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Pity the authors of books on Russia and the states of the former USSR it's very hard to be up-to-date. Consider Anatoly Khazanov's section on the Chechen war (written in May 1995). He says, "Moscow's scenario for the solution of the Chechen problem closely resembled the previous Soviet scenarios of the interventions in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Afghanistan." He describes how a phony opposition was created and bolstered by plenty of falsehoods; then, when Plan A failed, military intervention followed. He concludes: "The Chechen crisis proved to non-Russian citizens of the Russian Federation that the federative character of this state exists mainly on paper. Many of them are convinced now that the Russian Empire has never ceased to exist." It also gave the Russian people the message that "they have no rights." He finishes the chapter with a dark warning that, once again, people are becoming afraid to talk openly. Well, the pattern he describes is not so far from the French scenario in Indochina or Algeria (formerly an "integral part" of France), the American one in Vietnam, or the Nigerian in Biafra or all the rest of the cheerless list. It appears that there may be a larger pattern here than merely a Soviet/Russian one. As to the state of Russia's imperfect democracy, in 1997 people continue to speak openly and an argument can be made that the Russian press covered the war with less censorship apart from the self-censorship during the presidential election campaign than most other wars have received. Certainly, as this reviewer can attest, there were plenty of horrible scenes of charred bodies in burnt-out armored vehicles and destruction shown on TV at the time. There was very little supporting the official line of "anti-bandit operations, which will be completed next weekend." But he is led to the conclusion that the Chechen war showed the real face of post-Soviet Russia. Would observers say this today? Human stupidity (and greed), rather than devious cunning, seem to have been the real impellers of the Chechen disaster. Indeed, the "problem" of Chechnya is not just Russia's; no one has recognized an independent Chechnya because few states are ready to recognize separatism for fear the disease may be contagious. Russia is not the first country to have gone to war to prevent separation. And not the first to have lost that war.

The book appears to be more a collection of essays centred on nationalism than a book with a single theme. This can create inconsistencies. For example, in an excellent discussion of nationalism in its various forms in Chapter 3, he shows that he is very well aware of just how arbitrary a "nationality" could be. "Nationality" in the USSR was an obligatory designation and every Soviet citizen was a member of a "nationality" and only one. The classification could be very capricious: some ethnic groupings were lumped together: Svans with Georgians; others split apart: Circassians into Cherkess, Kabardins and Adigey. The reality of mixed ancestry was never recognized every Soviet citizen had one, and only one, official nationality. One of my hobbies is asking "Russians" whether all four of their grandparents were "Russian"; very few can say they were. And yet all are counted as "Russian." This definitional fact greatly affects the statistics that he quotes at other times. When it is said, for example, that x percent of a particular country are Russians, just what is meant? And it begs the question of just what a "Russian" is

anyway. Few ethnic designations are as mixed as that one: Norse Varangians, forest peoples like the Finno-Ugric group, Slavs in all their variety, horse peoples like Alans and Pechenegs, Turko-Mongols and Europeans. That's what a "pure" Russian is. No wonder they spend so much time trying to agree on a national identity. "Russian" is probably more of a cultural definition than anything else. Consider the three commanders at Borodino and a typically "Russian" group they were too: Kutuzov (the name sounds Turkic), Barclay de Tolly (a Frenchified Scot) and Bagration (a Georgian). But, elsewhere in the book, the author quotes the official statistics as if they actually meant something. The only data comes from the 1991 USSR Census there have been none since and it is corrupt. First, it categorizes people into a false ethnic purity; second, the figures were then cooked to reflect the current interpretation of Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy. If 25 percent of "Ukrainians" are married to non-"Ukrainians" (so the Census tells us) then how "Ukrainian" are their children? For what it's worth, Russia is abandoning the communist nationality/citizenship system: the new passports have the single designation of Russian citizen.

Continuing the patchy nