the masses against communism and actually encircling the Soviet Union from a geopolitical perspective, all of which sat uneasily with Prometheism’s architects.<sup>323</sup> Though opposed to fascism and Nazi antisemitism, Charaszkiewicz could not help but recognize the successes of the illiberal right in promoting its incendiary brand of anticommunism, attracting both a youthful base of supporters and winning over a growing community of anti-Soviet emigres to the worldwide network of fascist internationalism. Prometheism’s only hope in the face of this serious competition from the right, Charaszkiewicz and especially Pelc believed, consisted of the radical reform of Promethean institutions, the revival of Promethean ideas, and making a

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<sup>320</sup> Charaszkiewicz, “Referat,” 56-57.

<sup>321</sup> Idem., “Istota mocarstwowości Polski,” 1-6.

<sup>322</sup> “1934, 5 grudnia. Protokoły z konferencji u Tadeusza Schaetzla z 12 listopada 1934 w sprawie ogólnego stanu sprawy prometejskiej i wytyczne Tadeusza Schaetzla do pracy prometejskiej,” in *II Rzeczpospolita*, 309-316.

<sup>323</sup> CAW, I.303.4.5629, “Przeciągania prometeuszowców.”

“wager on the young” that would transform the movement into a proper “internationalism” (*międzynarodówka*).<sup>324</sup>

The starting point for Charaszkiewicz’s anxieties was the overall state of the Promethean emigre network, which, despite its transnational reach, did not possess the disciplined ethos and ideological coherence essential to surviving the 1930s. According to a report issued by the Second Division, the propaganda campaigns and lobbying activities of the emigre centers had been suitable for the early period of exile, namely the beginning and middle of the 1920s, but were no longer succeeding in advancing the movement and undermining global communism.<sup>325</sup> Individual emigre circles remained deeply attached to their governments-in-exile, which they treated as their private fiefs tucked away in the affluent neighborhoods of Europe’s major cities. This attitude, for the Second Division’s staff, meant that the emigres were doing far too little to think in terms of a “general-Promethean” struggle, remaining within their national silos and, worst of all, treating Prometheism as a source of funding for the expenses of their exile colonies.<sup>326</sup> In other words, participation in Prometheism had become a means to an ignoble end rather than a road to radical historical and geopolitical change.

Pelc fully shared these sentiments in a secret report on the reconfiguration of Prometheism, further charging the entrenched emigres with looking after their national interests at the expense of the wider movement.<sup>327</sup> He also argued that the established exiles, especially in Paris, had formed a kind of emigre aristocracy that

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<sup>324</sup> CAW, I.303.4.5693, “Uwagi,” 4-5.

<sup>325</sup> “1936, 12 marca, Paryż. Projekt reorganizacji propagandy prometeuszowskiej za granicą, L.dz. 871/36,” in *II Rzeczpospolita*, 371-372.

<sup>326</sup> CAW, I.303.4.5693, “Uwagi,” 5-7.

<sup>327</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5; 9-17.

looked down upon the representatives of the “ahistorical” or “unformed” nations of Siberia and the Far East, losing potentially vital allies in the struggle to undo the Soviet Union.<sup>328</sup> In fact, Pelc chastised the emigres for embracing a narrow definition of nationhood that excluded many of the “crystallizing” peoples of Eurasia, arguing that the Prometheans should devote resources and attention to promoting the interests of these nations in order to exploit as many weaknesses as possible in the Soviet borderlands. Even more important for Pelc, though, was the replacement of this allegedly lethargic, elitist concept of nationhood with a much more dynamic, aggressive, “elastic” concept of national mobilization as a revolutionary force that should be awakened among every non-Russian minority population, no matter how small.<sup>329</sup> Moreover, the obsession of the emigres with their relatively trivial affairs in France or Poland had narrowed the focus of Prometheism and lost sight of the movement’s true purpose, which was to bring the fight to the Bolsheviks and, wherever possible, penetrate the territory of the Soviet Union with propaganda and intelligence gathering missions.<sup>330</sup> For Pelc, it was perfectly clear that the Bolsheviks thought in terms of international hegemony and were working without rest to promote communism in foreign countries, chief among them China and Spain. Prometheism, therefore, could not become satisfied with the defensive mentality of the emigres, and instead must take the initiative in spreading the “national revolution” into Soviet territory.<sup>331</sup>

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<sup>328</sup> Ibid., 3; 18-23.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>331</sup> Ibid., 5-7.



The fight against “world Bolshevism,” of course, was not being waged alone by the Prometheans, who, in the opinions of Charaszkiwicz and Pelc, were losing influence and relevance with every day that they allowed the “alternative Prometheisms” of Hitler’s Germany and imperial Japan to lead the battle.<sup>332</sup> While the Second Division’s staff were not united in their views on Nazi ideology, they could concur that Poland, once a leader in the anti-Soviet struggle in 1919 to 1921, had fallen behind. Prometheism, meanwhile, was also crumbling, not least because the older guard of emigres lacked an energetic ideological unity that could place them on par with the burgeoning fascist movements in Central Europe and East Asia. While avoiding mentioning specific names, Pelc cast doubt upon emigres with Social Democratic backgrounds, insinuating that these Prometheans, though devoted to bringing down Bolshevism, might still tolerate some type of moderate socialism in Russia. Such leftist sentiments, however vague, had to be purged from the movement and replaced with a fresh ideology whose appeal would extend beyond the stuffy townhouses of the elite exiles.<sup>333</sup> Pelc termed this new creed “national radicalism,” defining it as an ideology centered on discipline and sacrifice in the name of the nation, the unity of classes within any given nation, militant anticommunism manifested in concrete deeds, and the promotion of a global “national revolution” that would obliterate communism.<sup>334</sup> Compared to the old guard of emigres, with their lavish, allegedly bohemian lifestyles, the new breed of Prometheans would be consummately disciplined, unambiguously devoted, and prepared to lay down their lives by taking up arms against the forces of communism wherever they might be on

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<sup>332</sup> Ibid., 12-15.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>334</sup> Ibid., 18-20

the rise. Above all, these “national radicals” would model themselves on the cult of Marshal Piłsudski by living the life of a soldier and accepting a rigid hierarchy of command within the Promethean movement.<sup>335</sup>

This tendency to fetishize the “youth” as a raw, untapped source of radical renewal became crucial to men who, like Pelc, saw Prometheism losing ground to much more vibrant anticommunist movements. This is hardly surprising given not only the mood in neighboring Germany, but also the increasingly authoritarian tendencies of the *Sanacja* regime that had come to power in Poland in 1926.<sup>336</sup> Piłsudski, though avoiding formal office, towered as the country’s “great man” whose longstanding contempt for the Polish parliament, which he likened to a “brothel,” was realized in the elimination of nearly all political parties from the *Sejm* and *Senat* except for the “Nonpartisan Bloc for Cooperation with the Government.” Even Piłsudski’s former Polish Socialist Party was brutally maligned and placed on trial, while communists of any sort faced indefinite detention at the country’s main political prison at Bereza Kartuska.<sup>337</sup> Piłsudski’s death in 1935 only deepened dictatorial rule in Poland and, notably, unleashed public antisemitism to an extent previously unknown in the history of interwar Poland. The *Sanacja* system, of course, was not only operated from above, but also found an expanding following in youth organizations structured around the “cult of the Marshal,” the principles of social hygiene and personal discipline, and the Camp of National Unity led by Edward Rydz-Śmigły.<sup>338</sup> The more radical fascist opponents of *Sanacja* in the formally

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<sup>335</sup> Ibid., 20-22.

<sup>336</sup> See Eva Plach, *The Clash of Moral Nations: Cultural Politics in Piłsudski’s Poland, 1926–1935* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2006).

<sup>337</sup> Porter, “The Ambivalence of Democracy and Authority, 1922-39,” in *Poland in the Modern World: Beyond Martyrdom* (Malden: Wiley, 2014), 90-104.

<sup>338</sup> Plach, “Women’s Activism during the Sanacja Period,” in *The Clash of Moral Nations*, 102-132.

banned National-Radical Camp, meanwhile, styled themselves as disciples of Roman Dmowski, forming one of the other main right-wing youth milieus of the 1930s.<sup>339</sup>

While the Second Division remained far from cultivating their desired army of anticommunists, there was nevertheless a notable influx of young members into the Promethean movement in the last several years before the outbreak of the Second World War, and many of them came from opposing sides of the Polish political arena whose shared value was an ethos of discipline and nationalism.<sup>340</sup> Foreign students at the Eastern Institute, the University of Warsaw, and other Polish institutions of higher education also joined the movement as representatives of their respective homelands. Starting in 1936, Włodzimierz Bączkowski and Roman Smal-Stocki began publishing a new journal known as *Młody Prometeusz* (*The Young Prometheus*), whose few issues featured Polish-language articles from young representatives of all of the “captive nations.” The heading of the title page had also expanded in terms of the nationalities that the paper claimed to encompass, now including Ingria, Karelia, the Komi people, and the Kuban’ Cossack host. In his inaugural contribution to this new title, Smal-Stocki assured the Promethean youth of their role as the future of the anticommunist movement, while an anonymous contributor to the next number, perhaps Bączkowski, argued that the world stood on the verge of a total war between “nationalism” and “communism.”<sup>341</sup> Here, the author spared no time differentiating among the various strands of “nationalism,” insisting only that the Prometheans bore a sacred duty to support the monarchist forces in Spain and the Kuomintang in

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<sup>339</sup> Paul Brykczyński, *Primed for Violence: Murder, Antisemitism, and Democratic Politics in Interwar Poland* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2016).

<sup>340</sup> Libera, “Zarys,” 56-60.

<sup>341</sup> See the cover page of the first issue of *Młody Prometeusz* (1936). Smal-Stocki, “Słowo do Młodego Prometeusza,” *Młody Prometeusz* (1936), 2-5; “Nakaz chwili,” in *Młody Prometeusz* (1938), 1.

China.<sup>342</sup> While the Wilsonian language of self-determination and some degree of faith in internationalist institutions characterized the articles that appeared in *Le Prométhée* up until 1940, *Młody Prometeusz* struck a new tone with its fiery talk of an unstoppable “world war” of all against all.

The older emigre community, of course, did not go obsolete in the course of the 1930s, though efforts to organize the exiles in a manner more aligned with the outlook of the Second Division made their mark by 1939. New guidelines for the management and financing of *Le Prométhée* were proposed by Pelc, who chastened the Parisian Prometheans for their inability to increase subscriptions and actually generate income for the movement.<sup>343</sup> Paris certainly was the focal point of the Second Division’s reform projects and reprimands for ideological laxity and a lack of discipline, as Helsinki and Harbin were well enmeshed in the rightist atmospheres in their respective parts of the world. Nevertheless, the Second Division’s staff remained frustrated with the inability of the old Paris exiles to conform to their new ideological and organizational imperatives, although the announcement of a new initiative dubbed the “Promethean Front” in 1938 gave some cause for optimism. This reinvigorated movement would incorporate many of Pelc’s recommended reforms concerning ideological uniformity, active anti-Soviet propaganda campaigns, close cooperation across emigre centers and the Polish military intelligence staff, and some degree of engagement with the anti-Komintern Pact.<sup>344</sup> With only a year to the start of Hitler’s September Campaign, however, the “Promethean Front” did not have sufficient time

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<sup>342</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>343</sup> “1938, 24 lutego. Projekt reorganizacji czasopisma ‘Prométhée’ w Paryżu autorstwa Władysława Pelca, nr 80/27/38,” in *II Rzeczpospolita*, 435-437.

<sup>344</sup> “1938, 4 czerwca, Warszawa. Rezolucje frontu prometejskiego o stosunku do wrogich sił międzynarodowych i w sprawie taktyki wewnętrznej,” in *II Rzeczpospolita*, 449-450.

to show whether it would have effected a major change in emigre politics and deliver the sort of disciplined internationalism envisioned by Pelc.

## Chapter Five: A Tale of Two Piedmonts

Cross-border communist movements in the interwar Polish-Soviet struggle for  
Ukraine and Belarus, 1921-1939

In May of 1929, Mykola Skrypnyk delivered a rousing speech on “the condition and future prospects of cultural construction in Ukraine” at the Eleventh All-Ukrainian Congress of Soviets in Kharkiv. Since the October Revolution, Skrypnyk declared, the Bolsheviks had forged a bastion of Ukrainian proletarian culture in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR), expelling “bourgeois nationalists” such as Symon Petliura while combating the resurgent forces of “Great Russian chauvinism” inherited from the empire of the Tsars.<sup>1</sup> As one of the architects of the “indigenization” (*korenizatsiia*) of Soviet power in the Ukrainian SSR, Skrypnyk lauded the advance of the “national-cultural process” that had uplifted Ukraine linguistically, educationally, and culturally while inducting ethnic Ukrainians into the ranks of the Bolshevik Party and the commanding heights of power in their own republic on a massive scale. Not only had the drive for “Ukrainization” produced a genuinely native form of Soviet socialism with deep roots among Ukrainian workers, Skrypnyk argued, but it had also created ample space for non-Ukrainian minorities, including Russians, to exercise their right to national self-determination while joining an inclusive Soviet Ukrainian polity.<sup>2</sup>

Yet, even as Skrypnyk and his comrades celebrated their successes in engineering “Ukrainization” within the Soviet Union, the address made clear that there remained much to accomplish before the victory of the proletariat could be assured in Ukraine. While Skrypnyk had, in earlier articles, emphasized the need to mobilize Ukrainians

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<sup>1</sup> Mykola Skrypnyk, “USRR - P’iemont ukrains’kikh trudiashchykh mas,” in *Mykola Skrypnyk - statti i promovy z natsional'noho pytannia*, ed. Ivan Koshelivets’ (Munich: Suchasnist’, 1974), 178.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 178-180.

living in other Soviet republics, he now declared the “Ukraine beyond our borders” to be the greatest unconquered frontier in the struggle of the Ukrainian Bolsheviks to liberate their people from the double burdens of national and socioeconomic oppression.<sup>3</sup> Specifically, Skrypnyk named Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Romania, three of the outermost dominions of Euro-American capitalism, as the prisons in which millions of Ukrainian peasants and workers languished under the yoke of reactionary regimes that denied them self-determination while exploiting their labor. In the international struggle for the liberation of Ukraine from the global hegemony of the bourgeoisie, Skrypnyk proclaimed that “our Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, the only possible Ukrainian republic built in the struggles of the proletariat, *is the true cultural Piedmont of the entire Ukrainian nation.*”<sup>4</sup> If Piedmont had powered the drive for Italian integration in the nineteenth century, then the Ukrainian SSR, in Skrypnyk’s analogy, bore a “special historical mission” to create a unified “national culture” for all members of the “Ukrainian toiling masses,” serving as a beacon of emancipation visible from “all corners of the Ukrainian lands.” Though condemned to penury by his Polish landlord and deluded by “Petliurist” nationalists, the Ukrainian peasant in Volhynia or East Galicia would see his compatriots enjoying freedom and equality across the border and develop the consciousness necessary to break his chains.<sup>5</sup>

Drawing applause, Skrypnyk powerfully conveyed that Ukrainian Bolsheviks should approach their cultural work from a transnational perspective by striving to include “all of the nationalities” of the Ukrainian SSR along with cross-border

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 179-181.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 180. Emphasis is from the original.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 180-181.

Ukrainian minorities in “brotherly collaboration on the cultural, economic, political, and national fronts.”<sup>6</sup> On this particular occasion, Skrypnyk’s main interest lay in the sphere of “Ukrainian national culture,” and no explicit calls for the gathering of the “Ukrainian lands” within a single country were put forth. However, as Terry Martin has demonstrated, the “Piedmont principle” at the center of Skrypnyk’s vision was hardly anything new among Soviet leaders of the 1920s, who had already recognized the power of mobilizing cross-border national ties in projecting their influence abroad.<sup>7</sup> As Skrypnyk’s speech showed, this approach to internationalizing the revolution by national means proved especially attractive in cases when a Soviet “Piedmont,” such as the Ukrainian SSR, could assert its place as the unifying protector of members of the titular nationality concentrated in the neighboring borderlands of a capitalist country. While outright territorial annexations often figured into their end goals, interwar Piedmont projects generally employed subtler approaches to waging war by other means, such as supporting pro-Soviet political parties, organizing peasant partisan movements, and spreading national communist literature beyond Soviet borders.<sup>8</sup> Such approaches proved powerful in promoting national communism while undermining the legitimacy of the state in question, especially in regions in which the severity of rural poverty and the malleability of peasant identities combined to create fecund ground for pro-Soviet organization. It was only in 1939 to 1940, by which time Skrypnyk and the type of national

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>7</sup> Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 8-9.

<sup>8</sup> For examples beyond Ukraine and Belarus, see Harun Yilmaz, “The construction of Azerbaijani identity under the shadow of Iran and Turkey,” in *National Identities in Soviet Historiography: The Rise of Nations under Stalin* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 19-37; Octavian Țicu, “Borders and nation-building in post-Soviet space: a glance from the Republic of Moldova,” in *The EU's Eastern Neighbourhood: Migration, Borders and Regional Stability*, ed. Ilkka Liikanen, James W. Scott, and Tiina Sotkasiira (New York: Routledge, 2016), 50-64.



communism that he embodied had been largely destroyed under Stalin, that the Red Army actually crossed into nearby countries in the name of freeing repressed nationalities.

During the interwar decades, two of the most important Soviet Piedmont projects focused on cross-border populations of Ukrainians and Belarusians, the two largest non-Russian nationalities in the entire Soviet Union according to the census of 1926, particularly those situated near the long and porous western frontier with Poland. Following the Peace of Riga in 1921, the predominantly East Slavic peripheries of Poland officially became neighbors of the Ukrainian SSR and the Belarusian SSR, both of which emerged as potent national communist Piedmonts over the course of the next decade. As Poland's right-wing governments lurched through successive crises and struggled to gain a grip on their eastern peripheries, Soviet promises of radical property redistribution and national liberation appeared better positioned, for observers on both sides of the border, to attract the allegiance of Ukrainian and Belarusian workers for Kharkiv and Minsk rather than Warsaw.<sup>9</sup> Although some regional experiments in national autonomy gained traction after Józef Piłsudski, an iconic federalist figure, returned to power in 1926, a robust Polish response to *korenizatsiia* never truly materialized, leaving expansive swathes of the borderlands dangerously permeable to strong Soviet influences even after the fall of the national communists in Ukraine and Belarus.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> See, for instance, Leon Wasilewski, *Sprawa kresów i mniejszości narodowych w Polsce* (Warszawa: Głos Prawdy, 1927); Seweryn Wysłouch, *Rola komunistycznej partji zachodniej Białorusi w ruchu narodowym Białorusinów w Polsce* (Wilno: Rocznik Instytutu Naukowo-Badawczego Europy Wschodniej w Wilnie, 1933).

<sup>10</sup> See Jan Jacek Bruski, *Między prometeizmem a realpolitik: II Rzeczpospolita wobec Ukrainy sowieckiej 1921-1926* (Kraków: Towarzystwo Wydawnicze "Historia Iagellonica," 2010).

Yet, as much as national communists such as Skrypnyk expressed confidence that their Piedmont projects would win the day by infiltrating rickety dictatorships such as Poland, the realities of exporting Soviet power abroad via cross-border national ties were, on the ground, far messier and less predictable than it seemed in Kharkiv on that day in 1929. In fact, over the previous two years, Skrypnyk himself had been entangled in a severe row over the direction of Ukrainian national communism in which the majority faction of the Communist Party of Western Ukraine (KPZU) had backed the “deviant” demands of the Ukrainian Bolshevik Oleksandr Shums’kyi for greater Ukrainian autonomy from Moscow.<sup>11</sup> The next year, in 1928, the majority seceded from the KPZU and were formally ejected from the Komintern, tarring the Party’s revolutionary pedigree with charges of “petty bourgeois nationalism” and severely weakening the Ukrainian Piedmont project in Poland.<sup>12</sup> Formally, the KPZU and its more northerly counterpart, the Communist Party of Western Belarus (KPZB), emerged in 1923 as “regional organs” of the Communist Party of Poland (KPP), yet much of their funding and organizational support originated from within the Soviet Union.<sup>13</sup> While the KPZU and KPZB initially prepared for an armed uprising and the coming of the Red Army, a change in Komintern strategy in 1925 shifted their focus to mobilizing peasants and workers for an “all-Polish revolution,” after which western Ukraine and western Belarus would break away from Poland and join their respective Soviet Piedmonts.<sup>14</sup> In practice, however, charting the uncertain road to the “all-Polish revolution” and deciding the terms on which “unification” would occur became

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<sup>11</sup> Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, 215-220.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 218-219.

<sup>13</sup> See Janusz Radziejowski, *The Communist Party of Western Ukraine, 1919-1929*, trans. Alan Rutkowski (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 1983); Per Anders Rudling, *The Rise and Fall of Belarusian Nationalism, 1906-1931* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015).

<sup>14</sup> AAN, archiwum KPZB, 163/II/3, 7-9, 38-40.

points of heated contention for the KPZU and KPZB throughout the 1920s, bringing factional antagonisms and theoretical disagreements into sharp relief while, in the case of the KPZU, critically straining ties with the KPP, the Ukrainian Bolsheviks, and the Komintern.

In contemporary Polish and Western historiography, the KPZU and KPZB have acquired a reputation as faithful cross-border projections of “Soviet power” and rigidly conspiratorial, ideologically disciplined “fifth columns” loyal to their masters in Moscow.<sup>15</sup> Such characterizations, which echo the anxieties of Polish intelligence officials and nationalities experts from the interwar period, are perhaps most fitting for the last decade of the two parties’ existence. This period, in which scholars of the KPZU and KPZB generally see relatively few notable ideological innovations, stretches from the victory of the pro-Moscow “minority faction” of Julian Leszczyński (Leński) within the KPP to Stalin’s purge of the KPP in 1938. However, a closer examination of the first decade, stretching from the KPP’s inception in 1918 until 1928, unveils a more complex and nuanced intellectual landscape, one in which the KPZU and, to a lesser extent, the KPZB emerge as parts of a transnational laboratory of national communist thought and practice rather than just expedient instruments of shadowy figures in Moscow. In fact, the geography of the national communist experiment of the 1920s equally encompassed Minsk, Kharkiv, and Kyiv, not to mention cities such as L’viv, Vilnius, and Warsaw where Polish elites, among them members of the Promethean movement, competed with borderland communists for the loyalty of the country’s Ukrainian and Belarusian minorities. As Aleksandra Bergman, Roman Solchanyk, and Janusz Radziejowski have illustrated, the KPZU and KPZB were, at least before the “Bolshevization” of the KPP at the end of the

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<sup>15</sup> A representative example may be found in Andrew Savchenko, *Belarus - A Perpetual Borderland* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2009).

1920s, sites of intellectual ferment embedded in wider revolutionary networks that included many non-Bolshevik and non-communist nationalists as well as hundreds of thousands of Belarusian and Ukrainian peasants and workers living in Poland who joined mass movements for radical social reform and national liberation.<sup>16</sup> Though hardly averse to hierarchy and discipline, the KPZU and KPZB were not the silent handmaidens of their Soviet sponsors during the interwar height of national communism, which, as Solchanyk argues, was especially in flux and formation during the 1920s.<sup>17</sup>

The KPZU and KPZB emerged from messy borderland milieus that produced heterodox personalities and ideas that tested and sometimes openly challenged imperatives emanating from the Soviet Union and the Komintern, and both parties were regularly roiled by ideological controversies, factional splits, and mass defections that, on closer examination, illuminate a tangled web of connections with other communist groupings and institutions rather than a unidirectional flow of influence from Moscow into Poland's eastern borderlands. It is likewise essential to view the KPZU and KPZB not only within the context of Soviet efforts at westward expansion, but also as the products of the KPP's own eastward campaigns to bring ethnic Ukrainians and Belarusians into its ranks. In 1923, the KPP's leaders formally adopted Lenin's theses on the "right of nations to self-determination" to the point of "secession from states to which they were attached by force," avoiding direct references to Stalin's recent innovations and instead adopting the longstanding Polish

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<sup>16</sup> Key texts include Radziejowski, *The Communist Party of Western Ukraine*; Roman Solchanyk,

"The Comintern and the Communist Party of Western Ukraine, 1919-1928," *Canadian Slavonic Papers / Revue Canadienne des Slavistes*, 23.2 (June 1981), 181-197; Aleksandra Bergman, *Sprawy białoruskie w II Rzeczypospolitej* (Białystok: Białostockie Towarzystwo Naukowe, 1984).

<sup>17</sup> Solchanyk, "The Comintern," 195-197.

revolutionary slogan of “for your freedom and ours” while promising a struggle “of equals with equals, of the free with the free,” exactly as the Prometheans would.<sup>18</sup>

Yet, even if the KPP did not cite Stalin, their program echoed important elements of Soviet *korenizatsiia* by seeking out indigenous communists in the eastern borderlands and responding to Poland’s multinational composition by granting its two “regional organs” the responsibility of organizing the socialist revolution on their respective territories of western Ukraine and western Belarus. Importantly, however, the KPP’s attempts at winning local allies were, for the most part, predicated upon the promise of full secession from Poland and unification with the Soviet Union for Belarusians and Ukrainians, unlike concomitant Soviet *korenizatsiia* campaigns that aimed to unite different nationalities within a shared Soviet federation. Unlike the Bolsheviks, moreover, the KPP did not control the machinery of the state and faced a limited choice of allies, especially in the case of the KPZU, which was formed from a preexisting communist organization whose leaders expressed profound hostility and distrust towards the idea of belonging to an “all-Polish” party. Nevertheless, while the KPP’s own *korenizatsiia* experiment was especially turbulent in western Ukraine, its successes in creating a stable party were considerably greater in western Belarus, where the native cadres did not boast the same degree of preexisting organizational independence as the KPZU and were better inclined to participate in an “all-Polish” movement.<sup>19</sup> With this in mind, the KPZU and KPZB should always be seen as crucial parts of a transnational experiment in *korenizatsiia* in which not only the Bolsheviks but also the KPP played an important part.

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<sup>18</sup> *Uchwały II-go Zjazdu Komunistycznej Partji Robotniczej Polski* (Warszawa: Komunistyczna Partja Robotnicza Polski, 1923).

<sup>19</sup> Bergman, “Kwestia białoruska w Komunistycznej Partii Zachodniej Białorusi,” *Przegląd Historyczny* 62.2 (1971), 225-250.

## Unsettled ground

With the conclusion of the Peace of Riga in March of 1921, Polish-Soviet military hostilities officially ended and the shared frontier of Poland and the future Soviet Union emerged on a map of Eastern Europe that was still smoldering from seven devastating years of war and revolution. Under the terms of the treaty, the region's ethnically Belarusian territories were roughly divided in half, with Minsk remaining under Soviet rule, while the vast majority of Ukrainians living beyond the Zbruch became incorporated into the Ukrainian SSR headquartered in Kharkiv. Yet although the open clash of formal armies would not resume until September of 1939, the interwar struggle to consolidate lasting structures of multinational governance in the Polish-Soviet borderlands was only getting underway. Although successive Polish governments of different ideological stripes and the all-Union Bolshevik authorities in Moscow shared an aversion to another costly conventional war, a struggle to claim the partitioned Ukrainian and Belarusian territories and win the allegiance of their inhabitants unfolded by other means.<sup>20</sup> This conflict would be waged not only by intelligence agents, diplomats, and border guards, but, just as importantly, by the elites charged with establishing structures for education, land reform, local government, and national autonomy that would integrate the contested countryside into one competing state project or another.

The stakes in this “cold war,” to borrow Jan Jacek Bruski's apt expression, were especially high due to the frail grasps of the early Polish and Soviet states over their adjacent peripheries, which, for some prominent observers of the time, generated the impression that the settlement reached at Riga would be an ephemeral one. Moreover, the importance of the geographically contiguous Ukrainian and Belarusian

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<sup>20</sup> Bruski, *Między prometeizmem a realpolitik*, 47-58; 250-252.

populations in this “cold war” cannot be overemphasized, since measures implemented towards these groups on one side of the frontier inevitably reverberated on the other. It was within the context of this nationally charged “cold war” that cross-border communist organizations such as the KPZU and KPZB, along with their national communist sponsors in Minsk, Kharkiv, and Kyiv, worked to prepare the way for the “unification” of the eastern territories of Poland with their respective Soviet Piedmonts, sometimes drawing the ire of highly placed Bolsheviks in Moscow for their provocative activities in sensitive regions.<sup>21</sup> Although the national communists’ Polish-based rivals, in particular the post-1926 Prometheans, never penetrated the Soviet Union to a comparable degree, all of those involved in this battle for the borderlands were constantly learning from one another and were driven to weaponize nationality in new ways for fear of falling behind. While the *korenizatsiia* policies of the 1920s emboldened Poles such as Leon Wasilewski to believe that the Soviet regime was sowing the seeds of its long-term demise, they also compelled Tadeusz Hołówko and Henryk Józewski to formulate an alternative model backed by Warsaw, while Promethean dreams of creating pro-Polish Piedmonts in Ukraine and Belarus registered powerfully, and often exaggeratedly, in the writings of cross-border communists.<sup>22</sup>

In the 1920s, the most coveted weapon on which the fate of this “cold war” turned was nationalism, so it is essential to understand the wider context of changing Polish and Soviet nationalities policies in the Ukrainian and Belarusian borderlands order to understand the work and ideas of the KPZU and KPZB in their proper

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 295-298.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 295-296; on Józewski, see Snyder, *Sketches*; Hołówko presented his vision for a federalized Poland in *Kwestja narodowościowa w Polsce* (Warszawa: Księgarnia Robotnicza, 1922); Wasilewski puts forth this thesis on *korenizatsiia* in *Sprawy narodowościowe w teorii i w życiu* (Warszawa: J. Mortkowicz, 1929).

historical frame. Most fundamentally, Polish policies shaped the ground on which these two parties operated and presented visions of nationhood in the eastern borderlands in response to which the KPZU and KPZB articulated their own programs. From 1922 to May of 1926, the official policy of Poland's right-wing governments was to Polonize the eastern borderlands, incorporating Ukrainians and Belarusians into an enlarged Polish ethnic territory.<sup>23</sup> To the borderland communists, this approach was direct and damning evidence of "Polish chauvinism" and the desire of Warsaw to denationalize all of its minorities by force, much as the "Great Russian chauvinist" Tsars had done before 1917.<sup>24</sup> After the rise of Józef Piłsudski as Poland's dictator in May of 1926, the situation shifted as the new *Sanacja* regime sought out moderate allies among ethnic minority parties in the borderlands and even experimented with different degrees of autonomy, an approach that both the KPZU and KPZB recognized as especially dangerous.<sup>25</sup> If the Polish state could win over the "bourgeois nationalists" of Ukraine and Belarus, then it could not only gain a better chance of eroding the communists' popular base, but might also attempt to project its power across the border into the Soviet Union. In either case, however, "bourgeois Poland" remained at heart a "prison of nations" that, in the borderland communists' appraisal, looked very much like the old Russian Empire in miniature.<sup>26</sup>

In late September of 1921, not long after the ink had dried at Riga, the government of the Second Polish Republic conducted a census of its inhabitants that was meant to generate a more complete picture of the nascent country's demography,

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<sup>23</sup> Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations*, 58-60.

<sup>24</sup> Compare *Uchwały* with AAN, KPZB archive, 163/V-155, "Presledovanie Natsmen'shinstv v Pol'shche"; Radziejowski, *The Communist Party of Western Ukraine*, 16-20.

<sup>25</sup> "Presledovanie."

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*



socioeconomic condition, and productive power. Alongside “native language” and “religion,” the census featured “nationality” as a major category of identity, counting most of Poland’s 25.7 million people as Poles (69.2%), Ukrainians (15.2%), Jews (8.0%), Belarusians (4.0%), and Germans (3.0%).<sup>27</sup> These figures, which most likely overstated the ethnically Polish proportion of the population, masked the ambiguity and fluidity of peasant identities on the ground, something that Kate Brown and Olga Linkiewicz have both examined in the past two decades.<sup>28</sup> The first Soviet census conducted five years later similarly operated in terms of “nationality,” of which there were officially many more than in Poland, that could be neatly represented on colorful maps that wedded territory and nationhood. Polish and Soviet ethnographers and political leaders, however, were cognizant of the malleability of the premodern identities held by their subjects, and, in the interwar years, often demonstrated a determination to convert these “backward” people into members of properly modern nationalities.<sup>29</sup> Achieving this aim, especially in the case of Poland’s eastern borderlands, carried a serious geopolitical urgency that was never lost on those in power, especially as the KPZU and KPZB conducted their own nation-building operations within Polish frontiers.

While Stalin’s theses on *korenizatsiia* delivered at the Twelfth Party Congress in 1923 set the dominant tone for the spirit of this nationalizing work in the Soviet

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<sup>27</sup> *Spis ludności i zwierząt gospodarskich z dnia 30 września 1921 roku; wyniki tymczasowe* (Warszawa: Główny Urząd Statystyczny, 1923).

<sup>28</sup> Kate Brown, *A Biography of No Place: From Ethnic Borderland to Soviet Heartland* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 2009); Olga Linkiewicz, “Peasant Communities in Interwar Poland’s Eastern Borderlands: Polish Historiography and the Local Story,” *Acta Poloniae Historica* 109 (2014): 17-36.

<sup>29</sup> Iosif Stalin, “Dokład o natsional’nykh momentakh v partiinom i gosudarstvennom stroitel’stve. 23 apreliia,” “Zakliuchitel’noe slovo po dokladu o natsional’nykh momentakh v partiinom i gosudarstvennom stroitel’stve. 25 apreliia,” “Dobavlenie k dokladu komissii po natsional'nomu voprosu. 25 apreliia,” in *Sochineniia*, vol. 5 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1947), 236-263; 264-275. 279-280; Stanisław Grabski, *Uwagi o bieżącej historycznej chwili polski* (Warszawa: Perzyński, Niklewicz i spółka, 1922), 62-79.

Union in the 1920s, the situation across the border in Poland was more volatile during the same decade. From the time that the Western Allies recognized Poland's independence in November of 1918 up until the gradual conclusion of Polish-Soviet fighting in late 1920, two major visions of Polish nationhood had vied for control of the Polish state and the right to decide where it should be located and whom it should include. Józef Piłsudski, interwar Poland's first Head of State and chief of the military appointed by the Allies, devoted the country's resources to an eastward drive to claim much of the old Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, which he and many future Prometheans wished to transform into a "brotherly," anti-Russian federation of Poles, Lithuanians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians.<sup>30</sup> This project proved costly as Piłsudski violently submitted Lithuanian and Ukrainian nationalists on the road to his decisive clash with the Red Army, which left Poland exhausted and placed his rival, Roman Dmowski, in a favorable position. Dmowski, as a longtime representative of Polish interests in the West and the leader of the right-wing National Democratic movement, held sway in Poland's provisional parliament after the elections of 1919. In stark contrast to Piłsudski, Dmowski maintained that Poland's greatest enemy was an industrialized, expansionist Germany, meaning that the main battlegrounds in the national struggle lay to the west.<sup>31</sup> In the east, Dmowski wrote that Poland, out of strategic necessity, should only annex as many Lithuanians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians as it could hope to Polonize, finding peace with Russia or its successor but always leaving open the possibility of future growth in this direction.<sup>32</sup> As wars

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<sup>30</sup> For a recent take on the debates surrounding Piłsudski's motives, see Andrzej Nowak, "Józef Piłsudski: a Federalist or an Imperialist?," in *History and Geopolitics: A Contest for Eastern Europe* (Warsaw: Polish Institute of International Affairs, 2008), 169-186.

<sup>31</sup> Roman Dmowski, *Niemcy, Rosya i kwestya polska* (L'viv: H. Altenberg, 1908), 250-271.

<sup>32</sup> Idem., 'Memorjał o terytorjum Państwa Polskiego, złożony sekretarzowi Stanu, Balfourowi, w Londynie w końcu marca 1917 r.', in *Pisma, Tom IV: Polityka polska i odbudowanie państwa. Druga połowa* (Częstochowa: A Gmachowski, 1937), pp. 262-66.

raged on Poland's shifting frontiers, Piłsudski and Dmowski clashed over the country's structure between 1918 and 1921 in a "duel" that their respective partisans continued into the interwar years.<sup>33</sup>

At Riga, it was Stanisław Grabski, an influential National Democrat who occupied several prominent stations in Poland's early right-wing governments, who played a key role in limiting the country's eastern frontier with the Ukrainian and Belarusian SSRs as much as possible.<sup>34</sup> Like Dmowski, Grabski wanted Poland to inherit only as much of the messy borderlands, with their mostly East Slavic countryside and heavily Jewish towns, as it could realistically integrate into the ethnically Polish "core" to the west of the Buh and San Rivers. Writing in 1922, when Piłsudski's powers were severely curtailed and the National Democrats enjoyed power in the parliament, Grabski argued that the borders of the Polish state should overlap as closely as possible with the contours of the Polish ethnographic space.<sup>35</sup> After the Peace of Riga, he continued, this meant that non-Poles in the borderlands would have to be assimilated into Polish culture, accept the Polish language, and develop an unambiguous sense of Polish identity tying them to the government in Warsaw.<sup>36</sup> Other National Democrats, such as senator Joachim Bartoszewicz, contended that an ethnic Ukrainian could still be a loyal Pole in terms of national consciousness, yet Grabski rejected such a modern revival of the "*gente ruthenus, nationae polonus*" paradigm.<sup>37</sup> The only way to build a robust Poland capable of

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<sup>33</sup> Norman Davies, *Heart of Europe: The Past in Poland's Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 113-115.

<sup>34</sup> Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations*, 180.

<sup>35</sup> Grabski, *Uwagi*, 106-115.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 63-70.

<sup>37</sup> Bartoszewicz, *Znaczenie polityczne kresów wschodnich dla Polski* (Warszawa: Polskie Towarzystwo Opieki nad Kresami, 1924), 29-35.

pursuing its own claims against Germany in East Prussia, Pomerania, and Silesia, Grabski held, was to use the machinery of the state to advance Polonization in the east, molding the “ethnographic raw material” of the East Slavic peasantry into a solid base for “Polish civilization.”<sup>38</sup> Grabski’s most infamous move in this direction was to dramatically roll back educational opportunities in Ukrainian, promoting bilingual or exclusively Polish schools while rejecting calls for greater self-rule by non-Poles in the borderlands. Following a well established National Democratic axiom, Grabski insisted that the state, by nature, must serve the Polish nation and promote everything Polish, especially in regions where competition from non-Polish elements might challenge the homogeneity and internal unity of the country.<sup>39</sup> Even so, a Bloc of National Minorities founded shortly after Poland’s emergence as an independent country proved to be a potent contender for power in parliament, backing the PPS in 1922 in the selection of President Gabriel Narutowicz, who was murdered by a far-right assassin at the very beginning of his term.<sup>40</sup>

In 1923, Grabski further developed his program with respect to the borderlands by declaring his commitment to a “politics of strength without force,” insisting that the state should win souls for the Polish nation not at gunpoint, but by demonstrating the superiority of “Polish civilization” over less mature Ukrainian and Belarusian national movements.<sup>41</sup> While the state should play its role in overseeing Polonization, Grabski now placed more emphasis on the “spontaneous expansion” of “Polish civilization,” calling upon ethnic Poles with technical or academic expertise to

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<sup>38</sup> Grabski, *Uwagi*, 141-151,

<sup>39</sup> Grabski, *Z codziennych walk i rozważań* (Poznań: Wielkopolska Księgarnia Nakładowa Karola Rzepeckiego, 1923), 35-52.

<sup>40</sup> Paul Brykczyński, *Primed for Violence: Murder, Antisemitism, and Democratic Politics in Interwar Poland* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2016).

<sup>41</sup> Grabski, *Z codziennych walk i rozważań*, 48-50.

perform their patriotic duty by resettling in the borderlands and setting an example for their non-Polish neighbors.<sup>42</sup> This “organic” or “natural” portrayal of eastward colonization was a longstanding motif in National Democratic political thought, which had, since the 1890s, treated the lands stretching to the Dvina, Dniro, and Dniester Rivers as the territory on which “Polish civilization” would expand demographically, materially, and geopolitically.<sup>43</sup> Here, Bartoszewicz concurred with Grabski, writing in 1924 that Poland would have to win back its tarnished prestige in the East Slavic village by directly demonstrating that becoming Polish promised indisputable spiritual and material benefits. Only independent Polish farmers, rather than military colonists dispatched by the government, had any hope of settling among non-Poles without inflaming ethnic tensions and acting as an appealing missionary in the service of “Polish civilization.”<sup>44</sup>

Yet while Grabski and Bartoszewicz may have theoretically resolved the problem of violence in the Polonization of the borderlands by deploying the language of “assimilation” or a “civilizing mission,” the fragmented territory that they dreamed of welding to “core Poland” seemed frighteningly close to drifting from Warsaw’s orbit into the mid-1920s. Back in 1922, as Grabski penned his meditations on the direction of Polish politics, a gathering of voivodes from the eastern provinces in Warsaw featured an abundance of unsettling reports of porous borders, mutinous peasants, and general devastation.<sup>45</sup> Western Belarus, in particular, emerged from the proceedings as an especially dangerous corner of Poland in which communist agitators, with easy

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<sup>42</sup> Grabski, *Uwagi*, 115-116.

<sup>43</sup> Brian Porter, “Who is a Pole and Where is Poland? Territory and Nation in the Rhetoric of Polish National Democracy before 1905,” *Slavic Review* 51 (Winter, 1992); 639-53.

<sup>44</sup> Bartoszewicz, *Znaczenie*, 31-32.

<sup>45</sup> AAN, MSW archive, 1001, “Sprawozdanie stenograficzne z konferencji z wojewodami z Kresów Wschodnich z dnia 14 czerwca 1922 R.”

access to the neighboring Soviet Union, were fomenting rebellions among the benighted and impoverished peasants, who had already started plundering private property and forming armed bands. Indeed, as Aleksandra Bergman has written of western Belarus in the immediate aftermath of the Polish-Soviet War, the prevailing mood in the village as well as among the authorities was that the post-1921 arrangement would not endure long and that another major conflagration was on the way.<sup>46</sup> The voivodes, for the time being, proposed carefully gerrymandering the borders of communes, counties, and entire provinces to deny non-Poles a significant majority at any level of administration and hinder attempts at political mobilization. When it came to the problem of stymieing potential Ukrainian-Belarusian cooperation, the voivodes recommended relying upon the nationally ambiguous *tutejsi*, East Slavs concentrated in Polesie who described themselves as “locals,” as a firewall separating the territories of those two larger nationalities.

Some combination of divide-and-rule tactics coupled with demographic engineering in the form of Polish colonization seemed to form the core of how these men intended to govern the unruly borderlands, yet the young Polish state lacked the resources and organization to truly change the situation on the ground. When another cohort of voivodes met with Grabski in Warsaw in 1925, anxieties over the weakness of state power in predominantly Ukrainian and Belarusian territories persisted, but it now seemed that the program of “strength without force” elaborated in 1923 provided a clearer guide to how the peripheries should be Polonized. One of the voivodes ambitiously envisioned the creation of strategically placed “rural centers” in each county of the borderlands in order to showcase the superiority of Polish culture, technology, and agriculture, providing a living, breathing example of how voluntary

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<sup>46</sup> Bergman, “Kwestia białoruska w Komunistycznej Partii Zachodniej Białorusi,” *Przegląd Historyczny* 62.2 (1971); 226.

assimilation could pay off for non-Polish peasants. Like the “model villages” examined by James C. Scott in his monumental *Seeing Like a State*, these settlements would become beacons of order and “civilization” against both the dark night of rural poverty and the subversive dangers of non-Polish nationalists and pro-Soviet communists.<sup>47</sup> While Grabski himself commented that such a program would be far beyond the means of the Polish government, he and the voivodes generally concurred that the Polonization of schools, universities, and the administrative system should be vigorously continued in the borderlands. The problem at hand, Grabski argued, boiled down to a competition between the historically established, centuries-old high culture of the Poles and the relatively weak idea of Ukrainian or Belarusian nationhood. In this struggle, he claimed with confidence, the stronger, better nation backed by its own state would prevail.<sup>48</sup>

Grabski, of course, was looking out over the eastern borderlands from his office in Warsaw much as a representative of the state would do, to borrow from Scott. The school reform program only galvanized preexisting Ukrainian opposition to the hegemony of Polish culture in East Galicia, while grand visions of Polonization failed to play out on the ground in even the most “backward” and nationally unformed parts of Volhynia and Polesie.<sup>49</sup> Polish colonization, meanwhile, never became a mass phenomenon capable of tipping the demographic balance in ethnically mixed counties, owing in no small part to the Polish government’s lack of adequate resources to remold the population of entire provinces and the practical difficulties facing the

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<sup>47</sup> James C. Scott, *Seeing like a state: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 39-43; AAN, “Sprawozdanie stenograficzne.”

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Radziejowski, *The Communist Party of Western Ukraine*, 2-4.

“spontaneous expansion” of the nation.<sup>50</sup> In fact, Seweryn Wysłouch, one of the most insightful commentators on Belarusian affairs in interwar Poland, argued in 1930 that the policies pursued under Grabski had only served to exacerbate preexisting socioeconomic and national antagonisms in western Belarus without truly bringing many benefits.<sup>51</sup> The massive post-1921 shuttering of Belarusian-language schools, which had seen vibrant growth under the aegis of the Civilian Authority of the Eastern Lands during the Polish-Soviet War, had alienated Belarusian villagers and intellectuals alike.<sup>52</sup> Meanwhile, the placement of ethnically Polish prefects brought in from further west in local administrative bodies prevented Belarusians from participating in organized politics while weakening trust in the state among peasants. The obsession of the National Democrats with the eastern borderlands as an open, virgin territory for colonization, Wysłouch continued, was utterly unsound, since the region’s low population density corresponded to the poor quality of the soil and the penury of the Belarusian peasantry.<sup>53</sup>

In Wysłouch’s opinion, as well as that of Aleksandra Bergman, all of these factors had only worked to alienate western Belarus from Warsaw while lending credence to the radical programs of the KPZB and strengthening the idea that *korenizatsiia*-era Soviet Belarus was a more attractive home than Poland.<sup>54</sup> The best policy to emerge from the pre-1926 years, for Wysłouch, was Stanisław Thugutt’s

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<sup>50</sup> Christoph Mick, “Colonialism in the Polish Eastern Borderlands 1919-1939,” in *The Shadow of Colonialism on Europe’s Modern Past*, ed. Róisín Healy and Enrico Dal Lago (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

<sup>51</sup> Wysłouch, *Rola*, 14-16.

<sup>52</sup> Marjan Świechowski, “Obecny stan szkolnictwa białoruskiego na Ziemiach Wschodnich,” *Sprawy narodowościowe* 1.1 (January and February 1927).

<sup>53</sup> Wysłouch, *Rola*, 17-18.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 34-35; Bergman, 225.



land reform acts of 1925, which reorganized the parcelization of agrarian property to the benefit of a land-hungry peasantry in all parts of the country.<sup>55</sup> As economic troubles and crises of leadership embattled the right-wing Popular-National Union and its ally, the conservative “Piast” faction of the Polish People’s Party (PSL), Thugutt’s radical PSL-*Wyzwolenie* (“Liberation”) rose and enacted reforms for their main constituency in the countryside.<sup>56</sup> Even sources produced by the KPZB show that the party was shaken by these measures, which helped to ease rural privation and abolish archaic service relationships between peasants and landowners.<sup>57</sup> KPZB documents also frequently name PSL-*Wyzwolenie*, alongside the PPS and the Bund, as the communists’ main competitors or, during times when the Komintern called for a “united front” of progressive forces, potential allies.<sup>58</sup> This episode, as Wysłouch emphasized to Polish policymakers of the 1930s, demonstrated the intimate link between agrarian reform and nationalities policies in the eastern borderlands as well as the necessity of proactively addressing rival Soviet policies in order to win the support of cross-border minorities.<sup>59</sup>

While Dmowski and Grabski envisioned a centralized, unitary Polish state that would strive for ethnoreligious homogeneity, members of Piłsudski’s camp presented radically different visions of Poland’s organization even before the May Coup brought some of them back to power in 1926. Having faltered in their struggle to create a vast federation of Eastern European nations between the Baltic and Black

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<sup>55</sup> Wysłouch, *Rola*, 43.

<sup>56</sup> George D. Jackson, *Comintern and Peasant in East Europe: 1919-1930* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), 189.

<sup>57</sup> AAN, KPZB archive, 163/II/3, “III Konferencja,” s.7-10.

<sup>58</sup> AAN, KPZB archive, 163/II/1, “II Konferencja,” “Da pol’skikh rabochykh i sialianau,” s.25-27.

<sup>59</sup> Wysłouch, *Rola*, 43-45.

Seas, these future members of the Promethean movement turned their attentions to the territories that Poland had gained after 1921, seeking ways to federalize the country internally or, better yet, forge their own Piedmont provinces that would prepare the way for a struggle to liberate Ukraine and Belarus from Soviet rule. One such prominent figure was Leon Wasilewski, a longtime ally of Piłsudski who authored the PPS's programmatic pamphlet on the "national question" between 1899 and 1901.<sup>60</sup> Already a caustic critic of the National Democratic movement for more than twenty years, Wasilewski attacked his rivals in 1924 in a polemic calling for a civic form of Polish identity capable of including citizens of all nationalities and religions. Rejecting the notion of a "Poland for the Poles," Wasilewski, who especially recognized the importance of Polish-Ukrainian cooperation against the Soviet Union, insisted upon legal protections and structures of autonomy for his non-Polish countrymen.<sup>61</sup> While Poland's dispersed communities of Jews and Germans would be best served by extraterritorial self-rule, Wasilewski pushed for territorial autonomy as the best solution for Ukrainians and Belarusians. Wasilewski maintained this position throughout the interwar years, though his enthusiasm for the idea of Belarusian nationhood appears to have waned in some of the publications that he authored closer to his death in 1936.<sup>62</sup> While Wasilewski did not have the space to elaborate on the precise mechanisms of systems of minority autonomy in this particular work, he made clear that Polish governments would only lose support in the peripheries by privileging ethnic Poles as a special "state nationality," to use Grabski's phrase.

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<sup>60</sup> Wasilewski, *We wspólnym jarzmie: o narodowościach przez carat uciskanych* (London: Wydawnictwo Polskiej Partii Socjalistycznej, 1901). See Chapter 1 for a more extensive discussion of this text.

<sup>61</sup> Idem., *Polska dla Polaków czy Polska dla wszystkich obywateli polskich? (Sprawa mniejszości narodowych w Polsce)* (Warszawa: Nowe Życie, 1924).

<sup>62</sup> Idem., *Jak powstały obecne stosunki narodowościowe Polski* (Warszawa: Wiedza i Życie, 1928).

An even more radical advocate of decentralization was Tadeusz Hołówko, another Promethean activist and an even closer confidant of Piłsudski who saw Ukraine as the lynchpin of the Soviet system and the key to bringing down the Bolshevik experiment. In 1922, as Grabski was calling for outright Polonization, Hołówko published a strikingly sophisticated but largely neglected monograph that presented the federalization of Poland as the only realistic approach to ensuring the state's survival in the face of internal movements for secession and foreign competitors like the Bolsheviks.<sup>63</sup> Hołówko forcefully argued that Poland could not behave like a typical nation-state because it was, in fact, a multinational polity cobbled together from different imperial borderlands with complex legacies of national and socioeconomic tensions. Rather than pursuing homogeneity, a wise Polish government would embrace a diversity of structures for self-government within its borders, working, most fundamentally, to give non-Poles strong incentives to be loyal to Warsaw and participate in building a Polish-led bloc of nations that might someday expand into the Soviet sphere.<sup>64</sup> For Hołówko, Poland's right-wing governments were simply recreating the faulty structures of the old Russian Empire on a smaller scale by relying on brute coercion and waging a constant war of oppression against the borderland nationalities.<sup>65</sup> What the authorities needed to do, instead, was to give the eastern borderlands broad territorial autonomy, granting Ukrainians and Belarusians control over education, defense, infrastructure, and economic affairs in their own regions.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Hołówko, *Kwestja narodowościowa*, 5-7.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 20-21.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-7.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-10.

The need for such an approach, Hołówko claimed, was most exigent in East Galicia, which would become a “Polish Ireland” unless leaders in Warsaw came up with a program for regional self-rule that would, as a starting point, restore the freedoms that Ukrainians had known as Austrian subjects before 1918.<sup>67</sup> Further north, in places such as Volhynia and Polesie, Hołówko urged Poles to actively promote Ukrainian and Belarusian nationhood on terms friendly to Warsaw in order to strengthen the country’s eastern “wall” against Bolshevik infiltration, something that became an alarming reality by the late 1920s.<sup>68</sup> In Hołówko’s imagination, the next generation of Ukrainian and Belarusian “patriots” born from this experiment would grow up fluent in their native languages as well as in Polish, and would view themselves as part of an expanded, ecumenical community of “Polish culture” open to all ethnic groups. It would be this new, vigorous culture grounded in bilingual schools and universities, rather than the sheer power of the military or police, that would provide the cohesive fiber for a federalized Poland capable of challenging the Soviet Union or whatever resurgent Russian state would replace it.<sup>69</sup> With the elimination of national inequalities, Hołówko prophesied that the working classes of all of Poland’s nationalities could unite around a single, non-communist socialist movement like the PPS, allowing for the replacement of unregulated capitalism with a juster order based around peasant-worker cooperatives.<sup>70</sup> Though Hołówko held low expectations for the survival of the Bolsheviks over the long run, his pamphlet anticipated many of their most effective innovations in nationalities policies during the 1920s.

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-22.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 34-37.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 36-40.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 69-72.

Unfortunately, such ideas held scant purchase after Piłsudski's temporary fall in 1922, and their implementation proved difficult once he returned in 1926. The May Coup certainly ushered in the remarkable growth of Prometheism as an international movement, but this hardly meant that Promethean ideas reigned freely when it came to the sensitive question of administering Poland's restive borderlands. Though Hołówko and Henryk Józewski made progress in recruiting Ukrainians for the Polish state in Volhynia, the *Sanacja* government exercised a heavy hand in western Belarus and East Galicia during times of upheaval and never implemented a potentially risky nationwide plan for federalization.<sup>71</sup> Interwar Poland, as Krzysztof Brzechczyn notes, seemed to have incorporated the deficiencies of both Dmowski and Piłsudski's visions while never fully harnessing the strengths of either.<sup>72</sup> These weaknesses, which Polish elites struggled to remedy, were well known in the ranks of the KPZU and KPZB, both of which exploited the overlapping national and socioeconomic antagonisms on their respective territories throughout the interwar period.

### ***Korenizatsiia's Polish offspring: the KPZU and the KPZB***

During the interwar period, the Polish Ministry of Internal Affairs maintained a detailed and growing register of radical, "anti-state" political movements operating within the country's frontiers, distributing weekly, monthly, and annual reports to an extensive web of military and government agencies.<sup>73</sup> These organizations, by 1939, included anarchist cells in major industrial cities, right-wing Ukrainian nationalist parties calling for secession, and pro-Nazi groupings formed by self-identifying

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<sup>71</sup> Snyder, *Sketches*.

<sup>72</sup> Krzysztof Brzechczyn, "Ukraina w koncepcjach federacyjnych Leona Wasilewskiego," in *Zagadnienie rosyjskie. Myślenie o Rosji: oglądy i obrazy spraw rosyjskich*, ed. Michał Bohun and Janusz Goćkowski (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Secesja, 2000), 57-68.

<sup>73</sup> AAN, MSW archive: starting in 1927, the government published regular reports usually titled "Sprawozdanie z ruchu komunistycznego i anarchistycznego" or "Z życia mniejszości narodowych w Polsce."

*Volksdeutsche* along the German border. Among the most dangerous, in the eyes of the authorities, were outlawed communist groupings, most notably the KPP (known as the KPRP, or Communist Labor Party of Poland, until 1925) and its two “regional organs,” the KPZU and KPZB. The KPP formally emerged in 1918 from collaboration between the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania (SDKPiL), the party of both Rosa Luxemburg and Feliks Dzierżyński, and the Left Faction of the Polish Socialist Party (PPS-*Lewica*).<sup>74</sup> The latter grouping had split from Józef Piłsudski’s Revolutionary Faction in 1906, condemning many future Prometheans for their opportunistic nationalism and severe deviations from Marxist historical materialism. Though formally banned from the time of the Polish-Soviet War, the KPP’s popular base grew in the proletarian centers of Warsaw, Łódź, and Katowice, as well as among Ukrainian and Belarusian peasants in the eastern borderlands.<sup>75</sup> Alfred Reguła, a former KPP member who defected to the Polish government and authored a monumental work on his old Party, reported that many of the KPP’s newest rank-and-file inductees came from predominantly non-Polish borderlands, especially after the formation of the KPZU and the KPZB.<sup>76</sup> In this sense, the KPP was not only a minority party within the Polish political landscape, but it was also very much a party composed of national and religious minorities, with ethnic Poles forming its only disproportionately underrepresented group.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Antoni Czubiński, *Komunistyczna Partia Polski: Zarys historii*, 2nd ed. (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne, 1988), 12-20.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 98-101.

<sup>76</sup> Alfred Reguła, *Historja Komunistycznej Partji Polski w świetle faktów i dokumentów* (Warszawa: Drukprasa, 1934), 25-29.

<sup>77</sup> Henryk Cimek, *Mniejszości narodowe w ruchu rewolucyjnym w II Rzeczypospolitej* (Rzeszów: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego, 2011).

As the First World War ended in November of 1918, the Bolsheviks, facing an encirclement on all sides of their foothold along the Volga River, looked to the western borderlands of the former Russian Empire for a path into Central Europe, where the German Revolution beckoned for reinforcement.<sup>78</sup> The KPRP, formed in December of that year, sought to support the Red Army in its westward push by transforming Poland into a revolutionary bridge to Germany, though its weakness as a popular force limited its ability to openly challenge Piłsudski, who commanded the military and enjoyed mass support through his branch of the Polish Socialist Party. By the time that Soviet forces stood on the outskirts of Warsaw in August of 1920, a Moscow-backed Provisional Polish Revolutionary Committee, headed by Julian Marchlewski, prepared to take power, yet the dramatic reversal of fortunes on the battlefield over the next two months shelved the creation of a Polish Soviet Republic on the Wisła. After the cessation of Polish-Soviet hostilities and the formal closing of the European revolutionary frontier under the Peace of Riga in 1921, the KPRP shifted its focus towards expanding its reach among Poland's working classes, not only via underground channels but through alliances with more moderate socialist groupings and campaigns for parliamentary representation through its legally recognized organ, the Union of the Proletariat of the Town and Village.<sup>79</sup> These efforts, which developed most vigorously from 1922 to 1926, were pioneered by the "majority" faction of Adolf Warszawski (Warski), a former comrade of Rosa Luxemburg, and Maria Koszutska, a veteran of PPS-*Lewica*, who worked to adapt the KPRP's policies to prevailing circumstances in Poland, resisting closer ideological alignment with the Bolsheviks and protesting the reduction of Polish communism to

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<sup>78</sup> See Chapter Two.

<sup>79</sup> Reguła, *Historja*, 84-112.

an instrument of Moscow's interests. The rival "minority" faction, led by Julian Leszczyński (Leński) and endorsed by the Komintern, worked to "Bolshevize" the KPRP and increasingly unseated the "majority" in the mid-1920s, particularly after Warski and Koszutska backed Piłsudski's coup in 1926 in the misplaced hope that it would evolve into a socialist uprising on Polish terms.<sup>80</sup>

The efforts of the "majority" to widen their base of grassroots support depended in no small part upon their ability to formulate and implement a compelling line on the "national question" that would draw non-Poles, who accounted for no less than one-third of the country's population, to the ranks of the KPRP. At its Second Congress, which convened outside of Moscow in August and September of 1923, the KPRP resolved that a future socialist Poland could only be constructed on ethnically Polish territories, recognizing the right of the Ukrainians and Belarusians of the eastern borderlands to secede from the bourgeois-capitalist domination of Warsaw and pursue full integration with their respective Soviet republics. Until this radical transformation could be achieved, the KPRP proclaimed its dedication to fighting alongside non-Polish toilers in their struggles for land redistribution, education in their native languages, cultural advancement, and political representation, all of which had been suppressed to varying degrees by the right-wing governments of the National Democrats.<sup>81</sup> Warski even argued that the KPRP should harness the revolutionary potential of the non-Polish peasants and "townspeople" (*mieszczanie*), both social strata of questionable reliability in the Bolshevik analysis that the "majority" considered it possible to rally behind a broad revolutionary front.<sup>82</sup> The

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> *Uchwały*, 60-67.

<sup>82</sup> *II Zjazd Komunistycznej Partii Robotniczej Polski, 19.IX-2.X.1923; protokoły, obrad i uchwały* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1968), 360-361.



bottom line of these resolutions was that the Second Polish Republic was an artificial and ultimately temporary patchwork of lands and peoples assembled violently and solely for the profit of the Polish capitalist and landowning elites, whose impending demise would eliminate the basis for the country's existence within its post-1921 borders and allow the working classes, broadly defined, to dismantle it according to socialist principles.

Shortly after the Congress concluded, the KPRP incorporated these theses into its structure by creating "autonomous organs" in the form of the KPZU, effectively a successor to the Communist Party of East Galicia (KPSH) formed in 1919, and the KPZB, which lumped together a handful of provincial cells of the Polish, Belarusian, and Lithuanian communist parties based in the towns of northeastern Poland.<sup>83</sup> The KPRP's direction appeared to incorporate important elements of Lenin's vision of the "right of nations to self-determination to the point of secession" as well as Stalin's more recently adopted *korenizatsiia* policies, providing not only for the separation of western Ukraine and western Belarus from Poland but also committing, in the meantime, to cultivating the indigenous cadres that would tear away the eastern borderlands. References to Bolshevik interpretations of the "national question," however, were conspicuously absent from the Congress's published resolutions, which framed the KPRP's ideological innovations as a socialist revival of the "slogans written on the old revolutionary standards" of the long nineteenth century, namely the idea that Poles would fight alongside the oppressed nationalities "for your freedom and ours, as equals with equals, as the free with the free." This formulation, which can most likely be attributed to the "majority," was likewise notable because the KPRP's resolutions stressed that a socialist Poland, once stripped of the eastern

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<sup>83</sup> *Uchwały*, 1-3.

borderlands and liberated from capitalism, would pursue a “free, independent existence within the family of European socialist republics,” linking the Soviet Union with a revolutionary Germany yet standing on equal footing with both of these powerful neighbors.<sup>84</sup> Forcible “Bolshevization,” from this point of view, would violate the sovereignty of a Poland headed by the KPRP’s “majority,” which stirred Stalin’s ire with its “Luxemburgism” and “Menshevism” by avoiding compliance with directives emanating from Moscow.<sup>85</sup>

For the KPRP delegates assembled in Moscow in 1923 who had originally belonged to the SDKPiL, the ongoing struggle over the “Bolshevization” of the party represented a bitter continuation of the pre-1918 rows between Luxemburg and Lenin, who had clashed on key organizational and ideological issues, including the controversial question of recognizing the “right of nations to self-determination.” Karl Radek, himself a former SDKPiL member who later joined the Bolsheviks, provoked objections when he addressed the Congress with a speech that dismissed non-Leninist interpretations of the “national question” as both incorrect and tainted with the opportunism of the Second International. Julian Brun, hardly an ally of the “majority,” challenged Radek’s suggestion that the Bolshevik line on the “national question” had always been theoretically sound or original, praising Luxemburg’s refusal to endorse the “right of nations to self-determination” as a crucial decision that, especially in 1905, had shielded Polish workers from nationalist influences and consolidated the disciplined proletarian foundations of the KPRP.<sup>86</sup> Later, in an article that appeared in *Nowy Przegląd* (*The New Review*) in 1923, Warski denied that there had ever even

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<sup>84</sup> *Uchwały*, 60-63.

<sup>85</sup> See *Sprawa Polska na V Kongresie Międzynarodówki Komunistycznej* (Moscow: Trybuna, 1924).

<sup>86</sup> *II Zjazd*, 337-340.

been a tendency towards “national nihilism” in Luxemburg’s camp, insisting that the party had simply reached a sober, empirically grounded assessment of the revolutionary significance of nationalism in the time and place in which it had been operating. The KPRP’s latest decision to devolve power to the KPZU and KPZB, Warski argued, was actually consistent with the underlying logic of Luxemburg’s alleged “national nihilism” because it had arisen from a careful examination of the postwar situation in Poland’s eastern borderlands, where Ukrainian and Belarusian nationalist struggles for secession now constituted a revolutionary force against Polish occupation and international capitalism. Warski claimed, in fact, that the KPZU and KPZB were the direct descendants of the SDKPiL, which, in comparison, had functioned with “one hundred times more” autonomy within the broader Russian Social Democratic landscape.<sup>87</sup>

While Warski creatively defended Luxemburg from accusations of “national nihilism,” he was also keenly aware that the KPRP, for much of its first four years, had frequently run roughshod over the autonomy of non-Polish communist groupings in the name of administrative expedience and economic integration, a practice that had produced ethnic alienation and antagonism in the eastern borderlands that the Second Congress would have to ease.<sup>88</sup> By supporting Ukrainian and Belarusian secession from Poland, Warski managed to win the allegiance of Iosip Krylik (Vasyl’kiv), one of the leaders of the KPSH and a key figure in the KPZU, who had vehemently opposed earlier attempts by the KPRP to incorporate East Galicia into a so-called Polish Soviet Republic drawn up according to the geography of production

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<sup>87</sup> Adolf Warski, “Nauki jubileuszu bolszewickiego. Jubileusz KPRP?,” *Nowy Przegląd* 2 (1923); 77-79.

<sup>88</sup> *II Zjazd*, 360-363.

with few ethnographic considerations.<sup>89</sup> Speaking at the Second Congress, Vasyl'kiv, who regarded the Polish working classes as a privileged group opposed to the revolutionary struggle of the doubly oppressed Ukrainians, announced that the KPSH had cleansed itself of deviant nationalist elements early on, though he continued to doubt whether his comrades in the KPRP had fully abandoned their own chauvinist tendencies.<sup>90</sup> Tellingly, Vasyl'kiv's comments were immediately followed by a rejoinder from Anna Ketti, who emphasized that the party should be fully committed to creating a "state of the proletariat" undivided by troublesome national differences, one in which the primary basis for the demarcation of administrative regions should be economic rather than ethnic. Ketti, importantly, hailed from the heavily industrialized region of Upper Silesia along the contested Polish-German border, where the KPRP actually encouraged Polish workers to resist the nationalist provocations of their own government and bourgeoisie while supporting their German comrades in the struggle to overthrow the much more powerful class of German industrialists.<sup>91</sup> While the plebiscite conducted in Upper Silesia in 1921 had partitioned the region to Poland's economic advantage, the KPRP's Second Congress resolved that the rich coal reserves given to Warsaw were far more essential to the success of the coming German revolution, which required the "full heart" of the "Upper Silesian proletariat" to prevail.<sup>92</sup>

Ketti's view, informed by the situation in Upper Silesia, represented a fairly extreme position at the Second Congress, yet other participants, most notably Leński

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<sup>89</sup> Roman Solchanyk, "The Comintern and the Communist Party of Western Ukraine, 1919-1928," *Canadian Slavonic Papers / Revue Canadienne des Slavistes*, 23.2 (June 1981), 181-197.

<sup>90</sup> *II Zjazd*, 328-330.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 330-331.

<sup>92</sup> *Uchwały*, 66-67.

and his “minority,” leveled serious criticisms of Warski’s sweeping concessions to separatism in the eastern borderlands. Attempting to channel both Lenin and Luxemburg, Leński stressed that the “majority” had dangerously opened the way for nationalist deviants and opportunists to infiltrate the communist movement by broadly and imprecisely endorsing “self-determination” and secession without thoroughly elaborating upon the key questions of who exactly would be liberating the borderlands and on what concrete terms. Leński emphasized that both Lenin and Luxemburg had avoided such blanket statements and always insisted upon a close, incisive analysis of class relations in every individual case of national separatism, something that the KPRP had allegedly not yet done in the eastern borderlands. Interestingly, Leński also warned against conflating “self-determination” with territorial “separation,” claiming that the party should only support attempts at achieving the latter after a rigorous review of the specific circumstances involved.<sup>93</sup> Otherwise, the KPRP would effectively invite potentially counterrevolutionary elements to invoke its prematurely capacious invitation for minorities to fight for complete separation from Poland, an end that, in and of itself, was not inherently revolutionary and threatened to mire the party in its own theoretical imprecision.

Leński’s remarks quickly elicited responses that the slogan of territorial secession had already become intimately coupled with the movements for Ukrainian and Belarusian “self-determination,” not only in the minds of nationalist elites but, more importantly, in the collective consciousness of the working classes toiling under the twin yokes of national and socioeconomic domination.<sup>94</sup> One comrade even advanced the unusual counterargument that capitalism, on the whole, was on its way towards

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<sup>93</sup> *II Zjazd*, 354-356; 368.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 360-363.

stagnation and decline, meaning that surprising economic developments in the eastern borderlands were unlikely to precede the beginning of the socialist revolution, so the present situation on the ground more or less approximated what the KPRP would face in its struggle to overthrow the existing order.<sup>95</sup> Warski, meanwhile, forcefully charged Leński with propagating a harmful brand of “Polish nationalism,” accusing him of overruling or belittling legitimate demands for national self-determination by citing “economic” factors that supposedly favored the continuing unity of the Polish state. Though Warski challenged the idea that “national nihilism” had prevailed in the ranks of the SDKPiL before 1918, he nevertheless claimed at the Second Congress that Leński was not alone among the grouping’s former members in making the case for an unduly expansive Polish Soviet Republic in which ethnographic differences would be subordinated to the logic of economic integration. In Warski’s view, the Second Polish Republic of 1923 resembled the Russian Empire of 1917 as a nationally conglomerate polity maintained through coercion by the ruling and propertied classes of the dominant nationality, making it sensible that Lenin’s own interpretation of “national self-determination” as the right to secession and independence, which the SDKPiL had once opposed, should now be enthusiastically employed in the fight against “Polish nationalism and imperialism.”<sup>96</sup>

For the time being, Warski and his “majority” won the day on the “national question,” finding important allies in the once hostile ranks of Vasyl’kiv’s own “majority” faction of national communists in the newly formed KPZU. The Komintern, however, increasingly intervened in the internal affairs of the KPRP leadership by 1925, when the party’s line on national secession was modified to

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 350-362.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 362-363.

require that the separation of the eastern borderlands from Poland only occur once an “all-Polish revolution” had taken control of the whole country, a position that apparently corresponded to an ascendant Leński’s desire to keep “deviant” separatists out of the party.<sup>97</sup> The following year, Warski and Koszutska supported Piłsudski’s coup in the hope that it would turn into a prelude for a wider working-class uprising, yet this plan proved to be a miscalculation and Leński, backed by the Komintern, began to truly displace the “majority” within the KPRP.<sup>98</sup> In 1927, Vasyl’kiv became entangled in a losing battle with the Ukrainian Bolsheviks in Kharkiv to defend Oleksandr Shums’kyi, a patron of the KPZU who had been disciplined for advocating the allegedly chauvinistic, anti-Russian intensification of “Ukrainization” policies in the Ukrainian SSR.<sup>99</sup> While Warski, Vasyl’kiv, and their comrades in the KPZB had all collaborated with more moderate left-wing forces in their respective parts of Poland, the Komintern ruled in 1928 that the relatively inclusive policy of the “united front” adopted in 1924 was no longer suitable for the coming demise of world capitalism, requiring its constituent parties to take a far more hostile approach to the so-called “social fascists” with whom they had previously worked.<sup>100</sup> At this point, Leński, who had spent the previous two years tarring the declining “majority,” authored an article in *Nowy Przegląd* denouncing the KPZU as a hotbed of petty-bourgeois infiltration, hailing the downfall of Vasyl’kiv’s “majority” as a positive

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<sup>97</sup> Regula, *Historja*, 96-145.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 143-163.

<sup>99</sup> Radziejowski, *The Communist Party of Western Ukraine*, 127-169.

<sup>100</sup> Duncan Hallas, *The Comintern: A History of the Third International* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2008 [1985]), 127-130.

development while leading the general campaign to purify the KPP of counterrevolutionary contamination.<sup>101</sup>

While the paths of the KPZU and the KPZB diverged notably in the course of the 1920s, the two parties' programs shared some fundamental assumptions about the nature of the national and working-class struggles in Poland and also came under harsh criticism for similar ideological "deviations." The most basic of these borderland theses held that western Ukraine and western Belarus had been forcibly incorporated into Poland for the purpose of raw economic exploitation, and that their unification with their corresponding Soviet republics should be the chief geopolitical objective of the communist struggle.<sup>102</sup> Until 1925, both the KPZU and KPZB were readying themselves for armed uprisings supported by the Red Army, but the cancellation of such plans within the Soviet Union shifted the focus to a coming "all-Polish revolution."<sup>103</sup> Only once Poland, as a whole, had adopted socialism could the borderlands properly secede and join their countrymen across the border, yet how and when this revolution would arrive remained unclear and subject to frequent postponement from the Komintern.

The ideological proclamations of the KPZU and KPZB, inspired to a considerable degree by ideas circulating within the Komintern and the KPP but always adapted to local circumstances, appeared to apply two of Lenin's own arguments about Tsarist Russia to the context of interwar Poland. First was the contention that Poland constituted a "prison of nations," or a pre-Soviet Russia in miniature, lorded over by

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<sup>101</sup> Leński, "Źródła i charakter kryzysu w KPZU," *Nowy Przegląd* 7.25 (November-December 1928); 142-154.

<sup>102</sup> *Uchwały*, 62-63; Radziejowski, *The Communist Party of Western Ukraine*, 14-16; AAN, KPZB archive, 162/II/3, "III Konferencja," s.1-3.

<sup>103</sup> AAN, KPZB archive, 163/II/1, "II Konferencja," s.20-22.



bourgeois capitalists and rapacious landowners with the support of a repressive government. Before 1926, the borderland communists pointed to the Polish state's attempts at Polonizing its minorities as proof of the interconnection between national and class oppression, treating the policies of the National Democrats as echoes of the Russifying impulses of the old Romanov monarchs. After 1926, the KPZU and KPZB admitted that Piłsudski, a "fascist" dictator, was cleverer than his predecessors for abandoning outright Polonization and instead forming a superficially inclusive alliance with rich peasants and petty bourgeois nationalists of non-Polish background, all the while keeping the working classes down.<sup>104</sup> The formation of state-sponsored cooperative movements in Volhynia, where landowners such as senator Joachim Wołoszynowski worked to win the loyalty of peasants, likewise earned derision in communist circles.<sup>105</sup> Even more deeply despised were Henryk Józewski's efforts at integrating Ukrainians into structures of self-rule in Volhynia, a project that convinced the borderland communists of both Warsaw's growing creativity in controlling its peripheries and Piłsudski's plans for an offensive against the Soviet Union.<sup>106</sup> Second was the borderland communists' view of Poland as the "weak link" in the global chain of capitalism, a perspective similar to Lenin's assessment of pre-1917 Russia's position within the global economy. As the easternmost outpost of Franco-British capital, Poland, alongside Romania and Czechoslovakia, became the economically backward and politically fragile subordinate of its imperialist masters but, at the same time, a menacing staging ground for the coming Western offensive

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<sup>104</sup> AAN, KPZB archive, 163/V-155, "Presladovanie," s.26-27.

<sup>105</sup> AAN, KPZB archive, 163/V-141, "Pastanovy i kanferentsy Kamunistychna Partyi Zakhodnai Belarusi," s.35.

<sup>106</sup> AAN, KPZB archive, 163/I-2/12.

against the Soviet Union.<sup>107</sup> Accordingly, the KPZU and KPZB regularly denounced plans for minority autonomy within Poland as well as visions of Polish cooperation with Ukraine and Belarus on the basis of a federal model as nothing more than imperialist schemes to temporarily alleviate national antagonisms and undermine the Soviet Union.

While the principal objective of the KPZU and KPZB was to overthrow Poland's "bourgeois" or "fascist" government, depending on the specific time period, and ensure the unification of the country's Ukrainian and Belarusian lands with the Soviet Union, the two parties were also frequently in conflict with themselves and with other communist organizations. During the 1920s, both the KPZU and KPZB made the "error" of working with left-wing Ukrainian and Belarusian nationalists who later earned the title of "national opportunists" when the Komintern shifted away from its "united front" policies at the end of the decade.<sup>108</sup> The KPZU's gravitation towards Shums'kyi earned serious charges of "petty bourgeois nationalism," while the KPZB's overwhelmingly peasant support base drew concerns that the party had failed to appreciate social "differentiation" in the village while neglecting the proletariat.<sup>109</sup> Meanwhile, both the KPZU and KPZB found themselves inevitably entangled in the long and painful drama of the KPP's "Bolshevization," which increasingly fragmented the party after 1923. Within the KPP, the "majority faction" led by Warski and Koszutska favored greater autonomy from Moscow and attempted to pursue a brand of national communism suited to Polish conditions. The "minority

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<sup>107</sup> AAN, KPZB archive, 163/I-2/12; 3467; *Die ukrainische nationale Frage* (L'viv: Selbstverlag des ZK der KPZU, 1928), 7-41.

<sup>108</sup> AAN, KPZB archive, 163/I-1 t.12, "I Zjazd," s.21; *Borot'ba z natsionalistychnymy ukhylamy v KP(b)U ta KPZU*, ed. M.M. Popov (Kharkiv: Proletarii, 1927).

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*; AAN, KPZB archive, 163/I-2 t.9, "II Zjazd. Protokół obrad," s.105-107.

faction,” headed by Leński, enjoyed Bolshevik backing and sought to structure the KPP around Soviet policies. This struggle manifested itself within the KPZU, whose independently minded “majority” supported Warski and Koszutska, as well as in the ranks of the KPZB, where the Bolshevik oriented “minority,” by most accounts, was in a dominant position by 1928.<sup>110</sup>

The real turning point came in May of 1926, when the KPP’s “majority,” with the endorsement of the KPZU, placed its weight behind Józef Piłsudski’s coup against the ruling right-wing government in Warsaw.<sup>111</sup> Some members of the KPP, as self-anointed “Polish leftists,” even defected from the party and swore allegiance to Piłsudski’s cause. For Warski and Koszutska, who wanted a socialist revolution on Polish terms, Piłsudski appeared to be a new incarnation of Aleksander Kerensky who would complete the bourgeois-national phase of the struggle before the communists could seize power. Economic crises, political turmoil, and a growth in KPP membership over the past few years emboldened the “majority” to intervene and shape the course of Polish history, knowing well that a victory could secure them the independence from Moscow that they had desired from the beginning. In Warski’s mind, the KPP should first support the more leftist elements within Piłsudski’s camp, defeating the right-wing authorities before launching their own campaign for power.<sup>112</sup> Unfortunately for the KPP, Piłsudski’s ascent took place rapidly and decisively, leaving no room for the kind of protracted, Russian-style civil war that would have provided the time and space necessary to mobilize and arm the working classes. Having failed catastrophically in their bid for power, the “majority” rapidly

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<sup>110</sup> Reguła, *Historja*, 150-155; *Komunisticheskii Internatsional pered shestym vseмирnym kongressom* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo, 1928), 234-238.

<sup>111</sup> Reguła, *Historja*, 162-164.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 136-140.

lost ground to the “minority,” confirming, in the eyes of the Komintern, that the KPP was in dire need of “Bolshevization” to restore order and discipline.<sup>113</sup>

Subsequently, Leński’s “minority” declared the KPP’s previous leaders to be representatives of the “right deviation,” associated most prominently with Nikolai Bukharin, and followed Stalin’s retraction of the “united front” policies under which Warski and Koszutska had attempted to form alliances with other left-wing parties. By 1928, the “majority” had lost power and the KPP became far less permeated by national communist “deviations.” The general arc of “Bolshevization” also ran through both the KPZU and KPZB, which, from chaotic beginnings in 1923 to 1924, reached the height of the influence of their national communist activities from about 1925 to 1927. In those few years, both parties cooperated with mass-based, non-communist peasant movements that won seats in the Polish parliament and became major forces for national and social liberation in the countryside of the eastern borderlands. The following two years, however, witnessed the intensification of “Bolshevization” and the triumph of the KPP’s “minority” in both the KPZU and KPZB, precipitating mass defections, factional strife, and turnovers in leadership.<sup>114</sup> After 1928, both parties remained formally autonomous within the KPP, yet the KPP as a whole could no longer be described as an ideologically independent communist organization in the same way given its notably increased submission to directives from Moscow and the Komintern.

Aside from the major conflicts over “Bolshevization” that raged through the 1920s, the KPP was also beset by internal tensions with its “regional organs,” in particular the KPZU, whose strong tendency towards Ukrainian national communism

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid. 175-178.

<sup>114</sup> Radziejowski, *The Communist Party of Western Ukraine*, 127-159; Bergman, “Kwestia białoruska,” 236-238.

sometimes clashed with the alleged “Polish chauvinism” and neglect for minority interests of the central leadership. Vasyl’kiv, the head of the KPZU’s “majority” faction until 1928, even appeared before the Komintern in the summer of 1924 to deliver a speech on the “national-colonial question” in which he castigated with KPP for its persistent “Luxemburgism” and “national nihilism.”<sup>115</sup> The KPZB, by contrast, experienced far fewer episodes of hostility with the rest of the KPP and maintained cordial and comradely ties with the KPZU, though some jostling over the leadership of the socialist struggle in ethnically mixed parts of Polesie apparently took place. Meanwhile, the KPZU and KPZB were never merely the eastern appendages of the KPP, but were equally the westward Piedmont projects of the national communists in Soviet Ukraine and Belarus who provided much of their funding and material support. While the flow of money and arms from the Soviet Union was, by all accounts, unidirectional, the same claim cannot be fully made about the origins of national communist ideas within the KPZU and KPZB during the 1920s. Though both parties drew substantial inspiration from their comrades across the border, they also had pre-1917, non-Bolshevik origins of their own and, after 1923, developed ideas and tactics of their own, sometimes drawing harsh criticism from their respective Piedmont republics. Operating on ethnically diverse, predominantly agrarian terrain within a hostile country, the KPZU and KPZB were prone to manifold “deviations” that complicated the Piedmont projects to which they belonged and exposed the complexities of exporting Soviet power to the capitalist world. Likewise, much as *korenizatsiia* policies had produced unanticipated intellectual challenges within the Soviet Union between 1923 and 1928, their Polish incarnations also tested the

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<sup>115</sup> *Piat’ii vsemirnyi kongress kommunisticheskogo internatsionala: stenograficheskii otchet* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1925), 663-664.

boundaries of acceptable national communist theory and practice during the same stretch of time.

### **Between the “all-Polish” and “all-Russian” revolutions: the case of the KPZU**

The Communist Party of Western Ukraine (KPZU) is most widely known for its fateful involvement in the struggle over the direction of *korenizatsiia* policies in the Ukrainian SSR that erupted around the heterodox ideas of Oleksandr Shums’kyi in 1927.<sup>116</sup> Shums’kyi, a former leader of the Borot’bist faction of the Ukrainian Socialist-Revolutionary and the republic’s Commissar of Education since 1924, had argued that the survival of “Ukrainization” required the expansion of Ukraine’s autonomy from the all-Union authorities in Moscow as well as the broadening of self-management for the ethnically Ukrainian or “Ukrainized” Bolsheviks most committed to the toiling masses. This program of decentralization, Shums’kyi contended, would allow Ukrainian Bolsheviks to forge an authentic bond with Ukrainian workers while preventing “Ukrainization” from degenerating into a “bureaucratic” project halfheartedly implemented by centrally appointed functionaries concerned with fulfilling quotas. In 1925, Shums’kyi protested the appointment of Lazar Kaganovich, one such “bureaucrat” of Jewish background known for his close ties to Stalin, to the post of First Secretary of the Ukrainian Bolsheviks. That same year, Shums’kyi defended Mykola Khvyl’ovyi, a prolific writer who claimed that a true Ukrainian artistic rebirth could only take place through the pursuit of closer ties with “Europe,” whereas the enduring burden of Russian hegemony within the Soviet Union stifled such a possibility. Shums’kyi shared Khvyl’ovyi’s distrust of the loyalties of

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<sup>116</sup> Radziejowski, *The Communist Party of Western Ukraine*, 158-159.

Ukraine's significant population of ethnic Russians, whose "Ukrainization" Shums'kyi pledged to accelerate.<sup>117</sup>

By the beginning of 1927, this vision of a reinvigorated "Ukrainization" unshackled from "centralism" had found support among a minority of Shums'kyi's comrades, yet it also drew heavy condemnation from leading Ukrainian Bolsheviks, chief among them Mykola Skrypnyk. Skrypnyk, as one of the chief framers of "Ukrainization" since 1923, defended the Party's more moderate measures against Shums'kyi's "Ukrainian chauvinism," which, he claimed, embodied the reactionary idea of an irreconcilable antagonism between the Ukrainian and Russian nations. The real struggle, Skrypnyk maintained, pitted Ukrainian and Russian workers, on one hand, against bourgeois nationalist oppressors of both nationalities, on the other, and Shums'kyi was only undermining the unity of the Bolshevik camp by appropriating "Ukrainization" for anti-Russian purposes.<sup>118</sup> While Skrypnyk managed to maintain the middle ground for the time being, Terry Martin shows that the clash over Shums'kyi's "deviant" ideas had wider implications for the future of *korenizatsiia*, whose opponents across the Soviet Union began to organize themselves against the alleged excesses engendered by Bolshevik concessions to non-Russian national communists.<sup>119</sup> More immediately, Shums'kyi's heresies had tested the boundaries of acceptable national communist thought and practice within the Ukrainian SSR, one of the principal laboratories for *korenizatsiia* policies in the 1920s.

The scope of this clash over the trajectory of Ukrainian national communism, however, rapidly escalated into a transnational matter encompassing the activities and

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 155-158.

<sup>118</sup> Popov, *Borot'ba*; Mykola Skrypnyk, "KPZU" and "Do teorii borot'by dvukh kul'tur," in *Natsional'ne pytannia* (Kharkiv: Proletarii, 1931).

<sup>119</sup> Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, 212-229.

ideology of the KPZU, whose “majority” faction led by Iosyp Krilyk (Vasyl’kiv), Roman Kuz’ma (Turians’kyi), and Karlo Savrych (Maksymovych) stood behind Shums’kyi until their ejection from the Komintern in the beginning of 1928.<sup>120</sup> Officially, the KPZU’s entanglement in the debates surrounding Shums’kyi began in the spring of 1927, when a congress of Ukrainian Bolsheviks convened in Kharkiv resolved to condemn their comrade for breaking with the Party on a crucial issue. Maksymovych, however, dissented, opining that Shums’kyi’s grave “deviations” constituted little more than minor divergences from the Party line that had been wrongly exaggerated, adding that Shums’kyi, in the past had been a noble patron of the KPZU.<sup>121</sup> The defense of Shums’kyi put forth by Maksymovych, himself a former Borot’bist, was not a principled proclamation of ideological solidarity, yet it sufficed to evoke the ire of Skrypnyk, who demanded that the KPZU immediately censure both Maksymovych and Shums’kyi for their transgressions. When the “majority” issued an equivocal reply that declared the KPZU’s agreement with the Ukrainian Bolsheviks on programmatic issues without denouncing either Maksymovych or Shums’kyi, a serious conflict emerged across the Zbruch. The deliberations initially spurred by Shums’kyi’s “chauvinism” soon came to focus on the manifold “deviations” of the KPZU’s “majority,” whose unruly brand of national communism came under attack from the Ukrainian Bolsheviks, the pro-Moscow “minority” faction, the KPP, and the Komintern. The “majority,” however, were no strangers to bitter strife with fellow communists, having fought a constant succession of battles against the KPP and the Komintern over questions of national self-determination and the KPZU’s own organizational autonomy since the outset of the 1920s. The “majority,”

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<sup>120</sup> Radziejowski, *The Communist Party of Western Ukraine*, 170-195.

<sup>121</sup> Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, 218; 226.



as usual, dug in, defying their powerful opponents in a confrontation that had grown from a disagreement over Shums'kyi into a struggle to maintain the KPZU's ideological and organizational independence.

The KPP and the KPZU's "minority" issued general condemnations of the "majority," but the most serious and systemic charges leveled against the KPZU in the aftermath of the clashes over Shums'kyi and Maksymovych were drawn up by Skrypnyk and fellow Ukrainian Bolsheviks and compiled into a single volume by Mykola Popov in 1927.<sup>122</sup> Rather than simply chastising the "majority" for engaging in factional politics, Skrypnyk diagnosed the KPZU's alignment with Shums'kyi as a manifestation of the much more deeply rooted menace of "petty bourgeois nationalism" in southeastern Poland. Owing to the recent stabilization of capitalism in this region, Skrypnyk wrote, the local Ukrainian bourgeoisie had managed to infiltrate ostensibly progressive, mass-based parties such as the KPZU, seizing the banner of the working-class struggle for nationalist purposes and distorting communist principles to serve their interests.<sup>123</sup> These Ukrainian counterrevolutionaries, who counted on the support of the backward peasantry in a territory in which a class-conscious industrial proletariat was still weak, served the international ambitions of Western European and Polish imperialists determined to invade the Soviet Union. This claim about the peasantry, in particular, contributed to a 1927 split within the Ukrainian Peasant-Worker Union (Sel-Rob) between the organization's more nationalist wing associated with the "majority" and its pro-"minority" section. As Radziejowski demonstrates, the fate of Sel-Rob, as a mass movement with more than 100,000 members and a strong support base in Volhynia, was a critical matter for the

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<sup>122</sup> Popov, *Borot'ba*.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

“majority,” whose strongly agrarian vision of Ukrainian national communism came into conflict with the outlook of Skrypnyk and other proponents of a proletarian-led revolution.<sup>124</sup>

Meanwhile, according to Skrypnyk, the growth of “Shums’kyism” in the Ukrainian SSR reflected the resurgence of “petty bourgeois” and “Ukrainian chauvinist” elements hostile to the revolution in the time of the New Economic Policy.<sup>125</sup> Trafficking in the deceptive and viscerally appealing language of anti-centralism and a struggle against Moscow, Shums’kyi himself represented a dangerous form of nationalism cloaked in the outward appearance of Bolshevism that threatened to gain support among ideologically uninitiated Ukrainians. Shums’kyi’s ability to powerfully resonate across the Zbruch, Skrypnyk reasoned, was alarming proof of the infection of the KPZU by reactionary influences fundamentally opposed to Soviet power. Rather than delivering communism to the western Ukrainian masses and advancing Kharkiv’s Piedmont project in Poland, the KPZU, in Skrypnyk’s narrative, had succumbed to the hazards of the very environment in which it operated.

In more recent years, the KPZU’s downfall has been recovered with far more nuance than Skrypnyk’s viewpoint allowed, and some contemporary Ukrainian historians have taken it upon themselves to redeem the legacy of the “majority.” Iurii Slyvka, for instance, has argued that the KPZU constituted the first true bulwark of Ukrainian national communist resistance that fell to Stalin’s relentless drive for “centralization,” foreshadowing the better known truncation of *korenizatsiia* policies in the early 1930s.<sup>126</sup> Popular websites of the Ukrainian left have likewise claimed the

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<sup>124</sup> Radziejowski, *The Communist Party of Western Ukraine*, 140-144; 187-188.

<sup>125</sup> Popov, *Borot’ba*.

<sup>126</sup> A key example is Iurii Iu. Slyvka, *Storinky istorii KPZU* (L’viv: Kamenar, 1989).

KPZU as a genuinely national communist organization whose East Galician origins and fierce commitment to the working classes of western Ukraine grew untenable by the conclusion of the 1920s.<sup>127</sup> Though clearly at odds, Skrypnyk's allegations against the KPZU and these more recent, sympathetic perspectives can be synthesized in the argument that the messy borderland milieu of southeastern Poland and, before 1918, Austrian East Galicia decisively molded the KPZU's heterodox brand of national communism. In fact, a closer examination of the KPZU's evolution up to 1927 reveals a turbulent, unruly history of borderland communism that helps to contextualize how the "majority" responded to "Shums'kyism" and obstinately defended themselves during their final year in power. Specifically, reconstructing the KPZU's roots in East Galicia helps to explain the origins of the syncretic ideology of Marxism-Leninism imbued with Ukrainian nationalism and agrarian populism that the "majority" embraced even beyond their fall in 1928. At the same time, the KPZU's clashes with Polish leftists and the involvement of its predecessors in resisting the imposition of Polish rule in East Galicia from 1918 to 1923 work to highlight the origins of the potent aversion of the "majority" to foreign interference in western Ukrainian affairs, particularly by Poles but also on the part of the Komintern and the Ukrainian Bolsheviks. Although they may have functioned well in the borderland context that produced them, the KPZU's approaches to waging factional struggles with fellow communists and pursuing a western Ukrainian variety of national communism proved central in unmaking the "majority" during Shums'kyi's downfall.

In the spring of 1928, after being recently expelled from the Komintern, the KPZU's "majority" published a volume of documents and appeals for reinstatement that passionately defended Shums'kyi's understanding of *korenizatsiia* as the

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<sup>127</sup> Serhii Hrabovs'kyi, "Tragedia KPZU," *Ukraina Incognita*. Obtained at <http://incognita.day.kyiv.ua/vtragediya-kpzu.html>.

continuation of the “true Leninist line” on the “nationalities question.”<sup>128</sup> In presenting their own qualifications as proper Leninists, the “majority” not only recounted their version of the history of the KPZU, but also appealed to the achievements of one of its predecessors, the East Galician International Revolutionary Social-Democracy (IRSD) led by Vasyl’kiv and Turians’kyi from its inception in 1915. The IRSD, argued the “majority,” had opposed the Austro-Hungarian war effort from the start and adopted a Marxist ideology even before the Bolsheviks had seized power in Petrograd in 1917.<sup>129</sup> The realities of the KPZU’s origins, however, are more complicated and entangled with Ukrainian nationalism, and the “majority” omitted many of the critical details of the IRSD’s own background as well as the activities of its members during the First World War and the Polish-Ukrainian War over East Galicia that arose from the ruins of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. A more complete picture emerges from the writings of Roman Rozdol’s’kyi, a Marxist theoretician who belonged to the IRSD’s “left wing” alongside Vasyl’kiv and Turians’kyi and participated in the gradual creation of the Communist Party of East Galicia (KPSH) between 1919 and 1921. While Rozdol’s’kyi left for Central Europe and later North America in the early 1920s, Vasyl’kiv and Turians’kyi emerged as central figures in the East Galician communist movement before the “majority” faction of the KPZU crystallized around them after 1923. Many other, less prominent members of the IRSD also remained allies of Vasyl’kiv through the foundation of the KPZU, meaning

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<sup>128</sup> *Die ukrainische nationale Frage*, 46-49.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 51-55.

that the “majority” faction, at least until 1928, enjoyed a notable degree of continuity in the composition of its membership.<sup>130</sup>

Before founding the IRSD in 1915, Vasyl’kiv and Turians’kyi, both of whom had been born in the countryside of Austrian East Galicia in the 1890s, entered the region’s network of student circles known as *Drahomanivky*, named for the prominent Ukrainian socialist thinker Mykhailo Drahomanov. According to Rozdol’s’kyi, these tight groupings based in L’viv and the region’s smaller provincial towns consisted almost exclusively of ethnic Ukrainians, with educated Poles and Jews forming their own societies despite occasional efforts at bringing together students of different national and confessional backgrounds.<sup>131</sup> The exact contents of the small libraries in which Vasyl’kiv and Turians’kyi would have read cannot be definitively reconstructed, though it is unlikely that both men, who were only in their late teenage years when the First World War erupted, would have only encountered Marxist writings in the *Drahomanivky*. Drahomanov himself, after all, was a non-Marxist socialist whose analyses of the prevailing socioeconomic and national conditions in Europe’s Ukrainian lands led him to emphasize the special role of the peasantry, rather than the industrial proletariat, in leading a future revolution in Ukraine.<sup>132</sup> In addition, Drahomanov proposed the unification of all ethnically Ukrainian territories within the broad framework of a European federation of nations, rejecting the idea that Ukraine’s horizons should be limited to a decentralized union with Russia.

Drahomanov likewise turned to his Polish contemporaries in calling for the

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<sup>130</sup> Roman Rozdol’s’kyi, “Do istoriï ukrains’koho livo-sotsiialistychnoho rukhu v Halychyni (Pidchasovoïenni “Drahomanivky” 1916-18 rr.)” Obtained at <https://vpered.wordpress.com/2009/06/09/>.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ivan L. Rudnytsky, “Drahomanov as a Political Theorist,” in *Essays in Modern Ukrainian History* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 1986), 216-220.

renunciation of any claims to majority-Ukrainian lands, envisioning an ethnographically defined frontier as the only guarantor of peaceful coexistence between these two Slavic nations.<sup>133</sup> Alongside Drahomanov's works, which contradicted later Bolshevik principles of "centralism," envisioned a European future for Ukraine, and wagered on the peasantry, it is not unlikely that Vasyl'kiv and Turians'kyi would have been familiar with East Galician radicals such as Ivan Franko and Iuliian Bachyns'kyi.

While Rozdol's'kyi does not mention specific thinkers by name in his short recollections, he nevertheless stresses that both the *Drahomanivky* and one of their major successors, the IRSD, were permeated with Ukrainian nationalist ideas and dominated by ethnic Ukrainians, even if Marxist influences grew more powerful over time. The IRSD, according to one source, even embraced the idea of Ukraine joining a global union of socialist nations, a notion temptingly similar to Drahomanov's proposal and one not far from the visions of the Ukapisty.<sup>134</sup> According to Radziejowski and some Ukrainian journalists, the IRSD expressed support for the Ukrainian Central Rada in Kyiv following the February Revolution, protesting Bolshevik policies towards Ukraine before gravitating towards Lenin as the Russian Civil War unfolded, even if Vasyl'kiv later denied such sympathies.<sup>135</sup> While Leninism, according to Slyvka, quickly grew into a major source of inspiration for the IRSD, the entanglement of the Russian Revolution with the First World War also brought Vasyl'kiv's group into personal contact with non-Bolshevik organizations such as the Borot'bisty, otherwise known as the "left faction" of the Ukrainian

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 220-221.

<sup>134</sup> Hrabovs'kyi, "Tragediia."

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.; Radziejowski, 12; 25.

Socialist-Revolutionary Party.<sup>136</sup> Both Maksymovych and Shums'kyi belonged to this grouping, which was formally integrated into the ranks of the Bolsheviks as the Central Rada and its successor, the Ukrainian Directorate, failed to protect the Ukrainian People's Republic from the Red Army. According to Hannes Leidinger and Verena Moritz, representatives of leftist parties from the Russian Empire like the Borot'bisty most often made their way to East Galicia as prisoners of war, highlighting the importance of the conflict as a context for the transnational movement of ideas and people.<sup>137</sup> The Borot'bist connection between Maksymovych and Shums'kyi, moreover, suggests that bonds forged in wartime endured into the interwar Ukrainian communist movement and, ultimately, proved decisive in shaping its direction in the second half of the 1920s. When considered in its imperial and transnational contexts, the IRSD, with its origins in the East Galician *Drahomanivky*, appears less as a disciplined, rigid organization of professional revolutionaries and more as a malleable grouping of youthful East Galician Marxists that was open to numerous non-Marxist or non-Bolshevik influences.

If the wartime years had exposed the IRSD to a wider world of revolutionary ideas, including those of Lenin, the subsequent period between the cessation of hostilities on the Western Front in November of 1918 and the emergence of the KPZU in September of 1923 brought the complex relationship between nationalism and communism to the forefront of the young organization's work. Prior to the First World War, East Galicia had witnessed the development of a Ukrainian nationalist movement with significant popular support among the Ukrainian-speaking peasantry,

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<sup>136</sup> This subject is discussed in *Gefangenschaft, Revolution, Heimkehr: die Bedeutung der Kriegsgefangenenproblematik für die Geschichte des Kommunismus in Mittel- und Osteuropa 1917-1920*, ed. Hannes Leidinger and Verena Moritz (Vienna: Böhlau, 2003).

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

whose socioeconomic grievances often overlapped with national antagonisms with propertied Poles.<sup>138</sup> While this mass movement was largely the product of popular mobilization in the countryside and the formation of agrarian political parties during the last two decades of the nineteenth century, Ukrainian-speaking intellectuals had already enjoyed considerable freedoms since the adoption of a formal constitution under the Austro-Hungarian *Ausgleich* of 1867. In fact, ever since Galicia's incorporation into the Habsburg Empire at the end of the eighteenth century, the monarchy had supported "Ruthenian" cultural and religious institutions in an effort to place checks on the influence of Poles, who controlled much of the region's wealth and political power. While the terms of the *Ausgleich* had also granted significant provincial autonomy to Galicia, which, in practice, strengthened the position of entrenched Polish elites, lively debates on Ukrainian identity and efforts to organize Ukrainian peasants around ideas of national belonging continued to develop far more freely than in either the Russian Empire or the Kingdom of Hungary. On the printed page and in provincial politics, Polish and Ukrainian groupings contested questions of land distribution as well as the division of Galicia into eastern and western halves roughly along the San River since 1772. Polish nationalists claimed that East Galicia, though mostly Ukrainian-speaking in population, had always been economically and culturally developed by Poles, who dominated the capital city of Lemberg (today's L'viv). Ukrainian responses, for the most part, insisted that ethnography should determine political boundaries, in which case the foothills outside of Kraków would belong to Ukraine's legitimate territory.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Paul Robert Magocsi, *The Roots of Ukrainian Nationalism: Galicia as Ukraine's Piedmont* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002).

<sup>139</sup> Rudnytsky, "Trends in Ukrainian Political Thought," in *Essays*, 91-122.



It was in the midst of these debates and the underlying antagonisms that they simultaneously reflected and reinforced that young, radical Ukrainians such as Vasyl'kiv, Turians'kyi, and their contemporaries in the *Drahomanivky* were coming of age on the eve of the First World War. While the Austro-Hungarian Empire managed to prevent an outpouring of Polish-Ukrainian violence within Galicia, the Habsburg monarchy simultaneously armed and trained ethnically Polish and Ukrainian military units that first fought against Russia on the Eastern Front before facing one another outside of L'viv in November of 1918. A newly declared West Ukrainian People's Republic (ZUNR) confronted the forces of the Second Polish Republic in a contest for East Galicia that lasted into the summer of 1919, when the ZUNR's leaders, having been forced to evacuate further eastward under the Polish advance, went into exile.<sup>140</sup> Though ephemeral, the ZUNR had won at least passive support from Vasyl'kiv's IRSD, who, in their own act of revolutionary defencism, abstained from declaring an East Galician Communist Party for fear of undermining the embryonic state, irrespective of its "bourgeois nationalist" character.<sup>141</sup> Some of the IRSD's members, according to Rozdol's'kyi, even joined the armed forces of the ZUNR, deciding that the struggle to save Ukrainian statehood from Polish imperialism could not be abandoned.<sup>142</sup> When the KPSH finally emerged in 1919, its leaders sought a closer affiliation with the Ukrainian Bolsheviks, hoping that a future Soviet incursion into Polish-occupied territories would bring national emancipation and the socialist revolution to their native realm. While this dream appeared to have

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<sup>140</sup> Michael Palij, "The Ukrainian-Polish War in Galicia and Its Aftermath," in *The Ukrainian-Polish Defensive Alliance, 1919-1921: An Aspect of the Ukrainian Revolution* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 1995), 48-58.

<sup>141</sup> Radziejowski, *The Communist Party of Western Ukraine*, 11-16.

<sup>142</sup> Rozdol's'kyi, "Do istorii."

been secured in the late summer of 1920 as Polish troops fell back on Warsaw under a major Red Army counteroffensive, a reversal of fortunes on the battlefield brought East Galicia under Polish control, while the Peace of Riga in 1921 designated the Zbruch as Poland's southeastern frontier with the Soviet Union.

With the conclusion of the Polish-Soviet peace and the partition of Ukraine, the Ukrainian Bolsheviks formally ceded the KPSH to the KPP, then known as the Communist Workers' Party of Poland (KPRP). A struggle immediately commenced over the KPSH's organizational autonomy, pitting a "pro-independence" faction led by Vasyl'kiv against a minority favoring a merger with the KPRP. Rejecting the prospect of their absorption into an "all-Polish" communist organization centered on Warsaw or Łódź, Vasyl'kiv and his comrades fought vigorously for their status as a separate grouping with its own territorial jurisdiction within the Komintern, condemning the Polish presence in East Galicia as an illegitimate occupation and a violation of Ukrainian self-determination.<sup>143</sup> By 1923, however, Poland's rule over its Ukrainian borderlands had attained greater international recognition, while the KPRP's own approach to simultaneously pursuing and indigenizing the revolution in western Belarus and western Ukraine presented a more tolerable compromise to Vasyl'kiv. The leadership of the newly created KPZU remained in the hands of Vasyl'kiv's "majority," gaining the eastern fringes of the old Volhynian gubernia of Russia and segments of the Chełm region as part of its territory of operations. Meanwhile, the "majority" had good reason to feel that its ties to the KPRP were superficial and ultimately temporary, enjoying cross-border support from the Ukrainian Bolsheviks and, until 1925, the promise of a rapid reunification with the Ukrainian SSR by means of an armed uprising backed by the Red Army.

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<sup>143</sup> M.I. Panchuk, "Komunistychna Partia Zakhidnoï Ukraïny," in *Entsyklopediia istorii Ukraïny*, Volume 4, ed. V.I. Smolii (Kyiv: "Naukova dumka," 2007), 508.

When the insurrection was shelved, the KPZU's "majority" turned to the challenge of carving out a place within the struggle for an "all-Polish revolution" while expanding their base of popular support in the territories assigned to them by the Komintern. Despite the East Galician roots of Vasyl'kiv and his comrades, the KPZU found most of their new supporters among peasants outside of the formerly Austro-Hungarian region, most notably in the Volhynian voivodeship and the eastern edges of Lublin voivodeship. Here, Sel-Rob developed into a mass movement in the Ukrainian-speaking village, combining demands for the radical redistribution of land with the cause of Ukrainian national liberation from Polish oppression.<sup>144</sup> While Ukrainian peasants in East Galicia may have been more widely exposed to nationalist and populist ideas than their Volhynian counterparts, they also were generally better educated, wealthier, and more integrated into a political culture that had already been developing under Austrian rule and which included a diverse range of political parties, the most powerful of which was the national-conservative Ukrainian National Democratic Alliance (UNDO).<sup>145</sup> Communism had always occupied a peripheral place in the relatively crowded East Galician political landscape, so Vasyl'kiv and his "majority" turned their efforts to winning support in places where national identities were still in formation and a combination of land hunger, poverty, and illiteracy stoked agrarian militancy. While the KPZU, as part of the KPP, were banned by the Polish government, Sel-Rob, before earning the same distinction in 1932, could operate as a mass-based organization and put forth candidates for elected office. With

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<sup>144</sup> Radziejowski, *The Communist Party of Western Ukraine*, 140-141.

<sup>145</sup> Data by electoral district (*okręg*) can be found in *Sejm i senat 1928-1933 : podręcznik zawierający wyniki wyborów w województwach, okręgach i powiatach, podobizny posłów sejmowych i senatorów, statystyki i mapy poglądowe* (Poznań: Wielkopolska Księgarnia Nakładowa Karola Rzepeckiego, 1928). The results show that the KPZU won the greatest number of votes, in absolute terms, in East Galicia, but that its most proportionally notable gains were made in Volhynia.

around 100,000 registered members, Sel-Rob managed to win a handful of seats in the Polish parliamentary elections of 1928, though one of its delegates was on the run from the government, gaining the highest quantity of ballots in East Galicia but finding the greatest proportional success in the much less densely populated villages of Volhynia.<sup>146</sup> Though the KPZU made inroads into the Volhynian countryside by 1928, their ties to Sel-Rob, which became a shared project for many left-wing Ukrainian nationalists without proper communist credentials, proved to be a serious liability once Skrypnyk accused them of working with “bourgeois nationalists” and reactionary peasants.<sup>147</sup>

As the KPZU found its main constituency among the Ukrainian peasantry, the “majority” aggressively defended the boundaries of their patrimony within the KPP from the “Polish chauvinism” of their erstwhile comrades. The Polish-Ukrainian wars of 1918 to 1919, fresh memories of the KPSH’s fate, and the recent Polonization campaigns under Grabski made the KPZU’s “majority” especially assertive over issues of national self-determination within the “all-Polish revolution,” which remained doubly divided along national and factional lines. While the Ukrainian Bolsheviks in the Soviet Union wrangled with “Great Russian chauvinism,” the KPZU found its principal enemy in the “Polish chauvinism” of the KPP, clashing with both the “majority” and “minority” factions in the mid-1920s. Perhaps the most contentious issue for the KPZU was the question of replacing calls for “secession” and “unification with Soviet Ukraine” with the attainment of minority “autonomy” within Poland as the KPP’s main goal for the borderlands. In one sense, as Radziejowski points out, KPP leaders such as Maria Koszutska of the “majority”

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid.; see the tables on Volhynia.

<sup>147</sup> Radziejowski, *The Communist Party of Western Ukraine*, 140-144.

faction promoted the idea of “autonomy” as an alternative to “secession” prior to 1926 because the latter slogan unnecessarily inflamed national divisions while weighing down the central push for a socialist revolution with nationalist distractions.<sup>148</sup> For an “all-Polish revolution” to succeed, the KPP would need to marshal the energies of a united working class across national lines, and the less extreme possibility of “autonomy” removed the incendiary imagery of a dismembered Poland.<sup>149</sup> Less openly, Koszutska and Warski likely worried deeply about what a commitment to “secession” would spell in the event that the “all-Polish revolution” actually played out and the western border of the Soviet Union moved significantly closer to Warsaw in a single leap. Already fearing encroachments by the pro-Moscow “minority” and the Komintern, the KPP’s “majority” would have sensed that promising “autonomy” would hold less serious geopolitical consequences for a socialist Poland, whose precise relationship with the Soviet Union would inevitably be the subject of intense contention.<sup>150</sup>

The KPP’s proposal briefly found some traction in western Belarus, but instantly met with severe opposition from both the KPZU and the Komintern for its alleged renunciation of the “true Leninist position” of “secession” and “unification with the Soviet Union.”<sup>151</sup> For the KPZU’s “majority,” calls for the adoption of “autonomy” over “secession” amounted to an especially sinister form of “Polish chauvinism” that treated the borderlands with the “national nihilist” spirit of “Luxemburgism,” subordinating the struggles of Ukrainians and Belarusians to the “all-Polish”

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 75-77; 156.

<sup>149</sup> AAN, KPZB archive, 163/II/8, “III Konferencja,” s.59.

<sup>150</sup> Reguła, *Historja*, 170-177.

<sup>151</sup> AAN, KPZB archive, 163/II/8, “III Konferencja,” s.59.

project.<sup>152</sup> After the rise of *Sanacja* in 1926, the KPZU's retrospective condemnation of the KPP over the abandoned idea of "autonomy" grew more intense now that Piłsudski's promises of greater self-rule for the borderlands had been exposed as an imperialist ruse meant to undermine true self-determination. As a grudging part of the KPP, the KPZU's "majority" remained devoted to defending their organization from any Polish incursions until integration into the Ukrainian SSR could take place. Just as importantly, in Radziejowski's analysis, Vasyl'kiv and his partisans exhibited few signs of considering national oppression to be a purely symptomatic outgrowth of class struggle, which helps to explain their firm resistance to cooperation with Polish communists.<sup>153</sup>

Moreover, Radziejowski indicates that the KPZU's "majority," with their roots in the village, likely considered Ukraine to be a nation of toilers, whereas Poland had developed an indigenous class of bourgeois oppressors.<sup>154</sup> While the concept of a "toiling nation" consisting of a "united village" came to be vehemently maligned in the late 1920s, particularly with the outset of Stalin's offensive against "kulaks," Per Anders Rudling shows that it was widespread among national communists in the Belarusian SSR from 1923 to 1927.<sup>155</sup> When Vasyl'kiv addressed a Komintern session devoted to the "national-colonial question" in 1924, he conceded that Ukrainians were capable of building a "bourgeois state" such as the ZUNR, yet he argued that the "national struggle" in western Ukraine had become "profoundly revolutionary" since it overlapped with the efforts of the Ukrainian "landless and

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<sup>152</sup> *Die ukrainische nationale Frage*, 32-35.

<sup>153</sup> Radziejowski, 190-195.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 190-195.

<sup>155</sup> AAN, KPZB archive, 163/I-1 t.12, "I Zjazd," s.25; Rudling, *The Rise and Fall of Belarusian Nationalism*.

smallholding peasants” against the “Polish landlords and bureaucrats.”<sup>156</sup> The KPP, Vasyl’kiv continued, had resisted adopting a serious position on the “national question” until the Komintern and the KPZU had agonizingly forced them to do so, demonstrating the extent of “Luxemburgist” deviations within the Party. In the end, Vasyl’kiv asserted, the only real way forward lay in “tearing away” western Ukraine from Poland and uniting it with the Ukrainian SSR by means of an “all-Polish revolution,” though it would be crucial, in the meantime, to fight for the rights of Ukrainians in schools and trade unions while winning the small Ukrainian proletariat from the control of the PPS.<sup>157</sup>

While the degree to which these heterodox orientations on national and social questions were widespread in the ranks of the KPZU’s “majority” remains to be exhaustively documented, Vasyl’kiv and his comrades had already accumulated a wide range of latent “deviations” for Skrypnyk to attack by the time that they clashed with him over Shums’kyi’s fate in 1927 to 1928. In addition to possessing murky, non-Bolshevik roots in the countryside of East Galicia and ties with the Borot’bists, the “majority” had also formed close bonds with Ukrainian nationalists from beyond the KPZU through Sel-Rob. At its core, the KPZU remained an overwhelmingly peasant organization and had found only limited success in winning Polish and Jewish workers for its cause, maintaining a heavily Ukrainian ethnic composition until the disbandment of the “majority” in 1928.<sup>158</sup> Such ideological and organizational breaches, however, do not appear to have significantly perturbed either the Komintern or the Ukrainian Bolsheviks prior to the clash over Shums’kyi, which laid bare the

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<sup>156</sup> *Piat’ii vsemirnyi kongress*, 663.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 663-664.

<sup>158</sup> Panchuk, “Komunistychna Partiiia,” 508-509.

KPZU's "deviations" as the acrimonious deliberations that would determine the fate of the "majority" unfolded. In fact, prior to 1927, Skrypnyk had praised the KPZU for staying the proper "Leninist" path to national liberation despite the difficult circumstances in Poland, while the Komintern's leaders, most likely, saw the KPZU as a check on the power of the KPP, whose own "majority," under Warski and Koszutska, had repeatedly disobeyed their calls for "Bolshevization." When the KPZU unleashed its unruliness upon Skrypnyk, however, a critical threshold had been crossed for the first time since 1923.

By all accounts, Maksymovych's defense of Shums'kyi in the spring of 1927 featured little in the way of explicit ideological declarations and, most likely, arose from the common Borot'bist origins and personal ties between the two comrades. The subsequent decision of Vasyl'kiv and Turians'kyi to rally the entire "majority" and close ranks around Maksymovych, however, begs further explanation, since a sustained, transnational clash among communist organizations need not have followed from the initial spat in Kharkiv. One interpretation, which Radziejowski puts forth, emphasizes the KPZU's history of factional struggles and hostility towards perceived encroachments upon its organizational autonomy, which helps to contextualize the mounting obstinacy of the "majority" as its rivals in the pro-Moscow "minority," emboldened by the severe attacks of the Ukrainian Bolsheviks, the KPP, and the Komintern, saw a chance to seize power.<sup>159</sup>

Meanwhile, the degree to which ideological factors shaped the KPZU's defense of Shums'kyi remains uncertain, though it is not difficult to imagine that the "majority," with their form of agrarian national communism rooted in ideas of Ukrainian self-determination, would have seen an ally in a former Borot'bist fighting

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<sup>159</sup> Radziejowski, *The Communist Party of Western Ukraine*, 180-181.



for Ukrainian freedom from Russian “centralism.” What is clear, however, is that Skrypnyk’s extensive condemnation of the KPZU’s “petty bourgeois” deviations in 1927 necessitated a systemic ideological defense on the part of the “majority,” which now stood accused of abandoning the communist camp for “Shums’kyism” and falling to the forces of capitalist imperialism. In the volume of documents and appeals for reinstatement in the Komintern published in 1928, the “majority” primarily concentrated on defending the KPZU’s revolutionary credentials, emphasizing their party’s adherence to the “true Leninist line” on nationalism in spite of the “deviations” of the KPP while insisting, as they had from the start, that they had never seriously strayed from the imperatives of the Komintern.<sup>160</sup> At the same time, the “majority” vigorously defended Shums’kyi, who, by this point, had been relieved of his posts in the Ukrainian SSR, as the authentic heir to the correct Leninist position on the “national question.” Here, the “majority” carefully articulated their arguments by stressing their agreement with much of Skrypnyk’s assessment of the revival of “petty bourgeois” dangers in both western Ukraine and the Ukrainian SSR, though they contended that Shums’kyi, far from deviating from Leninism, had actually presented the only viable and “truly Leninist” program for the survival of the socialist revolution in Ukraine.<sup>161</sup> In the face of a rising counterrevolution waged by Ukrainian “bourgeois nationalists” and their imperialist masters, the “majority” insisted that Kaganovich and his “centralist” doctrine had only worked to revive “Great Russian chauvinism” in Ukraine, raising the serious possibility that Ukraine might be reduced to an officially autonomous but ultimately submissive “dominion” of the RSFSR. The response of Skrypnyk and the majority of Ukrainian Bolsheviks to these

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<sup>160</sup> *Die ukrainische nationale Frage*, 51-64.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 56-60.

developments, the “majority” continued, had been phlegmatic and indecisive, threatening to further weaken Ukraine’s position in the face of its enemies.<sup>162</sup>

The only real answer to the ongoing crisis, meanwhile, had been put forth by Shums’kyi, whose insistence upon greater Ukrainian self-rule and the empowerment of Ukrainian Bolsheviks corresponded to the theses of the Twelfth Party Congress of 1923 as well as Lenin’s own “testament,” which perhaps refers to his calls for national federalization within the Soviet Union in 1922. The main point, according to the “majority,” was that Shums’kyi correctly envisioned the crystallization of Ukraine into a vibrant, powerful “national economy” (*Volkswirtschaft*) capable of resisting “centralizing” impulses within the Soviet Union while dealing on its own terms with other republics.<sup>163</sup> Shums’kyi, the “majority” claimed, had also distanced himself from the more extreme views of Khvyl’ovyi and had never called for the persecution of ethnic Russians, only the “acceleration of industrialization” in step with the commensurate expansion of “Ukrainization.”<sup>164</sup> Having exposed the manifold ideological blunders of the KPP and the Ukrainian Bolsheviks under both Kaganovich and Skrypnyk, the “majority” held that the KPZU embraced Shums’kyi because of their unique position as the westernmost bulwark of the socialist world against the onslaught of capitalist aggression. In fact, this independent line had motivated the enemies of the “majority,” whether in the KPP, the Ukrainian SSR, or the Komintern, to make every effort to constrain the KPZU’s independence as a communist organization, masking their own deviations from Leninism and flagging devotion to national self-determination by persecuting Shums’kyi and Vasyl’kiv. The worst

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 24-26; 39-41.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 52.

consequence of this fragmentation within the communist camp, the “majority” wrote, was that Shums’kyi’s fall and the ejection of the KPZU had dramatically emboldened foreign imperialists, who now knew that the most formidable barriers to their eastward expansion had fallen and the Ukrainian SSR was more exposed than ever.<sup>165</sup>

The appeals of the “majority” to the Komintern were unsuccessful, perhaps because the arguments put forth by Vasyl’kiv, Turians’kyi, and their comrades exposed their own preoccupations with maintaining the KPZU’s organizational autonomy and protecting the Ukrainian revolution from outside interference rather than demonstrating their loyalty to an acceptable form of Leninism. The Komintern’s interim report issued in 1928 repeated most of Skrypnyk’s claims about the seizure of the KPZU by opportunist infiltrators, concluding that the “bourgeois nationalist” plague had completely ravaged the communist movement in western Ukraine.<sup>166</sup> In general, both the Komintern and Poland’s Ministry of Internal Affairs reported the weakening of the communist movement in western Ukraine from 1928 through the 1930s, especially as Sel-Rob was outlawed and competitors from East Galicia, including right-wing Ukrainian nationalists, staked out their own claims in the Volhynian countryside.<sup>167</sup> After 1926, the *Sanacja* government found some successes in countering *korenizatsiia* in Volhynia when Henryk Józewski pioneered an experiment in assimilating ethnic Ukrainians into state structures. More notoriously, the Polish authorities launched intense campaigns to arrest communists, who came to constitute one of the largest groups of prisoners incarcerated in the “detention center”

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 62-63.

<sup>166</sup> *Komunisticheskii Internatsional pered shestym vseмирnym kongressom* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo, 1928), 245-246.

<sup>167</sup> AAN, MSW archive, report on anti-state organizations from 1932.

(literally “center of alienation”) at Bereza Kartuska alongside far-right Ukrainian nationalists.

At the same time, in the early 1930s, the intensification of Stalin’s collectivization drives across the frontier caused peasants in eastern Poland to defect from pro-Soviet groupings, while the KPZU’s momentarily victorious “minority” became the targets of Stalinist campaigns to expunge “kulak” sympathizers and “bourgeois nationalists” from their already depleted ranks.<sup>168</sup> This time, it was Skrypnyk rather than Shums’kyi who was pilloried as the chief author of Ukrainian “national opportunism,” a “deviation” that justified a wide-reaching “replacement of the KPZU’s leadership,” in the words of a Komintern document. In 1935, the Komintern issued another grim account of the situation in western Ukraine, claiming that the KPZU had experienced a severe “crisis” caused by the party’s infection with “nationalist agents” allegedly inspired by the “rise of Hitler to power” and affiliated with the far-right Ukrainian Military Alliance (UVO).<sup>169</sup> While the KPZU’s core membership recovered numerically by 1934, mostly thanks to the induction of Poles and Jews, and its “mass peasant movement in Volhynia” regained lost ground, the party, like the entire KPP, had been further devastated intellectually and organizationally by these latest purges. The expulsion of Vasyl’kiv’s “majority” in 1928, of course, had marked the first decisive act in the Komintern’s disciplining of the KPZU’s unruly brand of borderland national communism, which, though significantly tamed, was thoroughly eliminated in the early 1930s. Meanwhile, the members of the “majority” who had ended up in the Soviet Union as the result of voluntary emigration or, in the case of Vasyl’kiv, extradition from Poland faced arrest

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<sup>168</sup> Reguła, *Historja*, 241.

<sup>169</sup> *Kommunisticheskii internatsional pered VII vsemirnym kongressom* (Moscow: Partizdat TsK VKP(b), 1935, 299-302.

and execution on charges of conspiring against Moscow with the UVO. Few of the original founders of the KPZU survived the interwar period, save for Rozdol's'kyi, who made it to the United States and lived to tell the story of his generation of East Galician communists.

The story of the KPZU's origins, activities, and ultimate demise demonstrates the messiness and unpredictability of Soviet cross-border communist operations in the 1920s, when the boundaries of national communist thought and practice elaborated at the Twelfth Party Congress in 1923 were still being worked out on the ground. Though oriented towards ensuring western Ukraine's unification with its Soviet Piedmont across the Zbruch, Vasyl'kiv's "majority" faction were hardly obedient servants of Kharkiv, having emerged from a tradition of conflict with other communist groupings over contentious questions of national self-determination and organizational autonomy. This made the KPZU's position within the "all-Polish revolution" especially difficult, since the "majority" vigilantly guarded its independence against intrusions by the KPP while displaying strong nationalist tendencies in its approach to mobilizing the working classes of its region. In fact, the KPZU found their strongest base of popular support among ethnically Ukrainian peasants in Volhynia and the Chełm region, making few gains among Polish or Jewish industrial workers in larger cities such as Lwów or provincial towns like Łuck. The KPZU's revolutionary outlook only became a serious problem for fellow Ukrainian national communists when the debates surrounding Shums'kyi pitted the "majority" in a confrontation with Skrypnyk in 1927 to 1928. In this episode, which likely arose in the first place as a result of common Borot'bist ties between Maksymovych and Shums'kyi, the KPZU's "deviations" were explicitly condemned and the "majority," despite a spirited defense, were barred from the Komintern. As the

Komintern reports indicated, the communist struggle in western Ukraine truly foundered amid this crisis, which had laid bare the dangers and difficulties inherent in Bolshevik efforts at infiltrating a neighboring capitalist country through collaboration with communists with local roots and non-Bolshevik origins. The KPZU's unmaking, first in 1927 to 1928, then in 1930 to 1933, and finally in 1938, illuminates the complexities of exporting Soviet influence through unruly borderland communists whose agency was constrained and ultimately eliminated by their former sponsors.

### **Borderland communists as nation-builders: the case of the KPZB**

While the KPZU has enjoyed an upsurge in popularity in post-1989 Ukraine for its resistance to what some have described as proto-Stalinist “centralism,” recent coverage of the Communist Party of Western Belarus (KPZB) has generally been much less enthusiastic. Since the 1990s, scholars in both the United States and Poland have mostly characterized the KPZB as a loyal “fifth column” of Soviet power whose activists, bound by a commitment to ideological discipline and conspiratorial politics, strove to undermine the stability of the Polish state and secure a path for the westward advance of the Red Army.<sup>170</sup> An exception to this trend can be found in some Russian historiography that has lionized the KPZB's efforts to mobilize the peasant masses around the idea of unification with the Soviet Union and, supposedly, the fraternal alliance of toiling East Slavs against Polish imperialism.<sup>171</sup> While both of these narratives accurately reflect that the KPZB was, on balance, a more cooperative cross-border partner for Soviet elites and a less unruly section of the KPP than the KPZU, they oversimplify or altogether neglect the relationship between the western

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<sup>170</sup> Savchenko, *Belarus; Kontrolować czy likwidować - Komunistyczna Partia Zachodniej Białorusi*, ed. Wojciech Śleszyński and Justyna Owłasiuk (Białystok and Kraków: Avalon, 2005).

<sup>171</sup> Lev Krishtapovich and Aleksandr Filippov, *BSSR i Zapadnaia Belorussia. 1919-1939 gg.* (Moscow: Knizhnyi Mir, 2017).

Belarusian communists and Belarusian nationalism. In the first version of events, the KPZB's relationship to the wider Belarusian "national emancipation struggle" was merely instrumental, allowing cynical communists to exploit the naivete of "fellow travelers" in the left-wing Belarusian intelligentsia in order to expand their own power and win the backing of Belarusian peasants.<sup>172</sup>

The second narrative, though giving the benefit of the doubt to the communists, overlooks important disputes within the KPZB about the correct approach to building socialism in western Belarusian conditions, imposing a deceptive logic of continuity upon a grouping that had its own share of factional fighting and internal divisions, especially into the late 1920s. Such portrayals echo Soviet accounts of the KPZB's evolution, including an official party history completed in 1934, that limit themselves to demonstrating the party's gradual but triumphant march from ideological disorderliness in its first years to a properly "Bolshevik" orientation by the early 1930s.<sup>173</sup> A more nuanced alternative to these approaches, however, may be found in the work of Aleksandra Bergman, a Polish scholar whose writings on the KPZB always paid special attention to subtle ideological shifts within the party while reconstructing the wider intellectual landscape and socioeconomic milieu of interwar western Belarus. Though Bergman was far more sympathetic to the aims of the KPZB's cadres than her successors have been, she avoided descending into the hagiography that dominated the pre-1989 literature on the party. What Bergman's analyses suggest is that the KPZB's encounter with Belarusian nationalism involved much more experimentation and less rigidity than most historians have argued, owing in no small part to the fluidity of national identities in western Belarus and the

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<sup>172</sup> Savchenko, *Belarus*, 105.

<sup>173</sup> AAN, KPZB archive, 163/V-141, "Pastanovy i kanferentsy Kamunistychna Partyi Zakhodnai Belarusi."

urgency of “indigenizing” a party that, in its early days, still lacked an ethnically Belarusian character. While Bergman studied the KPZB on its own terms, it is possible and, in the context of the present study, potentially rewarding to consider the party’s development with respect to the parallel history of the KPZU. The point of such an approach is not to suggest that either party was somehow deficient or deviant when placed alongside the other, but instead to comparatively highlight how different borderland environments conditioned two national communist movements that have persistently earned contrasting reputations over the greater part of the last century.

The KPZU and KPZB both emerged in 1923 as “regional organs” of the KPP assigned to territorial spheres carved out on the basis of ethnography, yet their stories of creation differed significantly. The KPZU’s “majority” consisted primarily of ethnically Ukrainian revolutionaries who had led the KPSH and, before it, the IRSD within the borders of East Galicia, a region with a history of Ukrainian nationalism and Polish-Ukrainian antagonisms. Under Vasylykiv’s leadership, the KPSH had fiercely resisted integration into the wider framework of the KPP, preferring alignment with the Ukrainian Bolsheviks rather than with Polish communists. Even after the KPZU’s formation, the “majority” vigorously defended their autonomy within the “all-Polish” revolutionary movement, building a strong following in the Ukrainian village in the course of the 1920s. While most of the KPZU’s new followers came from rural Volhynia, the party’s leaders were mostly from East Galicia, which served, in its own right, as the “Piedmont” for the western Ukrainian communist cause. The KPZB’s initial formation, meanwhile, involved gathering disparate communist elites from the KPP, the Communist Party of Lithuania, and various Bolshevik groupings based in the major towns of a region that had been cobbled together by the KPP from Polish voivodeships that had, in turn, been forged



from different gubernias of the former Russian Empire.<sup>174</sup> Tellingly, when the KPP issued the resolutions of its Second Congress in September of 1923, the KPZU already appeared as a unified organization, whereas the future KPZB found representation in the “labor organizations of Białystok, Brest-Litovsk, and Vilnius,” which were listed on the same line but did not yet constitute a united whole.<sup>175</sup>

While the Białystok and Wilno regions fielded the most delegates at major congresses, the KPZB did not possess an internal “Piedmont” like East Galicia, and the very idea of western Belarus as a coherent region was a much newer one largely invented by the KPP. In fact, during the armed struggle for the borderlands between 1918 and 1920, Polish federalists, Lithuanian nationalists, and the Bolsheviks had drawn up their competing geopolitical plans in Belarus around the historic borders of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which Piłsudski, in particular, saw as the cornerstone of his anti-Russian alliance of nations between the Baltic and Black Seas.<sup>176</sup> Belarusian nationalists, meanwhile, had struggled to create their own ethnographically defined polity with German backing beginning in 1918, yet they were soon forced to choose exile or cooperation with either the Polish forces or the Red Army as the middle ground between the two emerging powers in East-Central Europe collapsed.<sup>177</sup> The precise place of Belarus within both the Polish and Soviet visions, meanwhile, remained unclear. Leon Wasilewski, one of Piłsudski’s close confidants, had argued back in 1917 that the western half of present-day Belarus should be joined with Poland, with Minsk serving as an “outpost of Polish influence,” and the eastern part

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<sup>174</sup> Bergman, *Sprawy białoruskie*, 21-24; *Kontrolować*, 7-8.

<sup>175</sup> *Uchwały*, 13.

<sup>176</sup> Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations*, 52-72.

<sup>177</sup> David R. Marples, *Belarus: A Denationalized Nation* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 2-5.

forming a battleground with Russian influences.<sup>178</sup> Piłsudski, meanwhile, trusted in the coherence of the old Grand Duchy of Lithuania when his armies took Wilno in 1919, believing that the multinational mosaic encompassed by this territory would remain united on the basis of a common political culture and aversion to Russian domination. On the Bolshevik side, meanwhile, the question of whether a distinct Belarusian nation really existed remained open, though the creation and enlargement of the Belarusian SSR proved to be a skillful maneuver in the Soviet bid to control the western peripheries of the former Russian Empire.<sup>179</sup>

The national amorphousness and socioeconomic turmoil of western Belarus provided fertile terrain for the KPZB, whose promises of unification with Soviet Belarus, radical land redistribution, and the abolition of taxes resonated in the countryside. For the KPZB's message to reach its principal audience, however, the party first had to undergo its own form of *korenizatsiia* by enlisting the support of leftist movements with roots in the Belarusian village. While the KPZB's original strongholds were in urban centers such as Wilno, its rural reach dramatically expanded by the end of 1923 as the Belarusian Revolutionary Organization (BRA) officially entered its ranks.<sup>180</sup> Representing the "left wing" of the Belarusian Socialist-Revolutionary Party, whose main constituency had consisted of peasants since 1917, the BRA can perhaps be best described as the Belarusian analogue to Shums'kyi's Borot'bisty, whose place among the Ukrainian Bolsheviks and, to a lesser extent, in the KPZU was also notable. The KPZB's dramatic absorption of radical Belarusian

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<sup>178</sup> Wasilewski, *O wschodnią granicę państwa polskiego* (Warszawa: Nakład Notatek Politycznych, 1917).

<sup>179</sup> *Zhizn' natsional'nostei* 6 (1919).

<sup>180</sup> Bergman, *Sprawy białoruskie*, 22-26; AAN, KPZB archive, 163/V-141, "Pastanovy i kanferentsy Kamunistychna Partyi Zakhodnai Belarusi," s.20; 163/II/1, "II Konferencja," s.1.

peasant elements in 1923 transformed the party's ethnic and class composition, reflecting what Terry Martin describes as a wider strategy of recruiting powerful non-Bolshevik elements to help implement *korenizatsiia* in places where Soviet power was still weak. Martin cites the case of Shums'kyi and the Borot'bisty as one such example of a pragmatic Bolshevik alliance with former rivals who, despite remaining marked as "former people" (*byvshye*), were employed to further the interwar Soviet experiment in engineering an "affirmative action empire."<sup>181</sup>

As the case of the KPZU showed, however, the position of figures such as Shums'kyi within the Bolshevik project was never stable, and clashes over the boundaries of national communism could easily cast them out. A similar observation emerges from the KPZB's incorporation of the BRA, which, despite widening the party's base of peasant support, precipitated an initial crisis over the direction of the revolution in Belarus from 1924 to 1925. During those years, the KPZU and KPZB were both preparing for armed uprisings against the Polish government, whose Polonizing campaigns and, prior to Thugutt's reforms, ineffectiveness in solving land hunger made unification with the Soviet Union an increasingly popular prospect in the borderlands. According to Reguła and Bergman, support for an insurrection by peasant partisans was especially widespread in western Belarus, where rural penury was the most acute, the presence of regular troops was still strong, and the extensive devastation wrought by years of war and revolution left little promise that the frontiers of 1921 would survive.<sup>182</sup> The severe conflict that broke out within the ranks of the young KPZB was not about whether a revolt should be launched, but about when and on whose terms. While some of the KPZB's leaders insisted that close

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<sup>181</sup> Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, 219-221.

<sup>182</sup> Bergman, "Kwestia białoruska," 226; Reguła, *Historja*, 69.

cooperation with the KPP must be maintained and that a peasant rebellion without proletarian support could never succeed, a faction within the Central Committee known as the “Secession” (*Secesja*) sought to organize an immediate rising and the rapid integration of western Belarus into the Belarusian SSR.<sup>183</sup> While Bergman reports that the *Secesja* included some prominent Poles, it was most likely led by ethnic Belarusians and enjoyed some backing in the countryside owing to the recent union with the BRA. The *Secesja*, not entirely unlike the KPZU’s “majority,” demanded a fully independent communist organization for western Belarus, rejecting membership within the KPP and emphasizing the need for all of Belarus to liberate itself from Polish control.<sup>184</sup> A decade later, the KPZB’s party historians charged that the *Secesja* also considered Polish peasants and workers to be colonists and mortal enemies of a socially undifferentiated Belarusian toiling nation, a perspective that would not have been unimaginable among former Socialist-Revolutionaries.<sup>185</sup> This revolt happened to overlap with the party leadership’s travels to major communist gatherings, allowing the *Secesja* to seize some of the KPZB’s printing machinery and publish its own newspapers until it was finally defeated and disbanded in 1925.<sup>186</sup>

The brief rise of the *Secesja* had exposed the potential instabilities inherent in the KPZB’s otherwise fruitful engagement with the Belarusian village and the agrarian BRA, which, between 1924 and 1925, served as a point of satisfaction at the party’s

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<sup>183</sup> Bergman, “Kwestia białoruska,” 229-230.

<sup>184</sup> AAN, KPZB archive, 163/V-154, “Publikacja pt. ‘Komunistyczna Partia Zachodniej Białorusi w rezolucjach’,” s.9-11.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, s.2-3.

<sup>186</sup> Adam Radosław Suławka, “Prasa Komitetu Centralnego Komunistycznej Partii Zachodniej Białorusi (KC KPZB) wydawana w języku rosyjskim,” *Studia z Dziejów Rosji i Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej* 50.2 (2015); 55-76.

Second Conference and June Plenum.<sup>187</sup> At these gatherings, the KPZB's leaders had resolved to mobilize the Belarusian peasantry for the coming rebellion against Warsaw but also laid out some of the most important projects that the party pursued in the countryside even after plans for an insurrection were scrapped. Already in 1924, the KPZB had resolved to demand schooling and administration in the Belarusian language, support peasants in withholding tax payments from the government, and organize armed self-defense units to protect Belarusian villages from the Polish military its bands of local "chauvinists."<sup>188</sup> These goals certainly corresponded to the changing demography of the KPZB's membership, which, within a year of the party's foundation, was around 80% Belarusian (and, counting Polesie, Ukrainian), with Jews making up most of the remaining 20% and ethnic Poles and Russians forming a negligible sliver.<sup>189</sup> The issue of education, according to the resolutions of the KPZB's Second Conference, was especially crucial, since Polonized schools allegedly constituted the primary infrastructure of state repression against Belarusians under Grabski but, just across the border, formed the backbone of Soviet *korenizatsiia* campaigns.<sup>190</sup> Still, in its preparations for an uprising, the KPZB called for cooperation between the Belarusian village and Polish peasants and workers, whose "chauvinist" mindset should be transformed by the communist movement through collaboration with Polish radicals.<sup>191</sup>

While the induction of Belarusian peasants into the KPZB had marked a major success by 1925, the subsequent shift in the KPP's focus from insurrection to the "all-

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<sup>187</sup> AAN, KPZB archive, 163/II/1, "II Konferencja," s.10.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., s.20.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., s.1

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., s.20.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., s.22.

Polish revolution” gave rise to concerns about the future of a communist party rooted primarily in the village. Into the late 1920s, and most likely up until 1938, what had been the KPZB’s crowning success now became the object of serious criticisms and doubts surrounding the party’s lack of a properly proletarian core. The KPZB’s Third Conference, held shortly before the May Coup in 1926, saw widespread proclamations that the party’s growth in the countryside had awkwardly outpaced its equally important efforts at winning over workers in the towns, whose primarily Polish and Jewish residents identified with the PPS, the Bund, or, in the case of Polish peasants, PSL-*Wyzwolenie*.<sup>192</sup> The KPZB’s leaders likewise condemned the earlier excitement surrounding the coming peasant revolt in western Belarus, arguing that such a campaign would have been doomed to exhaustion within two or three months and could never have succeeded without the proletarian backing that the party utterly lacked.<sup>193</sup> Gone were the days of “terrorist” and “insurrectionist” inclinations now that an “all-Polish revolution” led by a properly multinational coalition of workers and peasants had emerged as the only true path to unify western Belarus with its Soviet Piedmont.<sup>194</sup>

The Third Conference marked an important moment in the KPZB’s evolving relationship with Belarusian nationalism and the question of how to correctly organize a working-class alliance of Poles, Jews, and Lithuanians that would complement, if not lead, the Belarusian peasantry. These concerns, however, did not prevent the KPZB from working with left-wing Belarusian nationalists such as Branislaŭ Tarashkevich and Symon Rak-Mikhailoŭski, both of whom had attempted to work

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<sup>192</sup> AAN, KPZB archive, 163/II/3, “III Konferencja,” s.4.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, s.5.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, s.6.

with the Polish parliament before founding the Belarusian Peasant-Worker Union (Hramada) in 1925.<sup>195</sup> During its time as a legally recognized, mass-based organization, which ended at the hands of the *Sanacja* regime in 1927, the Hramada established deep roots in the western Belarusian countryside, advancing a platform that combined demands for Belarusian national self-determination and linguistic equality with calls for labor reforms and the radical redistribution of land.<sup>196</sup> Although the Hramada's leaders publicly limited themselves to insisting upon broad autonomy for western Belarus, the Hramada's true objective was the creation of a united Belarusian state, mostly likely within the existing structure of the Soviet Union. Reading some of the Hramada's numerous newspapers reveals columns that condemned *Sanacja* from its first days, calling for the establishment of a "worker-peasant government," as well as colorful descriptions of life in Soviet Belarus as free from class oppression, liberated from foreign imperialism, and marked by plenitude and happiness.<sup>197</sup> Some of the Hramada's members would have been able to test these assertions for themselves, as the frontier between Poland and the Soviet Union was especially porous in the Belarusian borderlands.

With heavy funding from Soviet sponsors and the KPZB, whose own ranks barely reached 4,000 people, the Hramada effectively wedded a message of national emancipation with promises of dramatic socioeconomic change, winning as many as 150,000 registered members.<sup>198</sup> The exact terms on which peasants and workers embraced the Hramada's platform, however, have not yet been thoroughly

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<sup>195</sup> Rudling, *The Rise and Fall of Belarusian Nationalism*.

<sup>196</sup> Bergman, *Sprawy białoruskie*, 42-52.

<sup>197</sup> *Sprava Belaruskaja*, in particular, began attacking *Sanacja* shortly after its inception in May of 1926.

<sup>198</sup> Rudling, *The Rise and Fall of Belarusian Nationalism*.

documented, and it is important not to project the ideas of nationalist elites onto the lower classes, for whom land hunger would have most likely been the central concern. However, the Hramada, along with the Belarusian School Society, managed to create grassroots programs for education and electoral mobilization that certainly brought a degree of national and class consciousness into villages where modern collective identities were still relatively malleable.<sup>199</sup> The results of the nation-building work of the KPZU, the KPZB, and their local allies in Volhynia and Polesie have also been documented in recent Polish scholarship, suggesting that borderland national communists filled an important role in shaping peasant identities in the large swathes of the eastern borderlands where state power was thin on the ground.<sup>200</sup> Likewise, the extent to which the KPZB established a geographically wide network of rural “cells” (*iacheyky*) throughout the interwar period is well documented in the reports of Polish intelligence officers and borderland prefects, and it is probable that the ground broken by the Hramada in just two years would have only aided the activities of professional communists.<sup>201</sup> In fact, Polish assessments of the peasant partisan movement in western Belarus in the 1930s indicate that the KPZB, despite never regaining all of the Hramada’s conquests, still commanded a strong base of supporters, even more so than the post-1928 KPZU.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> <sup>200</sup> Piotr Cichoracki, “Stosunki ukraińsko-białoruskie w ruchu komunistycznym na Polesiu w okresie międzywojennym,” *Wrocławskie Studia Wschodnie* 20 (2016); 155-166.

<sup>201</sup> MSW reports on the Belarusian countryside from the late 1920s and early 1930s, from the MSW archive, starting with t.1031; *Kontrolować*, 59-170 on communist organizations in the countryside at the start of the 1930s.

<sup>202</sup> MSW reports on anti-state activities in the eastern borderlands from the 1930s, starting from t.1031.



The KPZB's relationship with the Hramada is sometimes portrayed as one of complete organizational control by the communists over their "fellow travelers," a position that is not altogether inaccurate given the scale of Soviet support for Belarusian leftists in the mid-1920s.<sup>203</sup> Yet, even if the KPZB exercised such powerful influence over Tarashkevich and Rak-Mikhailoŭski, who themselves looked eastward for their Belarusian Piedmont, its leaders exhibited growing anxiety in their relationship with the Belarusian peasantry and Belarusian nationalism as the 1920s continued. Concerns about the KPZB's rural character came to the fore at the Third Congress in 1926, when an entire succession of proposals to win proletarian support were put forth and often adopted. Some comrades articulated specific plans for connecting proletarian and semiproletarian elements with the KPZB's existing peasant support base or widening the party's reach in trade unions, which remained largely in the hands of the PPS and the Bund.<sup>204</sup> The KPZB also set ambitious goals for winning defectors from Polish military units garrisoned in western Belarus, though gains in the army remained minimal through the 1930s.<sup>205</sup> Meanwhile, one motion to define the Hramada as a "territorial" body open to all nationalities rather than a purely "national" one restricted to Belarusians won by a vote of 10-5-3 among the KPZU's leaders, though this resolution had few effects on the organization's composition.<sup>206</sup> Bolder calls for the KPZB to shelve the slogan of "secession" and "unification with the Soviet Union" in favor of the more palatable project of Belarusian "autonomy" within Poland also poured forth, something that would have been unimaginable in the

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<sup>203</sup> Savchenko, *Belarus*, 104-105.

<sup>204</sup> AAN, KPZB archive, 163/II/3, "III Konferencja," s.50.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, s.36.

<sup>206</sup> AAN, KPZB archive, 163/II/15, "III Konferencja," s.44.

KPZU meetings held around the same time.<sup>207</sup> The main argument for “autonomy” was that the KPZB’s peasant partisan image had turned away Polish and Jewish workers, who cared more about joining an “all-Polish revolution” and held mixed or negative feelings about becoming Soviet subjects. The case for “autonomy” found support from powerful figures such as Vincas Mickevičius-Kapsukas, a Lithuanian communist who had been involved in organizing a pro-Soviet Belarus in 1919, yet it also drew determined opposition, both from those who worried about losing the backing of the Belarusian masses and comrades who tolerated no deviations from the correct “Leninist” position.<sup>208</sup>

While “autonomy” was briefly adopted by the KPZB in the spirit of winning a multinational proletarian following, it rapidly grew untenable and was thoroughly rejected after the rise of the *Sanacja* regime in May of 1926.<sup>209</sup> With Piłsudski’s rise, communist appraisals of the nature of “national-colonial oppression” in Poland changed, emphasizing that the brutal but straightforward Polonization policies of the previous five years had been supplanted by a subtler, more dangerous strategy of winning the loyalties of borderland minorities for Warsaw through concessions such as promises of “autonomy.”<sup>210</sup> Although Mickevičius-Kapsukas continued to challenge the KPZB leadership over the viability of winning multinational support under the banner of “secession” and “unification with the Soviet Union,” the party never returned to “autonomy,” which had now been tarred as an ideological deviation and a disastrous retreat from Leninist ideas.<sup>211</sup> With the rise of *Sanacja*, the KPZB’s

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> AAN, KPZB archive, 163/I-1/t.7, “I Zjazd,” s.108.

<sup>209</sup> AAN, KPZB archive, 163/III-10, “II Rozszerzone Plenum,” s.21.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., s.21-22.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

official attitude towards the Belarusian village and the left-wing nationalists in the Hramada also began to shift, in no small part due to the changing analyses of the Komintern on the “partial stabilization of capitalism in Poland” and the progress of “Bolshevization” within the entire KPP. Between 1926 and 1928, the KPZB, whose own leading “majority” sided with Leński’s “minority” in Warsaw, increasingly spoke of the deepening of class differentiation in the Belarusian countryside, something that had certainly been present in past debates but which gained a renewed significance under *Sanacja*.<sup>212</sup> Following the new line of the KPP, the KPZB argued that Piłsudski would emulate Stolypin in wagering on the rich Belarusian peasants, formally referred to as “kulaks” for the first time in 1928, and establish an indigenous class of exploiters in the borderlands.<sup>213</sup> Also in 1928, as the KPZU’s “majority” fought to defend Shums’kyi’s heterodox national communism, the KPZB engaged in self-criticism over its ties to the Hramada, admitting that it had engaged with “rightist elements” for the sake of winning votes.<sup>214</sup> Meanwhile, a constant, urgent item on the agenda of KPZB gatherings was the so-called “united village” deviation, which supposedly consisted in the view that the Belarusian nation consisted of a socially homogeneous peasant population free from “kulaks.” While Bergman has argued that such a simplistic understanding of the Belarusian village was never really present in the party’s ranks in a meaningful way, the constant renunciation of this “deviation” allowed the KPZB’s leaders to emphasize their commitment to a proletarian future while further distancing themselves from the “partisan deviation” of 1923 to 1925.<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> AAN, KPZB archive, 163/III-11, “III Plenum,” s.8-14; 163/III-17, “VIII Plenum,” s.1-3.

<sup>213</sup> AAN, KPZB archive, 163/III-11, “III Plenum,” s.8-14.

<sup>214</sup> AAN, KPZB archive, 163/III-18, “IX Plenum,” s.4-7.

<sup>215</sup> Bergman, “Kwestia białoruska,” 245.

While the KPZB had embraced elements of national communism with notable results in the countryside during the mid-1920s, changes in the Polish political landscape after 1926, shifting nationalities policies in the Belarusian SSR, and changes in the Komintern line on nationalism and the peasantry all precipitated a rapid retreat from potentially heterodox ideas by the close of 1928. In the first place, Piłsudski's rise and the Komintern's subsequent identification of non-Polish "kulaks" and "national opportunists" as *Sanacja's* main allies led the KPZB to distance itself from its reputation as a peasant party while clarifying its "errors" in collaborating with some "right-wing" elements of the Hramada. Second, the stakes of ideological debates grew alongside the intensification of factional strife between the KPZB's "majority," which identified closely with the Komintern and Leński's group, and its "minority," which sided with Warski and Koszutska's national communists in Warsaw.<sup>216</sup> Third, the removal of prominent national communists in the Belarusian SSR for ideological "deviations" had already begun in 1927, and those associated with the concept of a "Belarusian toiling nation," something similar to the "united village" thesis, were among the first to fall, signaling that the KPZB, as Bergman writes, should thoroughly cleanse itself of an "peasant deviations."<sup>217</sup> While Bergman opines that intellectual innovations in the KPZB declined by the close of the 1920s, the factional strife of 1928 to 1929 was ultimately far less severe than it had been in the KPZU and the KPP as a whole, since the victorious "majority" played the role of "consolidators," imposing their Komintern-endorsed imperatives upon the "minority" without seriously disrupting the party's structure or activities.<sup>218</sup> Nevertheless, the

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<sup>216</sup> P.I. Zelinskii, *Politicheskaia rabota KPZB v massakh 1923-1928* (Minsk: Izdatel'stvo "Universitetskoe," 1986), 19-20.

<sup>217</sup> Bergman, "Kwestia białoruska," 244-246.

<sup>218</sup> Zelinskii, *Politicheskaia rabota*, 20.

KPZB, though now free from “factions,” remained in a constant struggle with itself over its perpetually troubled relationship with the proletariat and its own image as a revolutionary party. In 1931, as it lost Belarusian peasant support in the midst of collectivization in the Soviet Union, the KPZB attempted to present itself as a “revolutionary party of the proletariat without respect to nationality,” though its leaders, as late as 1935, continued to describe their party as fundamentally “disconnected from the towns.”<sup>219</sup>

Unlike Vasyl’kiv’s “majority” faction in the KPZU, which embraced an assertive brand of agrarian national communism as its core platform from the beginning of its time in the KPP until its demise, the KPZB’s “majority” adopted national communist policies during the mid-1920s as a strategy for mobilizing Belarusian peasants, but later distanced itself from them once they fell out of favor in the Belarusian SSR and the Komintern. Even as the KPZB won peasant support, its leaders expressed ambivalence and concern about their successes in the countryside, attempting through organizational initiatives and ideological adaptations to gain the proletarian following necessary to pursue a properly Leninist revolution. In this regard, the KPZB clearly prioritized the needs of the “all-Polish revolution,” which its leaders took seriously, and sought to strike a balance between their existing following in the village and the support that they strove to secure in the towns. While the *Secesja* had attempted to tear western Belarus away from the orbit of the KPP, the KPZB as a whole never engaged in harsh confrontations with their comrades in “core Poland” in the ways that the KPZU’s “majority” had already done before 1923. In the first place, the absence of a western Belarusian analogue to the Polish-Ukrainian clash over East Galicia, which was already both socioeconomically inflamed and nationally charged before

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<sup>219</sup> AAN, KPZB archive, 163/I-2, t.9, “II Zjazd. Protokół obrad,” s.105-107.

1923, certainly played a role in allowing for better relations to develop between the KPZB and the KPP. Although the KPZB became a predominantly Belarusian party soon after its inception, it was not based around a national communist firebrand like Vasyl'kiv, and its leaders demonstrated a commitment to organizing their small corner of the global revolution around an inclusive, territorial model rather than on an ethnonational basis. Indeed, whereas the core of the KPZU's "majority" had already congealed without the help of Polish communists and in spite of a Polish invasion in 1919, the KPZB emerged as the creation of the KPP's experiment in *korenizatsiia* only in 1923, subsequently admitting an influx of ethnic Belarusians on its own terms. While the KPZB received substantial funding from across the Soviet border and looked to the Belarusian SSR as its Piedmont, it only adopted Belarusian national communism insofar as this ideology supported the progress of the "all-Polish revolution" in whose service the KPZB had been forged. Altogether, as Wojciech Śleszyński and Justyna Owłasiuk point out, the KPZB operated on a more nationally inclusive "territorial" model that serves as a point of contrast with the unabashedly "ethnic" approach of the KPZU in the 1920s.<sup>220</sup>

Despite its determined efforts to become a properly proletarian party, the KPZB's greatest legacy was the creation of a peasant power base that outlived the party's chaotic opening years, when launching an armed uprising had actually been its main goal. The successes of the Hramada in mobilizing the western Belarusian countryside around a program closely aligned with that of the KPZB between 1925 and 1927 had shown that national communism was not merely the conspiratorial ideology of a few thousand registered comrades, but a strategy for national liberation and socioeconomic empowerment that resonated in the village. While the KPZB faced

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<sup>220</sup> *Kontrolować*, 12.

vigorous government persecution and stiff competition from more moderate, legal Belarusian parties, it is notable that western Belarus never witnessed anything like Henryk Józewski's project for Ukrainian autonomy in Volhynia, nor did it confront a radical right-wing competitor such as OUN, which supplanted Sel-Rob and the KPZU in Volhynia by the early 1930s.<sup>221</sup> The Polish interior ministry closely followed the activities of the KPZB, which was considered to be the greatest danger to the state's relatively weak hold over the "northeastern borderlands."<sup>222</sup>

Yet rather than launching an experiment in Belarusian autonomy, which even most Prometheans considered to be impossible owing to the weakness of national identity among the peasants, the Polish state under *Sanacja* treated the "Belarusian question" primarily as a matter of social reform, though achieving much in this direction proved challenging as the global depression set in at the close of the 1920s. Men like Wasilewski and Hołowko, who had supported various types of Belarusian self-rule in their writings before 1926, became far more reserved once Piłsudski came to power, now emphasizing that Ukraine, as a much more historically developed nation claiming some four million members within Poland's borders, constituted the most important cross-border theater in the struggle against the Soviet Union. Creating a Ukrainian Piedmont in Volhynia to rival the Ukrainian SSR became a worthwhile and geopolitically urgent undertaking, yet the possibility of molding a coherent national center out of western Belarus fell by the wayside, lacking any support at all in the ranks of the Prometheans, who counted no Belarusian emigres in their organization. Writing in 1927, Wasilewski insisted that the government must accept the role of ethnic Poles as the "cement" holding together the country, but that

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<sup>221</sup> See Alexander J. Motyl, "The Rural Origins of the Communist and Nationalist Movements in Wolyn Województwo, 1921-1939," *Slavic Review* 37.3 (Sep., 1978); 412-420.

<sup>222</sup> AAN, MSW reports from the 1930s.

borderland minorities should be encouraged to develop loyalty to the government through legal equality, inclusion in the political system, and modernization programs aimed at alleviating the backwardness of the Ukrainian and Belarusian countryside.<sup>223</sup> This did not amount to encouraging the formation of a separate Belarusian nation where one did not exist, and even Wasilewski recognized that “assimilation” constituted one of the possible approaches that the state could adopt towards a population lacking collective coherence.<sup>224</sup>

Seweryn Wysłouch, a prominent non-Promethean academic close to Piłsudski, had recommended agrarian reforms as well as educational improvements and cultural concessions as the best remedy to counteract *korenizatsiia*. Like Piłsudski and some Prometheans, Wysłouch described the main objective of the Polish state in western Belarus in terms of the restoration of the unique multinational and cross-class harmony of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which had allegedly been undermined by decades of Tsarist Russification policies and, more recently, Bolshevik successes in promoting ethnic and socioeconomic antagonisms.<sup>225</sup> If the overarching civic identity of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania could be rebuilt, Wysłouch claimed, then its dominant Polish culture would return to its role of holding together a peaceful and prosperous mosaic of peoples in which the Belarusians would accept their place. Yet, what *Sanacja* delivered to its Belarusian citizens in practice fell far short of even these modest proposals. Seeking to counteract Soviet infiltration into western Belarus, the Polish government placed military men in charge of the northeastern voivodeships

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<sup>223</sup> Wasilewski, *Sprawa kresów*, 80; 83.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>225</sup> Wysłouch, *Rola*, 43-45.



while banking on military colonists as agents of order in the countryside.<sup>226</sup> As Wysłouch had warned, such a heavy-handed approach only worked to alienate Belarusian villagers from the Polish authorities while strengthening the position of the KPZB, which, despite significant setbacks during collectivization in the Soviet Union in the early 1930s, expanded its underground network of peasant partisans up until its destruction in 1938. Despite the KPZB's declaration of its role as a "revolutionary party of the proletariat, regardless of nationality" in 1931, the general mood among its leaders as late as 1935 was that the party was still fundamentally "disconnected from the towns." The peasant partisan movement, however, continued to grow as late as 1939, when efforts to create an armed "Belarusian Legion" backed by Minsk were apparently put into motion despite the KPZB's demise one year earlier.<sup>227</sup>

#### **Accounting for the KPZB/KPZU divergence in the 1920s**

While the KPZU and KPZB shared a common lifespan from 1923 to 1938, a great deal transpired within those fifteen years that reveals significant differences in how the two parties evolved organizationally and intellectually. During the 1920s, Maria Koszutska, a towering figure in the "majority faction" of the KPP that opposed Leński, praised the KPZB for avoiding most of the serious nationalist deviations of the KPZU, including those that would secure the latter's ejection from the Komintern in 1928.<sup>228</sup> This same sentiment often arose in passing at KPZB congresses and plenums, whose speakers, though critical of the Party's own theoretical "errors," insisted that the KPZU's errors in courting "bourgeois nationalism" were of a

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<sup>226</sup> Pavel Abramski, "The Nationality Issue on the Peripheries of Central and Eastern Europe: the Case of Polesie in the Interwar Period," *Studia z Dziejów Rosji i Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej* 52.2 (2017); 55-76.

<sup>227</sup> AAN, KPZB archive, "II Zjazd. Protokół obrad," s.105-107; *Kontrolować*.

<sup>228</sup> AAN, KPZB archive, 163/I-1/6, s. 29-30; 83.

fundamentally greater magnitude than the KPZB's more tactical faults.<sup>229</sup> In 1928, when the Komintern issued its hefty interim report on the eve of its Sixth Congress, the section concerning the communist movement in Poland identified some key "deviations" and "errors" on the part of the KPZB but generally applauded this "young" Party for undergoing a fairly painless "Bolshevization" while making major gains in popular support.<sup>230</sup> The same could not be said of the KPZU, whose briefer, one-page section featured a scathing condemnation of the secessionist "majority faction" and other "petty bourgeois" infiltrators while emphasizing the parlous condition of the communist cause in western Ukraine after the secession of the "majority."<sup>231</sup>

The collective judgment of these communist observers was that the KPZU grew into a renegade hotbed of nationalist "deviations" by 1928, whereas the KPZB, despite some missteps, remained close to the ideological and programmatic dictates of the Komintern, the KPP's pro-Moscow "minority," and the all-Union Communist Party throughout the 1920s. Such a portrayal finds broad confirmation in the severity of the KPZU's fragmentation at the end of the decade, which never found a correspondingly serious parallel in the ranks of the KPZB, though the latter party had its share of internal strife related to the overarching conflict within the KPP as well as the entry of Belarusian Socialist-Revolutionaries into its structure in 1924. While it would be reductionist to cast the KPZU and KPZB as polar opposites, the KPZU exhibited a far greater and more intellectually innovative inclination towards national communist ideas, specifically those of Shums'kyi, than the KPZB, which employed a

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<sup>229</sup> AAN, KPZB archive, 163/I-1/5, s. 2; 163/I-1/17, 2-7.

<sup>230</sup> *Komunisticheskii Internatsional pered shestym vseмирnym kongressom* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1928), 245-248.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, 245.

national communist ideology to garner working-class backing but remained in line with the Komintern as the tide began to turn against “deviants” in Minsk after 1927. More simply, whereas a majority within the KPZU went down with Shums’kyi in an acrimonious clash over issues of ideology and organization with the Ukrainian Bolsheviks, the KPZB’s leaders made no such impassioned defense of a marked national “deviant” in Minsk such as Usevalad Ihnatoŭski, quickly and meticulously recanting their earlier associations with “bourgeois nationalists” instead.

While the divergent paths of the KPZU and KPZB from 1923 to 1928 have been abundantly described, they have yet to find a thorough explanation. One line of reasoning, elaborated by Skrypnyk and Mykola Popov in the midst of the conflict over Shums’kyi, was that the KPZU had become imbued with “petty bourgeois” elements intent on seizing the reins of the communist struggle in southwestern Poland for its own nefarious purposes.<sup>232</sup> Since East Galicia was witnessing the rapid maturation of capitalism and was already awash with Ukrainian political parties opposed to the Soviet Union, the KPZU logically fell captive to its environment, allowing representatives of “Ukrainian chauvinism,” with their champion in Shums’kyi, to appropriate the communist banner in a bid to hoodwink the masses.

Another potential line of reasoning, which has not yet been explicitly proposed by historians, might follow the broader story of the contrasting paths of modern-day Ukraine and Belarus since the time of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. As Timothy Snyder has written, Belarus, owing to a confluence of geopolitical, socioeconomic, and cultural factors, only developed a strong nationalist movement in the twentieth century, whereas Ukraine, and in particular East Galicia, had already

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<sup>232</sup> The condemnations and correspondence may be found in Mykola Popov, *Borot’ba z natsionalistychnymy ukhylamy v KP(b)U ta KPZU: zbirnyk materiialu* (Kharkiv: “Proletarii,” 1927).

witnessed such a development in the late nineteenth century.<sup>233</sup> As Paul Robert Magocsi has argued, East Galicia gradually crystallized into a “Piedmont” of modern Ukrainian nationalism over the course of the long nineteenth century, and this legacy remained a powerful force even after Bolsheviks such as Skrypnyk appropriated the mantle of the national struggle for Soviet Ukraine.<sup>234</sup> The same was hardly true for western Belarus, which, as a territorial concept, was hastily created by the KPP in the early 1920s in an effort to lump together the remnants of old Tsarist gubernias that happened to be mostly Belarusian.<sup>235</sup> In short, whereas East Galicia still bore the characteristics of a vibrant Ukrainian “Piedmont” in the interwar period, especially with respect to nearby Volhynia, western Belarus did not boast such a history and filled the supporting role of the main territory to be liberated by Soviet Belarus rather than becoming a “Piedmont” in its own right.

Such an elucidation provides clues as to why the KPZU’s brand of national communism was far more imbued with East Galician nationalist ideas than that of the KPZB, which emerged in an amorphous region with very little in the way of an existing, mass-based Belarusian identity. The bottom line, in this case, might read that the Belarusian and Ukrainian communist movements in interwar Poland were only as nationalist as the terrain from which they grew. Yet, treating the presence or absence of modern nationalism as the main causal factor, neglects the fact that it was the borderland communists who were molding national identities among peasants in the rural backcountry of Polesie and Volhynia, where the divide between Ukrainian and

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<sup>233</sup> Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations*.

<sup>234</sup> Paul Robert Magocsi, *The Roots of Ukrainian Nationalism: Galicia as Ukraine's Piedmont* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002).

<sup>235</sup> Wojciech Śleszyński and Justyna Owłasiuk, “Komunistyczna Partia Zachodniej Białorusi - najniebezpieczniejsza antypaństwowa organizacja na ziemiach północno-wschodnich II Rzeczypospolitej,” in *Kontrolować*, 7-13.

Belarusian communities was still extremely nebulous into the 1930s.<sup>236</sup> In other words, a sharp Ukrainian-Belarusian divide had yet to take shape across a large swathe of territory on which both the KPZU and KPZB were intensely active, and both communist parties were forces for nationalization as much as they were products of it. Nevertheless, such a nationally based interpretation of the KPZU and KPZB's trajectories can become more satisfactory when combined with perspectives from the realm of imperial history, which helps to explain why the Ukrainian and Belarusian Piedmont projects unfolded differently in interwar Poland.

This necessitates looking not merely at nationality as a deciding factor, but also considering the kinds of personal and political networks to which the borderland communists belonged both before and after 1923. Such an analysis reveals that the disparities at hand grew not only from a Ukrainian-Belarusian dichotomy, but, just as importantly, from the differing histories of the Social Democratic movements in the Austro-Hungarian and Russian Empires. Most of the KPZU's leading figures, including the secessionists of 1928, hailed from the Austrian region of East Galicia and belonged to non-Bolshevik leftist groupings and student societies at the outbreak of the First World War.<sup>237</sup> They represented an independent current in Ukrainian Marxist thought that was heavily influenced by their homeland's indigenous Ukrainian nationalism and had enjoyed constitutional liberties and opportunities for political work that would have been mostly absent across the border in Russia. At the same time, while these Galicians shared ties with the Bolsheviks and the Polish labor movement, their relationships became strained after 1917 as both Poland and the Red Army became mired in wars with the West Ukrainian People's Republic based in

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<sup>236</sup> Piotr Cichoracki, "Stosunki ukraińsko-białoruskie," 155-166.

<sup>237</sup> Radziejowski, *The Communist Party of Western Ukraine*; Hrabovs'kyi, "KPZU: tragediia revoliutsiinykh romantykiv."

L'viv and the Ukrainian People's Republic centered in Kyiv.<sup>238</sup> After 1918, the KPZU's future leaders resented attempts at submitting their organization to outside domination, whether "all-Polish" or "all-Russian," or, in the late 1920s, subjugating Ukrainian national communism to "all-Soviet" interests. In fact, during the polemics over Shums'kyi's "deviation," the KPZU's secessionists explicitly invoked their Galician credentials to cast themselves as the original bearers of Ukrainian national communism in the face of Skrypnyk's attacks.<sup>239</sup>

By contrast, the KPZB's initial core leadership in 1923 were better integrated into both the "all-Polish" and "all-Russian" communist causes, hailing from the Polish, Russian, and Jewish communities of imperial Russian towns such as Hrodna, Navahrudak, Vilnius, and Białystok. These men and women, for the most part, had little in common with the Belarusian village or the village-oriented Belarusian national movement before 1923, and had to recruit non-Bolshevik Belarusian socialists to expand their popular base among the local peasants, a decision that closely followed the logic of *korenizatsiia* and changed the party's ethnic character.<sup>240</sup> While this transformation was first hailed as a success, it also prepared the way for numerous "peasant deviations" and "national-opportunist errors" that rattled the Party into the early 1930s. National communism, for the KPZB, served as one of many strategies for winning working-class support in the countryside rather than the core of the party's agenda, and always had to be carefully balanced with campaigns to gain a following among non-Belarusian toilers in the towns and cities. Unlike their contemporaries in the KPZU, the KPZB's leadership responded dutifully when the

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<sup>238</sup> Hrabovs'kyi, "KPZU."

<sup>239</sup> "An das EKKI," in *Die ukrainische nationale Frage*, 51-64.

<sup>240</sup> Bergman, "Białoruska Rewolucyjna Organizacja," in *Sprawy białoruskie*.

Komintern and the all-Union Communist Party changed their lines on national communism in the late 1920s, adjusting their program and conceding their “errors” rather than digging in against Minsk and Moscow. Moreover, the KPZB’s “Bolshevization,” or adoption of the all-Union Party’s resolutions as their own, around 1928 produced unrest, yet this was far less severe than what was unfolding within both the KPZU and the KPP proper.<sup>241</sup>

These observations suggest that the KPZU and KPZB’s pre-1923 roots in specific imperial borderlands and entanglements with different nationalist and Social Democratic milieus shaped the extent to which either party developed elective affinities with national communist ideas that were emerging from across the Soviet border. An imperial lens likewise sheds some light on the KPZU and KPZB’s levels of popular penetration into various parts of the countryside of eastern Poland, although this is not the principal concern of the present chapter. Proportionally speaking, former imperial Russian territories with strongly East Slavic, heavily illiterate, and deeply impoverished rural populations witnessed the greatest growth of socially radical mass movements aligned with the KPZU and KPZB, namely the Ukrainian Peasant-Worker Union (Sel-Rob) and the Belarusian Peasant-Worker Society (Hramada), respectively.<sup>242</sup> While the conspiratorial KPZU and KPZB seldom boasted more than 4,000 registered members apiece, many of whom were imprisoned, their legally registered counterparts, with the help of left-wing nationalists, each claimed between 100,000 and 150,000 supporters by the time that they were outlawed in the late 1920s.<sup>243</sup> Where preexisting national identities were weak, socioeconomic

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<sup>241</sup> P.I. Zelinskii, *Politicheskaia rabota*, 19-21.

<sup>242</sup> Figures are from Radziejowski, *The Communist Party of Western Ukraine*, 97-100; Rudling, *The Rise and Fall of Belarusian Nationalism*.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

grievances were serious, and the presence of the Polish state was thin on the ground, the borderland communists took on the part of nation-builders, wedding visions of land redistribution and popular mobilization with claims that a better life existed across the Soviet frontier, which some peasants, in practice, could cross to see for themselves. This was not the case in East Galicia, where a colorful multiparty political culture and better living conditions had already taken shape, and where the KPZU's leading minds found much less support among peasants and workers affiliated with mainstream groupings. The KPZU's main conquests lay further north, chiefly among peasants in the formerly Russian territories of Chełm Land (Kholmshchyna) and Volhynia, which also became the principal electoral strongholds of Sel-Rob.<sup>244</sup>

Meanwhile, the KPZB struggled to find a properly Leninist proletariat to lead the revolution in western Belarus, finding that the Polish Socialist Party, the Polish People's Party, and the Jewish Bund had already won the allegiance of the ethnically and religiously mixed working classes in the region's provincial towns.<sup>245</sup> Where the KPZB consistently succeeded beyond its own expectations, however, was in creating a geographically expansive, ethnically Belarusian peasant partisan movement around a program of national communist ideas that endured up until the eve of the Second World War. In this endeavor, as Polish intelligence reports indicate, the KPZB's relative reach in the countryside as well as its enduring legacy beyond the collapse of the Hramada in 1927 were greater than those of the KPZU for two principal reasons. In the first place, the post-1926 Polish *Sanacja* regime of Józef Piłsudski, in which some members of the Promethean movement occupied important places, treated its

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<sup>244</sup> Christopher Gilley, *The 'Change of Signposts' in the Ukrainian Emigration: A Contribution to the History of Sovietophilism in the 1920s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 328.

<sup>245</sup> AAN, KPZB archive, 163/V/158, 81; 163/V/160, 26.



Ukrainian and Belarusian minorities differently. Whereas Ukrainians enjoyed a considerable degree of state recognition as a historically crystallized nation with a widespread common identity, Belarusians were treated as a malleable mass of peasants lacking the same degree of collective coherence.<sup>246</sup>

Accordingly, whereas ambitious counter-*korenizatsiia* experiments in Ukrainian autonomy took place in Volhynia under Henryk Józewski, the “Belarusian question” remained essentially an issue of socioeconomic reform and moderate cultural concessions meant to slowly turn Belarusians into loyal Polish citizens of East Slavic stock.<sup>247</sup> The documents of the KPZU and KPZB demonstrate a strong awareness of Józewski’s work, expressing serious concerns that the *Sanacja* government had finally developed a model for countering the cross-border communist movement.<sup>248</sup> Meanwhile, the final ban on Sel-Rob in 1932 opened up Volhynia to vigorous right-wing competitors such as the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, who also promised a version of national liberation and property redistribution.<sup>249</sup> While the fall of the Hramada certainly weakened the KPZB’s foothold, there was no analogous right-wing Belarusian movement to usurp its place among radicalized villagers in the 1930s, although the Polish government did make efforts to collaborate with more moderate local allies in the hope of taming the countryside. Still, when compared with the KPZU, the KPZB by far remained the greater menace to Warsaw’s hold over the borderlands in the reports of the Polish intelligence services, whose agents were

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<sup>246</sup> Snyder, *Sketches from a Secret War: A Polish Artist's Mission to Liberate Soviet Ukraine* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 74-76.

<sup>247</sup> For contemporary commentary, see Wysłouch, *Rola*; Wasilewski, *Problem*; for an extended treatment, see Eleonora Kirwiel, *Kresy Północno-Wschodnie Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w latach 1918-1939: oblicze polityczne* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie Skłodowskiej, 2011).

<sup>248</sup> Snyder, *Sketches*, 75.

<sup>249</sup> This is according to MSW reports on “anti-state organizations” in Poland from 1932, available at AAN, MSW archive.

clearly aware of the widespread infiltration of pro-Soviet, cross-border communists into the countryside.<sup>250</sup>

The cases of the KPZU and the KPZB, which have been reconstructed separately in this chapter, suggest that the cross-border Soviet Piedmont projects of the 1920s turned out to be intellectually contentious, organizationally dynamic, and susceptible to ideological and tactical “deviations” in ways that mere extensions of Moscow’s reach would not have been. The story of the KPZU in particular demonstrates the extent to which the projection of Soviet power into neighboring Poland was profoundly shaped by preexisting intellectual milieus, socioeconomic landscapes, and imperial legacies, most notably in East Galicia, rather than simply conforming to imperatives issued from abroad. The KPZU’s dramatic breakdown by 1928, moreover, highlights how the party line of the Ukrainian Bolsheviks was not uncritically assimilated by communists across the Zbruch River and had to contend with the ideas of comrades who had never belonged to the all-Russian Social Democratic movement and resented the “Bolshevization” of the KPP. The contrasting arc of the KPZB only further helps to underline this point by showing that the fate of a particular Piedmont project depended heavily on the interplay of unevenly developed national identities, socioeconomic factors, and the pre-1923 affiliations of the communists who actually ran the party in practice.

In both cases, the Piedmont projects of the 1920s were not simply about exporting Soviet models onto Polish soil, but also necessitated a great deal in the way of disciplining and “correcting” indigenous communist movements under the banner of “Bolshevization.” While the Piedmont projects in both western Ukraine and western Belarus were supposed to culminate in “secession” from Poland and

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<sup>250</sup> This is based on MSW reports from 1929 to 1938. The KPZU is continuously portrayed as mired in crisis, while the dangers posed by the KPZB appear greater.

“unification” with the Soviet Union, the road to that conclusion remained exceptionally unclear until after 1928, when the imposition of greater ideological conformity by the Komintern coupled with the rise of Stalin’s new approaches to industrialization and nationalities policies significantly narrowed the intellectual creativity of Polish communists. More broadly, the observations to be drawn from studying the KPZU and KPZB point to the conclusion that the “internationalization” of Soviet power, presented in ambitiously global, universal terms in Party oratories and official propaganda, was already hitting its first major ruts on the muddy backcountry roads of western Ukraine and western Belarus within a decade of the October Revolution. Ultimately, the KPP faced destruction in 1938, and it was the Red Army and the NKVD rather than unruly national communists to whom Stalin entrusted the annexation of Poland’s borderlands to the Soviet Union in 1939. While Stalinist atrocities weigh heavily on the minds of the descendants of those formerly Polish territories to this day, it is still necessary to recover the uncertainty, chaos, and vibrancy of the Piedmont projects of the 1920s from the shadow of what followed.

### **Conclusions**

In the end, the anticipated “unification” of western Ukraine and western Belarus with their respective Soviet Piedmonts arrived without an “all-Polish revolution” in the autumn of 1939 as the Red Army crossed into Poland, facing determined but vastly outmatched resistance from scattered formations of border guards. In the three weeks between the initial offensive and the Polish army’s last major stand at the Battle of Kock in early October, the bayonets of the Red Army had carried Soviet power westward for the first time since 1920, accomplishing in territorial terms what the communists of the KPZU and KPZB had sought to achieve over a span of fifteen years. As “regional organs” of the KPP, both of these cross-border parties had been

entrusted with preparing the ground for the entry of their respective territories into the Soviet Union, yet their stories, though in many ways divergent, were marked far more by factional crises, mass defections, and purges than by the revolutionary triumphs that they had been created to achieve. In fact, cross-border communism in Poland had proven to be an exceptionally messy affair entangled with the nationalist deviations and tangled imperial legacies, especially in the case of the KPZU. Even as the KPZB avoided a major split in the late 1920s, its leaders, facing stiff opposition from the PPS, the Bund, and PSL-*Wyzwolenie*, struggled to spread their reach beyond the village, succeeding most in creating a peasant partisan movement where the principal goal had been the making of a proletarian power base.

The cases of the KPZU and the KPZB, both of which had been created by the KPP in accordance with its own interpretation of Leninist “national self-determination” highlight in their own historically distinct ways the importance of ingrained, local socioeconomic and national landscapes in determining how and on what terms Soviet power could be transmitted westward. Both the KPZU and KPZB, after all, were the children of the KPP’s efforts at implementing its own brand of *korenizatsiia* within the multinational Polish state rather than the direct products of Bolshevik initiatives, and their development bore the marks of the manifold challenges inherent in rallying borderland communists beneath the banner of an “all-Polish” revolutionary struggle. This was especially true in the 1920s, when ideological and organizational heresies still permeated the borderland communist movements, amounting to open criticisms of the KPP and, sometimes, the Soviet system, as the KPZU’s involvement in Shums’kyi’s downfall showed. The unruliness of the borderlands, however, was subjected to growing regimentation and discipline by the Komintern and Soviet elites after 1928, eliminating most of the intellectual diversity and factional politics within

the KPZU and KPZB by 1934. While contemporary commentators and modern-day scholars often consider these two parties to have been loyal “fifth columns” commanded by their masters in Moscow, their activities in the 1920s point to a far greater degree of local agency in determining the unfolding of the Ukrainian and Belarusian Piedmont projects, whose transnational networks seldom proved to be unidirectional transmitters of imperatives emanating from the center.

## Epilogue: Between Cold Wars

Prometheism and its Afterlives in the North Atlantic, 1939-1968

On 3 May 1954, eight members of the United States House of Representatives convened at Chicago's Old Main Post Office to continue the work of a congressional Select Committee on Communist Aggression that had been formed one year earlier.<sup>1</sup> Initially, this body was charged with investigating the circumstances under which the three Baltic countries of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia had been incorporated into the Soviet Union, first in 1940 and again in 1944, yet the scope and scale of its activities had expanded significantly since the first months of 1954. The Select Committee's chairman, Charles J. Kersten of Wisconsin, emphasized in his opening address that the most urgent and difficult questions confronting him and his colleagues now concerned the rapid worldwide spread of Soviet power in seemingly every direction. In outlining the problems that the Select Committee would endeavor to solve by year's end, Kersten was no longer just searching for scattered pieces of information with which to gain a more complete picture of events in specific places such as the Baltic states. Instead, he called for a more rigorous, holistic, and widely applicable framework within which to comprehend and, in due course, halt the dangerous growth of America's primary Cold War enemy.<sup>2</sup> If world communism were a dynamic system capable of aggressively adapting to difficult circumstances and transforming the structures of entire "captive nations," then Kersten wanted to fully understand its inner

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<sup>1</sup> *Communist Aggression Investigation, Fourth Interim Report. Part 2: Hearings before the United States House Select Committee To Investigate Communist Aggression and the Forced Incorporation of the Baltic States into the U.S.S.R., Eighty-Third Congress, second session, on May 3, 4, 7, 8, June 14-19, 23-25, 28-30, 1954.* (Washington, DC: United States Government Publishing Office, 1954), 679-680.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 680.

workings and divine the principles governing the ways in which it functioned. Framing the Select Committee's work, he asked

What are the methods by which the Communists aim to keep under their control millions of captive people? Where is the end of this Communist drive? What is the force - physical as well as political - which makes the satellite regimes and their victims, the captive peoples, revolve around the unpredictable center of power in the Kremlin?

Do the people behind the Iron Curtain acquiesce to the Communist rule and, if not, how is it that this rule can be enforced upon them and maintained so? What is the precise machinery, this tremendous machinery which makes it possible?<sup>3</sup>

Over the course of 1954, Kersten and his fellow congressmen journeyed around the United States and Europe in pursuit of the knowledge necessary to understand the Soviet colossus, interviewing hundreds of witnesses who included Eastern European emigres, academic specialists, and former heads of state deposed by communist revolutionaries. Yet it was already on 7 May, at the federal courthouse in New York's Foley Square, that a displaced scholar and personal friend of Kersten delivered one of the most impassioned testimonies that answered many of the guiding questions about communism and the Soviet Union laid out three days before in Chicago. The Select Committee's expert witness was Roman Smal-Stocki, a linguist of Ukrainian background born in 1893 in the Austro-Hungarian borderland town of Chernivtsi who had established his scholarly career in Poland before emigrating to the United States in 1947.<sup>4</sup> Revered within the Ukrainian diaspora community, Smal-Stocki received a professorship at Marquette University in Milwaukee, then part of Kersten's constituency, where he helped establish a vibrant Slavic Institute that doubled as a center of knowledge production about Eastern Europe and a bastion of anticommunist activism. In the 1950s, Smal-Stocki found influential allies among congressmen such as Kersten, participating in the interlinked military, political, and academic campaigns

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 680.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 911.

to “get to know” and effectively respond to the Soviet foe, to borrow from David C. Engerman’s acclaimed book on American Sovietology *Know Your Enemy*.<sup>5</sup>

Smal-Stocki’s testimony, which was accompanied by a dense and detailed typewritten history of the Soviet system that informed the conclusions reached by the Select Committee when it disbanded in December of 1954, began with the revelation that Ukraine in 1918, and not the Baltic countries in 1940, had been the first victim of “Russian communism.”<sup>6</sup> The Ukrainian case, Smal-Stocki argued before Kersten, constituted the true prototype for the exportation of Bolshevik tyranny into ethnically non-Russian territories, containing all of the essential features of Moscow’s later “imperialist” drives, whether in Poland, China, Korea, or Latin America. These general, structural characteristics, Smal-Stocki contended, were designed to achieve the “total” suppression of human freedom and “independent national life,” starting from the creation of a local communist party that would later serve as the state’s main weapon of coercion. Then came direct military occupation, the imposition of censorship, the establishment of an “iron curtain” restricting movement and communication, and the elimination of democratic political parties that might resist communist hegemony. Next, a regime of perpetual “terror” would descend upon the country in question, excising through deportation and execution intellectuals, “independent nationalists,” middling and wealthy peasants, and any other social groups capable of obstructing the drive for total control.<sup>7</sup>

Smal-Stocki’s model of Soviet expansionism not only responded to many of Kersten’s broad questions and influenced the Select Committee’s findings, but it also

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<sup>5</sup> David C. Engerman, *Know Your Enemy: The Rise and Fall of America’s Soviet Experts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> *Communist Aggression Investigation*, 911-912.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 912.



anticipated, in one form or another, all of the six major characteristics of “totalitarian” societies that Zbigniew Brzeziński and Carl Friedrich famously elaborated in their 1956 monograph *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*.<sup>8</sup> Brzeziński and Friedrich’s book, though sharply criticized for its schematic rigidity by fellow social scientists from its very debut, emerged as one of the canonical works of the Cold War-era “totalitarian school” of American Sovietology, alongside Hannah Arendt’s *The Origins of Totalitarianism* published in 1951.<sup>9</sup> Though hardly without opposition in academic circles, the “totalitarian” interpretation of Soviet history proved attractive among policymakers and military elites while spreading in the ranks of the American public, positing that Bolshevik rule was a mercilessly oppressive top-down project that had obliterated the division between public affairs and private life, menacing the healthy equilibrium of liberal capitalist societies.<sup>10</sup>

As a vigorous proponent of the totalitarian paradigm, Smal-Stocki had also included a crucial and historically significant seventh point, one omitted by Brzeziński, Friedrich, and most other American scholars of his time, that would attain substantial prominence in the United States by the end of the 1950s. Rather than viewing the Soviet system as a specifically modern malaise or an implementation of Marxist-Leninist internationalism, Smal-Stocki maintained until the end of his life that Bolshevism was a specifically Russian phenomenon rooted in the centuries-long development of a uniquely repressive, exploitative political culture originally inherited

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<sup>8</sup> Zbigniew K. Brzeziński and Carl J. Friedrich, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (New York: Praeger, 1956), 15-27.

<sup>9</sup> Engerman, *Know Your Enemy*, 207-209.

<sup>10</sup> Sheila Fitzpatrick, “Revisionism in Soviet History,” *History and Theory* 46.4 (December 2007); 77-91.

from the Mongols and steeled in the bloody march of empire-building.<sup>11</sup> While a totalitarian order was normal for ethnic Russians, Smal-Stocki insisted that the spread of Russian and later Soviet imperialism had imprisoned many “captive nations” whose indigenous institutions of democracy and private property faced suppression and, in theory, extinction at the hands of the Bolsheviks and local collaborators appointed by Moscow, necessitating an aggressive American policy of rollback.<sup>12</sup> The final goal of the Soviet occupiers of the “captive nations,” Smal-Stocki stressed, was not just the collectivization of property and the elimination of private life, but, more importantly, the “colonization” of entire nations, the sterilization of national identities, and the thoroughgoing cultural, linguistic, and political “Russification” of the non-Russians.<sup>13</sup>

Smal-Stocki’s application of the totalitarian model to the multinational structure of the “Soviet empire” was novel at a time when American knowledge of the diverse peoples inhabiting Eurasia’s borderlands was still limited.<sup>14</sup> It also met with support from fellow Eastern European emigres and anticommunist politicians who successfully pushed for the creation of a “Captive Nations Week” at the federal level in 1959, infuriating Nikita Khrushchev by denouncing the legitimacy of Soviet rule in non-Russian regions. In one sense, the work of Smal-Stocki and his associates can be broadly located within David C. Engerman’s narrative of the American drive to “get to know” the Soviet Union through the state-sponsored production of social-scientific knowledge and the pursuit of reliable intelligence in the immediate aftermath of the

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<sup>11</sup> A particularly representative text can be found in Roman Smal-Stocki, *The Captive Nations: Nationalism of the non-Russian Nations in the Soviet Union* (New Haven: College and University Press, 1960), 23-46

<sup>12</sup> *Communist Aggression Investigation*, 914-916.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 912; Smal-Stocki, *The Nationality Problem of the Soviet Union and Russian Communist Imperialism* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Company, 1952), 260-338.

<sup>14</sup> See Mark R. Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

Second World War. According to Engerman, the rise of American Sovietology was rooted in the wartime years, when policymakers and military elites in Washington found themselves distressingly lacking in accurate knowledge about their erstwhile enigmatic communist ally.<sup>15</sup> Arriving to the United States in 1947, Smal-Stocki attempted to join these networks of knowledge production and policymaking, promoting the liberation of the “captive nations” from his post at Marquette University, testifying before congressional committees, lecturing at the National War College, and championing a particularly rigid and hawkish version of the totalitarian paradigm.

Smal-Stocki and his fellow uprooted Prometheans, however, only rarely managed to join the elite academic mainstream of American Sovietology, cultivating a more vernacular brand of knowledge production and political agitation that was most deeply rooted in North America’s Polish and Ukrainian diaspora communities. The chief government patrons of displaced Promethean circles, meanwhile, tended to be anticommunist crusaders of the McCarthy years, such as Kersten, who saw refugee academics such as Smal-Stocki as intellectual authorities on their “captive” homelands and readily sought their expert testimony in Congress as they concocted grand schemes for the exploitation of the Soviet Union’s ethnic diversity. Between the late 1940s and the early 1960s, Smal-Stocki had attained some success in reproducing the familiar, anti-Soviet nexus of politics, scholarship, and military intelligence that had sustained his work in the Second Polish Republic from the mid-1920s through the 1930s, yet the retreat of anticommunist firebrands such as Kersten from public affairs coupled with the focus of American Sovietologists on questions of modernization left him and his associates to continue their work primarily in diaspora milieus rather than the leading government and academic institutions on which they had set their sights. Ultimately, it

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<sup>15</sup> Engerman, *Know Your Enemy*, 13-42.

was a younger generation of Sovietologists, Polish-born but American- and Canadian-educated, who became the leading Cold War authorities on the Soviet nationalities, with Richard Pipes and Zbigniew Brzeziński leading this cohort.

### **The transatlantic transmission of Promethean ideas**

The canonical paradigms and narratives within which the interwar Prometheans understood Russian and Soviet history, political culture, and nationalities policies informed the approaches of these borderland exiles to waging their own “cold war” against Moscow between 1926 and 1939. With the outbreak of the Second World War, the Prometheans were forced from their main centers of activity in Poland, which was partitioned between Hitler’s Germany and Stalin’s Soviet Union, and into an uncertain future that augured badly for the continuation of the movement. Deprived of its main sources of funding and state sponsorship, Prometheism never reemerged in its interwar form despite the determined efforts of Lieutenant Colonel Edmund Charaszkiwicz, who worked to organize a new front of “captive nations” from his adoptive home in London up until his death in 1975.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, a small but determined group of Prometheans resolved to resume their interwar campaigns against the Soviet Union within the emerging contours of the post-1945 Cold War, gravitating towards McCarthy-era anticommunism, founding new academic centers in the United States, and lobbying for the liberation of the recently expanded community of “captive nations.” Especially central to Prometheism’s Cold War afterlives was the struggle to inject the canonical paradigms of the interwar years into the emerging epistemic frameworks within which Americans understood the nature of the Soviet system, both within elite Sovietological and policymaking circles and in public discourse more broadly.

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<sup>16</sup> Extensive evidence can be found in Fond 38, which contains Charaszkiwicz’s papers, at the JPIA.

Włodzimierz Bączkowski, one of the leading authors of canonical Promethean articles on Russian and Soviet issues in the interwar period, was still a relatively young man of thirty-four years when the Wehrmacht and the Red Army entered Poland in 1939. When the Second World War erupted, Bączkowski remained close with the military intelligence elites of the Second Division who had sponsored Prometheism, first emigrating to Romania before continuing to Palestine via İstanbul in 1941, working for both the British Office of Strategic Services and the exiled Polish authorities in the Middle East until the end of the war. Settling in Jerusalem, Bączkowski became an expert on the politics and history of the region, participating in the foundation of the *Reduta* Eastern Institute in 1943 and teaching on the Soviet menace to the Middle East in Beirut from 1948 to 1955, when he permanently moved to the United States. *Reduta*, which relocated to London in 1946, continued the mission of Warsaw's Eastern Institute in emigration, harboring emigre intellectuals and politicians from the countries occupied by Soviet forces after 1945 while seeking to counter Moscow's anticipated offensive into southwestern Asia.<sup>17</sup> Like its interwar predecessors, *Reduta's* flagship journal, *The Eastern Quarterly*, took a hard line against Moscow, expressing the view that the mounting conflict between the West and the Soviet Union was fundamentally a clash of incompatible civilizations rather than a resolvable flareup between two regimes. Locating the roots of the Soviet system in the times of the Mongol conquest, the periodical's contributors likewise warned of the ruthless, repressive nature of Bolshevik power, which, they cautioned, would never be satisfied with anything less than world domination.<sup>18</sup> In his own lectures delivered at the American University in Beirut, Bączkowski warned of the insatiable expansionism

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 20-21.

<sup>18</sup> These themes are developed at length in the articles in *The Eastern Quarterly* 2.1 (1949).

that had driven Russia's territorial expansion for centuries, predicting that the Middle East would become Moscow's next target after the fall of Eastern Europe.<sup>19</sup>

It was also during Bączkowski's time in Jerusalem that a particularly notable process of intellectual transmission between the interwar Promethean Orientalist canon and the rapidly growing Anglophone corpus of knowledge about the Soviet Union transpired. In 1946, while directly affiliated with *Reduta*, Bączkowski synthesized many of the most important Promethean arguments about the nature of the Soviet system in a single, slender Polish-language volume, titled *Russia, Then and Now* (*Rosja wczoraj i dziś*). Much as he had done in the 1930s, Bączkowski proceeded from the central contention that Russia was partly "European in form" but fundamentally "Asiatic in content," having inherited its political culture and state structure from the Byzantine Empire, the Mongols and the "Eastern" peoples conquered by Genghis Khan. Russia's growth into a great power, Bączkowski argued, had generally been attributed by Western observers to its colossal standing army, yet this was by no means the most important factor that had allowed the Tsars and later the Bolsheviks to bring most of northern Eurasia under their rule. Far more crucial was Russia's particular approach to war and statecraft, which relied upon counterintelligence, diversion, misinformation, and propaganda to manipulate and undermine otherwise formidable enemies.<sup>20</sup>

Because Russia had grown to be so geographically extensive and nationally diverse, its state structure faced constant pressure and the risk of implosion, yet this had only caused its leaders to perfect their specific art of survival at all costs.

Accordingly, Bączkowski warned, Russians held no respect for higher ideals or values,

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<sup>19</sup> JPIA, 132.125 contains some of Bączkowski's lectures on Middle Eastern geopolitics delivered in Beirut.

<sup>20</sup> Bączkowski, *Rosja wczoraj i dziś: studium historyczno-polityczne* (Jerusalem: Gesher Press, 1946).

taking a brutally realist and cynical approach to maximizing their power by any means necessary.<sup>21</sup> Unsurprisingly, this meant that Russian political culture had little use for principles of national sovereignty and self-determination, abiding instead by the logic of cultural and linguistic Russification as a means by which to ensure the eventual uniformity of its subjects and transform the potentially rebellious “captive nations” into docile “dominions.” Russia, for Bączkowski, was at heart a tyrannical state system constructed from coercion, not a democratic national community that had congealed organically.<sup>22</sup>

One of Bączkowski’s original additions to *Russia, Then and Now* was his commentary on the “return to tradition” that had taken place in the late 1930s and during the Second World War, when the Bolsheviks, facing both internal tensions and the threat of an Axis victory, had embraced Russian patriotism while relaxing restrictions on the Orthodox Church and easing state intervention in family and economic life. Nicholas Timasheff, a Russian emigre living in the United States, had interpreted these changes as a partial restoration of the traditional, pre-Soviet Russian society in his 1946 book *The Great Retreat*, but Bączkowski reached a much different conclusion.<sup>23</sup> Owing to the nature of Russian political culture, the “return to tradition,” he wrote, was largely instrumental, marking, if anything, the evolution of Bolshevism into an even more powerful form of despotism that would rule the Soviet Union and aspire to world domination with characteristic mercilessness. Stalin had reopened churches for the sole purpose of subjugating them to state control and turning religion into an instrument of ideological hegemony, while Russian nationalist slogans had

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 40-42.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 189-242.

<sup>23</sup> Nicholas Timasheff, *The Great Retreat: The Growth and Decline of Communism in Russia* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1946).

been deployed in a calculated move to rally a collapsing Red Army in 1941 to 1942. Here, Bączkowski remarked that Russian statecraft, though abiding by the same essential principles established over centuries, was nevertheless “dynamic” and capable of developing over time, as the transition from the imperial model to the Bolshevik system had shown.<sup>24</sup>

What was truly important for Westerners to comprehend in 1945, however, was that the hypothetical passing of the Bolsheviks and the appearance of more “traditional” successors would entail the strengthening and “deepening” of Russian despotism, perhaps now with greater popular appeal, rather than its passing. If anything, Stalin’s apparent embrace of “tradition” reflected the growing entrenchment of Bolshevism in its essentially “Russo-Muscovite” roots and the intensification of Russification.<sup>25</sup>

Bączkowski warned that now, with both Germany and Japan defeated and their respective spheres of influences lying in ruins, Russia’s drive for conquest and collectivization would only find more advantageous directions in which to continue, particularly in the contested colonial world. Western hopes for a lasting peace or further cooperation with Moscow, in a word, were naive.<sup>26</sup>

Bączkowski’s Polish-language study would have likely gone unnoticed in the Anglophone world had it not been for the publication of a translated and slightly expanded English edition by his colleagues at *Reduta* in 1947. This time, the monograph was entitled *Towards an Understanding of Russia: A Study in Policy and Strategy*, and specifically set out to rectify Western misapprehensions about Russia’s history and political culture. This new volume remained largely faithful to *Rosja*

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<sup>24</sup> Bączkowski, *Rosja wczoraj i dziś*, 43-88.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 44-49, 70-78.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 243-246.



*wczoraj i dziś* in structure and content, though a closer reading reveals a few notable additions that reflect Bączkowski's desire to convey the Promethean assessment of the Russian threat to a broader international audience. The most notable of these is the use of the term "totalitarian" to describe the Russian state, which the Prometheans had hitherto characterized as "despotic," "tyrannical," "Asiatic," or "Machiavellian."<sup>27</sup> While the canonical Cold War-era writings of Hannah Arendt, Zbigniew Brzeziński, and Carl Friedrich were still at least four years away, the term "totalitarian" was hardly unknown in English political and social-scientific discourse, though it had yet to receive the type of detailed elaboration that it found in the 1950s.<sup>28</sup>

Bączkowski's invocation of "totalitarianism," of course, was rooted in a specific understanding of the grand trajectory of Russian history rather than a more general theory that could be applied to different contexts, making it an early but ultimately limited contribution to the "totalitarian school" of American Sovietology. Nevertheless, the defining features that Bączkowski saw in the Soviet Union were not entirely unlike those of the ideal-type totalitarian polity sketched out by Brzeziński and Friedrich in 1956, which included omnipresent state surveillance, the suppression of economic choice, the rule of a despotic and ideologically driven party, and the centralized control of the means of communication.<sup>29</sup> More broadly, the notion that Russian and Soviet "totalitarianism" derived from a deviation from healthy Western norms anticipated the logic of the popular American narrative of a Soviet "evil empire" bent on expansion most notably advanced by the Polish-Jewish historian Richard Pipes.<sup>30</sup> Bączkowski

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<sup>27</sup> Idem., *Towards an Understanding of Russia* (Jerusalem: Hamadpis Liphshitz Press, 1947), 1-10.

<sup>28</sup> Engerman, *Know Your Enemy*, 206-207.

<sup>29</sup> Brzeziński and Friedrich, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*, 15-27.

<sup>30</sup> See Richard Pipes, *Russia Under the Old Regime* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974) and *Property and Freedom* (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 2007), both of which emphasize Russia's alleged deviation from the "normal" course of European history.

also emerged as an ardent advocate of “containment” against the Soviet Union, warning that the Western “atomic bomb camp,” though enjoying the upper hand technologically and militarily, would face ubiquitous and determined efforts at exporting totalitarianism by underhanded, unconventional means from the Soviet-led “Trojan horse camp.”<sup>31</sup>

Bączkowski’s book, which was also translated into Turkish and Arabic, registered in the “atomic bomb camp,” appearing in the summer of 1950 in a State Department bibliography as a title to be procured for government use before being formally introduced as a textbook at the National War College in 1951.<sup>32</sup> While it is unclear how many people would have read Bączkowski’s first postwar monograph, the case of how *Rosja wczoraj i dziś* reached the United States as *Towards an Understanding of Russia* constitutes one of the few specific situations in which a text bearing the canonical ideas of the Promethean Orientalist paradigm directly entered the growing body of work read by America’s first generation of Soviet experts. Although the book’s actual influence on American Sovietology was more limited than Bączkowski had hoped, its diagnosis of Russia’s “totalitarian” political culture as well as its warnings for Western governments would have found some appeal amid the chaotic unfolding of the Cold War and the drawing of the “iron curtain.” Yet perhaps more importantly, the role of emigre networks in the Middle East in continuing the activities of the Prometheans and bringing Bączkowski’s work to the West highlights how the wartime reconfiguration of Prometheism’s global infrastructure made possible the transmission of knowledge across linguistic, political, and epistemic boundaries. Zaur

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<sup>31</sup> Bączkowski, *Towards an Understanding of Russia*, 202-203.

<sup>32</sup> “Soviet Bibliography,” manuscript from the United States Department of State, Division of Library and Reference Services, Office of Libraries and Intelligence Acquisition, 2 August 1950, 5. doi: <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/UF00089415/00024>; JPIA, 132.82, 8.

Gasimov shows that this was not only the case in the United States, but also in Turkey, where Prometheans of Azeri and Tatar background such as Mammad Amin Rasulzadeh and Ayas Ishaki contributed significantly to the development of local understandings of the Soviet Union after 1939.<sup>33</sup> Uprooted and displaced, often doubly so for those who had moved to Poland after 1926, the Prometheans were determined to transplant their ideas and institutions to the countries that now stood in the vanguard of the emerging global struggle against communism.

### **The “captive nations” and the Cold War totalitarian paradigm**

While Włodzimierz Bączkowski was making his way from Poland to Palestine in the company of the Second Division’s officer corps, his fellow Promethean and longtime colleague at the Eastern Institute, Roman Smal-Stocki, followed a different trajectory to the postwar West. Rather than leaving the European continent, Smal-Stocki relocated from Warsaw to Prague, then home to the Free Ukrainian University reestablished in Munich after the end of the war, where he worked to aid fellow emigre scholars while living under surveillance by the German Gestapo.<sup>34</sup> While life under German occupation was harsh, the danger of falling into Soviet hands as the tide of the struggle on the Eastern Front turned was far more menacing for Smal-Stocki, who made his way to a displaced persons (DP) camp in the American sector in 1945.<sup>35</sup> Fortunately for Smal-Stocki, who had by then distinguished himself as a linguist, an expert on the Soviet Union, and a leading figure in both the Promethean movement and the Ukrainian diaspora, powerful members of the Ukrainian community in North

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<sup>33</sup> Zaur Gasimov, “Anti-communism Imported? Azeri Emigrant Periodicals in Istanbul and Ankara (1920-1950s),” *Cumhuriyet Tarihi Araştırmaları Dergisi* 8.16 (Autumn 2012); 3-18. doi: [http://www.ctad.hacettepe.edu.tr/8\\_16/1.pdf](http://www.ctad.hacettepe.edu.tr/8_16/1.pdf).

<sup>34</sup> *Marquette University Slavic Papers* 11 (1949-1961), vi.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, vi.

America were already aware of his situation. From its debut in 1944, *The Ukrainian Quarterly* published by the Ukrainian Congress Committee of America in New York featured numerous articles drawing attention to the plight of Ukrainian DPs in Europe, specifically warning of the fate that awaited Ukrainian academics like Smal-Stocki were the Soviet authorities to capture them.<sup>36</sup> The cost of losing such talented Ukrainians was too great for those in the diaspora to stand by idly, wrote figures such as Lev Dobriansky in 1945 and 1946, not least because these “DP professors” had fought to liberate Ukraine from Soviet domination in the interwar period and would now prove to be invaluable allies in the West’s confrontation with Moscow. Dobriansky, an American of Ukrainian heritage born in New York who enjoyed prominent standing in the diaspora, spent most of the Cold War years as an economics professor at Georgetown University, where he frequently served the United States government, warned of the irreconcilability of tensions with Moscow, and arranged for emigres such as Smal-Stocki to deliver lectures on the Soviet menace.<sup>37</sup>

Dobriansky and his associates urged Western governments to intervene on behalf of the “DP professors,” and in 1947, Anthony Drexel Biddle, the former American ambassador to Poland, arranged for Smal-Stocki to leave Germany and settle in the United States, where he was soon hired as a professor at Marquette University, a Catholic institution in Milwaukee.<sup>38</sup> At a time when federally funded “area studies” and “Soviet studies” programs were proliferating around the country, Smal-Stocki was

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<sup>36</sup> Representative articles include Lev Dobriansky, “Ominous Features of a Divided World,” *The Ukrainian Quarterly* 2.2 (Winter 1946); 142-166; and “The World of Freedom and the World of Tyranny,” *The Ukrainian Quarterly* 2.2 (Winter 1946); 274-284.

<sup>37</sup> Dobriansky, “Preface,” in *The Nationality Problem*, v-vii; “Foreword,” in *The Captive Nations*, 7-12; Anthony Hlynka, “On Behalf of Ukrainian Displaced Persons,” *The Ukrainian Quarterly* 2.2 (Winter 1946); 167-181; Walter Dushnyck, “The Importance of the Problem of Displaced Persons,” *The Ukrainian Quarterly* 2.2 (Winter 1946); 285-288.

<sup>38</sup> *Marquette University Slavic Papers*, vi-vii.

well positioned to continue his interwar academic work and political activism in the upper Midwest, especially since the advent of McCarthy-era anticommunism and the heyday of the totalitarian paradigm were soon to come. While Smal-Stocki devoted much of his work to the Shevchenko Scientific Society, a Ukrainian diaspora organization in North America, his main project soon became the establishment of a Slavic Institute at Marquette that, not unlike the Eastern Institute in Warsaw, functioned as a center of Sovietological knowledge production that attracted a wide community of experts united in their anticommunist convictions.<sup>39</sup> At the same time, Marquette's Slavic Institute provided Smal-Stocki with a platform from which to advance the "captive nations" paradigm and bring the plight of the non-Russian peoples of the Soviet sphere to the attention of the American academic profession, the United States government, and the wider public, all of whom he faulted for failing to take a sufficiently hard line against Moscow.

The groundwork for the Slavic Institute materialized in the course of 1948, largely as a result of Smal-Stocki's close collaboration with Alfred J. Sokolnicki, the director of Marquette's Speech Clinic, and Francis X. Swietlik, dean of the Law School. Both Sokolnicki and Swietlik were important American-born members of the Polish diaspora in the greater Milwaukee area who were painfully aware of the fate of Poland in the last two years of the Second World War and readily supported the idea of endowing Marquette with an academic center specializing in the linguistics, politics, and history of the Soviet Union and its Eastern European satellite countries.<sup>40</sup> In March of 1949, the university's administration approved the foundation of the Slavic Institute, which, within its first decade, attracted a diverse community of professional academics,

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 16-19.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, v.

military men from the National War College, exiled Eastern European intellectuals, and Catholic priests who vastly expanded the range of classes on the Soviet space offered at Marquette.<sup>41</sup> While Smal-Stocki had taught popular survey courses on Eastern European and Soviet history and politics as early as 1947, the creation of the Slavic Institute led to the establishment of a formal, interdisciplinary concentration in Slavic studies that placed heavy emphasis on understanding the repressive nature of the Soviet system within a totalitarian frame.<sup>42</sup>

Interestingly, the Slavic Institute's founding charter never mentioned the Soviet Union, declaring instead the necessity of strengthening contacts between Americans and the world's Slavic nations while underlining the importance of serving Slavic diaspora communities outside of Europe.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, a glance at the publications and lectures of the Slavic Institute reveals the centrality of the "captive nations" paradigm and its totalitarian underpinnings to how Smal-Stocki and his circle of colleagues and associates studied and represented the Soviet nationalities system. During the 1950s, in particular after the "Polish October" and the suppression of the Hungarian Revolution in 1956, the Slavic Institute's intellectual output emphasized the imperialist, "Russifying" aspirations of Moscow towards its "captive nations," calling upon American leaders to contain and eventually reverse the spread of communism.<sup>44</sup> Smal-Stocki and his allies directly appealed to the residents of Milwaukee in radio interviews and with a six-month television series titled *Hammer and Sickle* that ran in

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 14-20.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 14-20; a collection of essays authored by the Institute's affiliates can be found in *Russian and Communist Imperialism in Action*, ed. Smal-Stocki and Alfred J. Sokolnicki (Milwaukee: Slavic Institute of Marquette University, 1963).

<sup>43</sup> *Marquette University Slavic Papers*, 1-2.

<sup>44</sup> Smal-Stocki, "Origin of National Communism," in *Russian and Communist Imperialism*, 19-42.

1958 to 1959, featuring Dobriansky as well as prominent military men.<sup>45</sup> Notably, the Slavic Institute's apparent reliance on private funding from the university and the efforts of diaspora leaders set it aside from other institutions that benefited from extensive government grants, suggesting that it was at least as much the result of emigre-led initiatives as it was the product of state funding.

Much like Włodzimierz Bączkowski's postwar publications, Smal-Stocki's scholarly work at the Slavic Institute continued to develop within the canonical paradigms of interwar Promethean Orientalism while approaching the Soviet system from an angle that was broadly compatible with American anticommunist models of the Soviet Union as a totalitarian despotism. Writing his first major monograph for an American audience in 1952, Smal-Stocki argued that Russia had emerged from Mongol roots and developed a uniquely repressive political culture that was deeply hostile to the Western "national idea" and its liberal capitalist values, swallowing up entire peoples and seeking to transform them into a uniform mass of silent subjects through Russification.<sup>46</sup> For Smal-Stocki, the "national spirit" was an organic emanation of the linguistic and cultural distinctiveness of "civilized" human populations striving for unity and sovereignty, while the Russian state, abiding by its ruthless and essentially non-Western lust for power, sought to destroy the natural fiber of nations by any means possible.<sup>47</sup> Smal-Stocki specifically cited interwar Soviet ideas of creating a common proletarian language as proof of Stalin's thinly veiled

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<sup>45</sup> *Marquette University Slavic Papers*, 10-11.

<sup>46</sup> Smal-Stocki, *The Nationality Problem*, 14-17, 41-43.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-13.

desire to establish Russian as the sole tongue of the Soviet Union and, in due course, the wider world.<sup>48</sup>

Building on an article originally published in *The Ukrainian Quarterly*, Smal-Stocki also openly charged the Soviet government with genocide, a term recently coined by the Polish-Jewish jurist Rafał Lemkin, insisting that the purges of indigenous intellectuals in the 1930s and the elimination of “wealthy” peasants, many of them ethnic Ukrainians, constituted special crimes against the “captive nations.”<sup>49</sup> These policies, Smal-Stocki explained, were the specific crimes of “Russian communism,” which had masked itself with the language of Marxist internationalism while remaining true to the deep structures of Russian political culture.<sup>50</sup> While many allegedly misguided Western academics regarded Tito as the world’s first “national communist” and lauded him for resisting Stalin, Smal-Stocki contended that it was Lenin, as the bearer of a distinctly Russian style of rule, who should receive this distinction.<sup>51</sup>

Within the next two years, most of these prominent ideas would find an interested and eager audience in the congressional Select Committee on Communist Aggression, where Smal-Stocki was already respected by his congressman and personal ally Charles J. Kersten as an authority on the “captive nations.” Yet if Smal-Stocki found himself in intellectually sympathetic company among the McCarthy-era anticommunist politicians of the upper Midwest, his relationship with Soviet specialists in Anglo-American academia was decidedly more strained. Already in 1952, Smal-Stocki

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 79-92.

<sup>49</sup> Idem., “The Genocide Convention,” *The Ukrainian Quarterly* 5.2 (Spring 1949); 144-163.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 146-160; Idem., *The Nationality Problem*, 41-78.

<sup>51</sup> Idem., “Origin of National Communism,” 38-39.



explained that his expectations of the United States as the land of Lincoln and Jefferson had been rudely soured when he immediately encountered scholars who expressed a positive view of the Soviet Union, either for its role in defeating Germany or because of its progressive social and nationalities policies.<sup>52</sup> Echoing McCarthyist views of the American university as a hotbed of communist infiltration, Smal-Stocki declared American academia to constitute a “Soviet colony” across the Atlantic.<sup>53</sup> He specifically took aim at American linguists who had found merit in the discredited quasi-Marxist theories of Nikolai Marr while attacking Hans Kohn, a scholar of nationalism then based in New York who drew a sharp distinction between the inclusive, civic nationalism of Western Europe and the xenophobic, atavistic nationalism of Eastern Europe, placing Poland and Ukraine squarely in the latter camp.<sup>54</sup>

Smal-Stocki also took issue with the English historian E.H. Carr’s account of the October Revolution, which included strong elements of social history that challenged the notion of Bolshevik power as something imposed exclusively from above.<sup>55</sup> More broadly, he dismissed as fundamentally mistaken those historians, political scientists, and sociologists who believed in the coming of a Soviet-American “convergence” arising from common processes of industrialization and modernization, something that seemed possible and increasingly likely after Stalin’s death.<sup>56</sup> The United States, Smal-

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<sup>52</sup> *Idem.*, *The Nationality Problem*, xii-xxv.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, xiv.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 10-13, 250-259. See Hans Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism* (New York: Macmillan, 1944) and, for a more recent commentary on the dichotomy between “East” and “West,” Andrzej Walicki, *The Enlightenment and the birth of modern nationhood: Polish political thought from Noble Republicanism to Tadeusz Kościuszko* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989).

<sup>55</sup> Smal-Stocki, *The Nationality Problem*, 11-12.

<sup>56</sup> Engerman, *Know Your Enemy*, 197-224.

Stocki argued, was a harmonious society built on freedom, whereas the Soviet Union could only escape its totalitarian structure if it were to collapse.<sup>57</sup> All of these academics, who either presented a positive reading of Soviet history or refused to subscribe to the totalitarian paradigm, drew the ire of Smal-Stocki, who firmly believed that American academia should function as a loyal arm of the wider anticommunist struggle, a view that certainly found its roots in the relationship between Promethean Orientalism and the Polish military intelligence staff between 1926 and 1939. Accordingly, Smal-Stocki found some of his most committed and receptive audiences outside of Milwaukee when he lectured at major American military academies in Maryland and Washington, D.C., though he also found a second home at Georgetown University, where Lev Dobriansky taught and Włodzimierz Bączkowski occasionally presented.<sup>58</sup>

### **Anticommunist campaigns for the “captive nations”**

While Smal-Stocki’s monograph on “Russian communist imperialism” did not receive much attention from fellow scholars outside of Marquette’s Slavic Institute and the Polish and Ukrainian diaspora communities, its publication came at an important juncture in the entry of the “captive nations” narrative into United States government and military discourse on the Soviet Union. As early as 1948, Smal-Stocki had published an open letter in the pages of *Commonweal*, a Catholic journal based in New York, calling for the continuation of the Promethean struggle through an “American Committee for Free Russia” that would fight for the abolition of the Bolshevik regime and unfetter the non-Russian nationalities.<sup>59</sup> Later, in 1951, Charles Kersten proposed a

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<sup>57</sup> Smal-Stocki, *The Captive Nations*, 17-18.

<sup>58</sup> Dobriansky, “A Man and Patriot,” *The Ukrainian Quarterly* 25.3 (Autumn 1969); 204-218.

<sup>59</sup> Smal-Stocki, *The Nationality Problem*, 454-460.

bill in the House of Representatives that would formally denounce “Russian communist” crimes against the non-Russian nationalities and recognize the right of the borderland peoples to complete self-determination and individual freedom. This document, which was redirected to the congressional Committee on Foreign Affairs and apparently never signed into law, nevertheless met with widespread approval from diaspora nationalists in the United States. It also bore notable signs of input from Smal-Stocki and Lev Dobriansky, as the bill enumerated nearly all of the original and often obscure “captive nations” included in the Promethean movement while featuring a lengthy and detailed section on Bolshevik crimes against Ukraine.<sup>60</sup>

Although this proposed resolution was tabled, Kersten, with the input of Smal-Stocki and Dobriansky, succeeded in 1952 at obtaining a \$100 million allotment for an amendment to the Mutual Security Act that would be devoted to organizing military units formed by anti-Soviet exiles within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) while rendering assistance to partisans fighting within the Soviet Union.<sup>61</sup> Kersten’s intelligence, derived from the testimonies of Smal-Stocki, indicated not only that insurgencies against Moscow were swelling in borderlands such as Ukraine but that the Soviet Union would face disastrous internal strife if the United States government promoted the secession of its constituent nationalities, which would leave only a vastly dwarfed Bolshevik territory around Moscow in its wake.<sup>62</sup> For a brief moment around 1951, periodicals such as the Catholic magazine *The Sign* quoted

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 462-474.

<sup>61</sup> *Mutual Security Act Extension: Hearings before the Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, Eighty-Second Congress, Second Session on H.R. 7005: to amend the Mutual Security Act of 1951, and for other purposes* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1952), 1105-1117.

<sup>62</sup> “Ukrainians a Potent Ally Against the Stalin Regime. Extension of Remarks of Hon. Charles J. Kersten of Wisconsin in the House of Representatives. Monday, April 2 1951,” in *United States of America Congressional Record: Proceedings and Debates of the 82nd Congress, First Session. Volume 97, Part 12. Appendix* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1951), A1735-A1738.

Smal-Stocki with an air of confidence in advocating the mobilization of the principle of “national-self determination” against the Soviet Union as a means of ending the Cold War without an open military conflict.<sup>63</sup> Like the interwar Prometheans, these American interlocutors of Smal-Stocki emphasized that there was a fundamental rift between the Soviet Union’s despotic Muscovite core and its outlying, ethnically non-Russian areas, even mentioning that the latter had struggled to break away from the former in 1917 and were only forcibly reintegrated by the Red Army.<sup>64</sup> Yet by repeating Promethean tropes about the Soviet Union, Kersten and his contemporaries also stumbled into the same strategic blunders as their “captive” experts, vastly overestimating the scale of anti-Soviet uprisings in Ukraine and the Baltic countries while, more understandably, neglecting to account for the successes of the Bolsheviks in institutionalizing national identities and controlling the fissiparous tendencies of nationalism since the 1920s. Kersten’s proposals, in the end, were initially approved and drew federal funding through 1953, when their alleged inefficacy combined with the absence of interest among America’s European allies in creating armed formations of Soviet borderland exiles led to the amendment’s abrogation.<sup>65</sup>

Undaunted, Kersten and several other congressmen, most of them from the heavily Slavic Midwest, expanded their official campaign on behalf of the “captive nations” between 1953 and 1954, chairing the congressional Select Committee on Communist Aggression that interviewed Smal-Stocki in New York. The Committee’s conclusions on the nature of Soviet expansionism, not only in the Baltic countries but, by 1954, worldwide, condemned “Russian communism” as fundamentally incompatible with the

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., A1736.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> László Borhi, *Hungary in the Cold War, 1945-1956: Between the United States and the Soviet Union* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2004), 286.

Western world while reproducing much of Smal-Stocki's testimony in specifically citing Ukraine's encounter with Bolshevik rule as a paradigmatic example of Moscow's policies towards non-Russian peoples.<sup>66</sup> While Kersten continued to fight for formal government recognition of the alleged evils of communism, Dobriansky, apparently with significant input from Smal-Stocki, authored a brief but important resolution on the "captive nations" that was signed into law by the Eisenhower administration in 1959. Building on the basic premise that the international growth of Soviet power, and "Russian communism since 1918" in particular, was based on the brutal repression of the "captive nations," the text insisted that the United States must recognize and fight for the liberties of the non-Russians subjugated by Moscow. The law established a "captive nations week" in the third week of July, which has continued to be observed after the fall of the Soviet Union in honor of the inhabitants of countries branded as dictatorships by the United States.<sup>67</sup> One year later, in 1960, Smal-Stocki published a monograph elaborating on the history of the "captive nations," receiving an emphatically positive foreword from Dobriansky, who also wrote the preface to Smal-Stocki's 1952 book on "Russian communist imperialism."<sup>68</sup>

The "captive nations" law met with support from diaspora nationalists and exiles from the specific countries listed in its text, though representatives of the Russian emigration immediately and indignantly picked up on the document's argument that ethnic Russians were the captors and even the beneficiaries in the Soviet system. Some politicians and government advisers, including George Kennan, considered the law to

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<sup>66</sup> *Special report of the Soviet Committee on Communist Aggression, House of Representatives, Eighty-third Congress, second session, under authority of H. Res. 346 and H. Res. 438* (Washington, DC: United States Government Publishing Office, 1954-1955).

<sup>67</sup> "Proclamation 3303: Captive Nations Week, 1959," in *Code of Federal Regulations: Title 3 - The President, 1959-1963 Compilation* (Washington, DC: United States Government Publishing Office, 1964).

<sup>68</sup> Smal-Stocki, *The Captive Nations*, 118.

constitute an unnecessary provocation against Moscow that would only complicate Soviet-American relations by effectively declaring the illegitimacy of Bolshevik rule over a significant part of the Soviet Union. Other critics found the inclusion of “Idel-Ural” and “Cossackia” among the “captive nations” to be ridiculous, noting that these places could not be found on even a detailed map of the Soviet space and sounded more like fanciful products of emigre imaginations.<sup>69</sup>

What this last argument missed, of course, was that both Idel-Ural and Cossackia had been part of the Promethean pantheon of “captive nations” prior to 1939, owing to the presence of influential groups of Tatars from the Volga-Ural region and Cossacks from southern European Russia and Siberia in the movement. A short-lived Idel-Ural polity had existed in late 1917 and early 1918, headed by Ayas Ishaki, one of Prometheus’s most important minds who wove networks with other emigres in Finland, Turkey, and the Far East.<sup>70</sup> Meanwhile, although the exact geographical extent of a theoretical Cossack polity remained a controversial matter, a sizable Cossack emigration led in part by Ignacy Bylyj had migrated to the West after the Second World War, pushing for autonomy from Moscow. It was actually Bylyj, once an interlocutor of the Prometheans, who protested that calls for decolonization in the postwar United States tended to focus on the global South while forgetting or ignoring the burden of “red colonialism” in Eurasia.<sup>71</sup> Far from being opportunistic inventions, both “Idel-Ural” and “Cossackia” were persistent remnants of the Promethean geopolitical imagination that came to be embedded in Dobriansky’s law, reflecting the

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<sup>69</sup> See *The Ukrainian Quarterly* 36.1 (Spring 1980); 123-125.

<sup>70</sup> See Katherine E. Graney, *Of Khans and Kremfins: Tatarstan and the Future of Ethno-federalism in Russia* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009).

<sup>71</sup> JPIA 38.5, 60-65.

continuing importance of interwar Orientalists such as Smal-Stocki in shaping Cold War-era anticommunist discourse about the “captive nations.”<sup>72</sup>

### **The afterlives of totalitarian ideas**

While the “captive nations” narrative and the idea of a historically specific “Russian communism” were finding their way into mainstream American discourses on the Soviet Union by 1959, their place in academic circles was much less well established. While Smal-Stocki’s Slavic Institute at Marquette University, Dobriansky’s Soviet Studies program at Georgetown, and the National War College proved to be notably receptive to canonical Promethean ideas, the rest of the Sovietological profession, as David C. Engerman shows, was already leaving behind the more rigid variants of the totalitarian paradigm in the late 1950s.<sup>73</sup> Most of America’s leading Sovietologists, including Zbigniew Brzeziński himself by the 1960s, found little use for excessively fixed representations of Soviet political culture that operated in a unidirectional, top-down fashion, expressing much more interest in dynamic models that could account for the significant changes wrought by technological development and large-scale social change.<sup>74</sup> Moreover, the notion of an irreconcilable antagonism between “East” and “West,” though undoubtedly popular both among anticommunist politicians and in the American popular imagination, were growing out of touch with what many Sovietologists saw as a potential global convergence between the Soviet camp and the American-led world.<sup>75</sup> Nevertheless,

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<sup>72</sup> See the list of “captive nations” displayed on the cover of the periodical *Młody Prometeusz* (1936-1938).

<sup>73</sup> Engerman, *Know Your Enemy*, 222-224.

<sup>74</sup> Idem., “The Fall of Totalitarianism and the Rise of Zbigniew Brzeziński,” in *Zbig: The Strategy and Statecraft of Zbigniew Brzeziński*, ed. Charles Gati (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), 27-41.

<sup>75</sup> Idem., *Know Your Enemy*, 218-222.

men such as Smal-Stocki remained true to their Promethean visions of the Soviet Union's nature as an essentially totalitarian empire, maintaining their prominence among diaspora lobbyists and fellow exiles even if they grew increasingly marginal in the American university landscape of the 1960s. Already riven by internal divisions, the totalitarian paradigm encountered an even broader challenge from the revisionist scholars of Soviet history beginning in the late 1960s, when the rise of the New Left precipitated a turn to social and cultural history as seen "from below," unsettling the dominant Sovietological approaches that focused on elites and state institutions.<sup>76</sup>

Nevertheless, even through the period of the revisionist rebellion against the canonical assumptions of totalitarianism, the multinational character of the Soviet Union continued to be widely neglected, and the one truly authoritative monograph to be published on the subject before the 1990s bore striking similarities to the Promethean "captive nations" narrative. Its author was Richard Pipes, a historian of Polish-Jewish origin who emigrated from Warsaw to the United States via Italy following the start of the Second World War. According to his memoirs, Pipes, who served in the American Air Force and completed his education at Muskingum College, Cornell, and Harvard, made the realization around 1951 that the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union were both multinational states, prompting the question of how the Bolsheviks had managed to keep together most of the Tsarist borderlands after 1917.<sup>77</sup> The answer, which Pipes advanced in a 1954 book that has since been republished in multiple editions, was that Lenin and his comrades, as conspiratorial revolutionaries trained in the use of power, employed a combination of cynical deception and brutal coercion to defeat secessionist nationalists in the non-Russian peripheries and crush

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<sup>76</sup> Fitzpatrick, "Revisionism in Soviet History," 77-78.

<sup>77</sup> Richard Pipes, *Vixi: Memoirs of a Non-Belonger* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 70-73.



popular desires for independence. Where possible, they used the promise of “self-determination” to mask their essential goal of transforming Russia into a nationally homogeneous communist society. When this approach failed, the Bolsheviks relied on local Russian minorities to staff the Red Army and crush their non-Russian opponents, particularly in Ukraine and Central Asia. While Pipes ended his narrative in 1923, he left little doubt that the Bolshevik approach to building the Soviet Union on the ruins of imperial Russia relied heavily on Russian nationalism and the continuation of centralism and oppression in the borderlands.<sup>78</sup>

In a much later work from 1974, *Russia under the Old Regime*, Pipes partly reproduced the Promethean *Sonderweg* narrative by contending that the foundations for Bolshevik dictatorship had been laid by the Tsarist model of patrimonial rule, something inherited, in the final analysis, from the Mongols.<sup>79</sup> It is not clear if Pipes had any contact with Promethean emigres after 1945, yet his interpretations of Russian history became canonical in the totalitarian school and proved to be especially popular with the wider reading public. One connection can be found in Smal-Stocki’s books and articles on the “captive nations” from 1960 to 1963, in which he cites Pipes’s 1954 work and quotes the assertion that Lenin aimed to bring as much national uniformity as possible to the multinational Soviet Union.<sup>80</sup> Pipes may also have encountered Bączkowski at Harvard’s Russian Research Center in 1957, though the link is more difficult to conclusively establish.<sup>81</sup> Today, Pipes’s interpretation of early Soviet nationalities policies remains prominent, though the opening of archives after 1989 and

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<sup>78</sup> Idem., *The Formation of the Soviet Union: Communism and Nationalism, 1917-1923* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997 [1964, 1954]).

<sup>79</sup> Idem., *Vixi*, 81-82.

<sup>80</sup> Smal-Stocki, *The Captive Nations*, 109; Idem., “Origin of National Communism,” 35-36.

<sup>81</sup> JPIA, 132.40 contains documents linking Pipes and Bączkowski.

the pioneering work of Terry Martin and Francine Hirsch have all shown that the Bolsheviks were actually skillful nation-builders who incorporated nationalism into the Soviet state rather than simply trying to destroy it, as Smal-Stocki repeatedly wrote.<sup>82</sup> While expert witnesses from Eastern Europe such as Smal-Stocki held great sway over how Americans imagined the inner life of the Soviet Union from 1945 to 1989, the canonical totalitarian interpretations of Bolshevik nationalities policies represented in the “captive nations” paradigm have, to a great extent, been overturned by a newer generation of researchers. The essential conclusion of this recent work has been that communism and nationalism were not diametrically opposed, as the Prometheans thought, but that the Bolsheviks managed to synthesize the two into an ethnofederal structure that endured across much of northern Eurasia for more than seventy years. Nevertheless, totalitarian ideas still live on in popular opinion and among the political and military elites responsible for shaping American policy towards the present-day Russian Federation.

## **Conclusions**

The attempted transplantation of canonical Promethean ideas about the Soviet system to the United States shows the importance of framing the rise of postwar American Sovietology not only as an indigenous, state-funded discipline that grew out of the Second World War, but also as a field whose establishment was shaped by the transnational reconfiguration and reconstruction of interwar intellectual networks. The point, of course, is not that these processes took place seamlessly or that exiles easily imposed their conventional wisdom on American minds, something that can be clearly seen in the stories of both Bączkowski and Smal-Stocki. More importantly, Prometheans and other emigres saw themselves as holding a stake in the direction that

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<sup>82</sup> Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*; Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).

postwar American Sovietology would take, mobilizing their material and cultural resources in a determined, if often only partial, attempt at molding the canonical paradigms with which Westerners understood the “Soviet empire” and its “captive nations.” Though lacking mainstream acceptance from American academics who increasingly tended to view totalitarian narratives as flawed and simplistic, the Prometheans created institutions of their own and found much more receptive audiences in military and government circles as well as in Slavic diaspora communities. Research centers such as *Reduta* and the Slavic Institute at Marquette University became Promethean institutions in exile that, according to their documents, drew together colorful groups of anticommunist activists and academics who strongly believed in a totalitarian interpretation of the Soviet system.

The point at which the Prometheans exercised their greatest influence in the United States definitely fell in the 1950s, when the height of the totalitarian paradigm, the expansion of McCarthyist ideological campaigns, and the growth of interest in the “captive nations” amid the unrest in Hungary and Poland in 1956 overlapped. Prometheism, of course, was only one current in the much vaster cast of emigres who contributed to the formation of American Sovietology, and Promethean thinkers, though prominent as experts on nationalities issues, never held a complete monopoly over the “captive nations” narrative. Yet despite these limitations, the specific examples of intellectual transmission and network building amid war and migration that Prometheism provides can be used as entry points into the broader study of the interwar roots of how knowledge about the Soviet Union, including many canonical paradigms and narratives that endured in Sovietology and public discourse until 1989, was produced in the Cold War-era west. What the examples of Smal-Stocki and other Prometheans suggest is that the making of canonical paradigms in Cold War-era

American Sovietology was not only a story of indigenous, state-sponsored institution building and knowledge production as described by Engerman. Just as importantly, American knowledge about the Soviet Union emerged from the reconfiguration and reconstruction of interwar intellectual networks, the movement of displaced emigres, and the transplantation of ideas and institutions across the Atlantic world.<sup>83</sup>

More importantly, the transformation of Prometheism during and after the Second World War highlights the unusual, generally marginal story of exiles from the expanding “communist world” who sought to weaponize the principle of national self-determination against the Soviet Union and its allies, running against the grain of most narratives of post-1945 decolonization that focus on the fates of Western maritime empires in the Global South, where Soviet and Chinese influences were on the rise. In recent years, Kyle Burke has illustrated the growth of aggressive, American-sponsored currents of “anticommunist internationalism” that often involved the formation of right-wing militia movements in decolonizing countries, something for which Smal-Stocki had unsuccessfully called in the case of Ukraine.<sup>84</sup> Benjamin Tromly, meanwhile, has reconstructed the trajectories of ethnically Russian exiles who collaborated with the Nazis during the Second World War before becoming useful strategic assets in the eyes of the Central Intelligence Agency, strikingly echoing the comparable entanglement of the far-right activists of the Anti-Bolshevik Bloc of Nations with anticommunist elites in the United States around the same time.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> See Andrzej Nowak, “A ‘Polish Connection’ in American Sovietology Or the Old Homeland Enmities in the New Host Country Humanities,” in *East and Central European History Writing in Exile 1939-1989*, ed. Maria Zadencka, Andrejs Plakans, and Andreas Lawaty (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2015), 375-395.

<sup>84</sup> Kyle Burke, *Revolutionaries for the Right Anticommunist Internationalism and Paramilitary Warfare in the Cold War* (Durham: University of North Carolina Press, 2018).

<sup>85</sup> Benjamin Tromly, *Cold War Exiles and the CIA: Plotting to Free Russia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2019).

Though unsuccessful in bringing down the Soviet Union, such Cold War campaigns to appropriate national self-determination for the anticommunist right make much more sense when considered in the context of pre-1939 incarnations of anti-Soviet internationalism such as Prometheism. Though a comprehensive alternative history of anticommunist internationalism in the age of decolonization has yet to be written, it would likely incorporate a thread concerning the “captive nations” and their self-proclaimed representatives, who expressed a palpable sense of frustration that their “civilized” homelands continued to languish in the Soviet “prison of nations” while sovereign nation-states proliferated throughout the supposedly less developed Global South. Considered in tandem with the history of Prometheism presented in this dissertation, such a narrative would reconstruct a genealogy of the political mobilization of the concept of national self-determination in ways, and in places, that do not fit neatly with our established understandings of decolonization that treat the Soviet Union as a problematic sponsor of anticolonial nationalism rather than a target and battleground for self-proclaimed projects of anti-Soviet decolonization in its own right. Above all, the post-1945 Cold War, writ large, will have to be comprehended in terms of the earlier, less widely known “cold wars” fought around the peripheries of the emerging Soviet Union in the revolutionary and civil war years as well as the interwar period, which generated its own tangle of ideas and institutions geared towards the weaponization of nationalism against Moscow. As this dissertation has argued, the path from the late nineteenth-century origins of Prometheism to Smal-Stocki’s postwar McCarthyism was a circuitous, complex, and contingent one that played out across a vast Eurasian intellectual network, starting with socialist visions of national liberation and class struggle that were anti-Tsarist and anti-Bolshevik rather than straightforwardly anticommunist before the Promethean movement became

heavily imbued with more right-wing, authoritarian currents under Piłsudski's *Sanacja* regime in the Second Polish Republic.

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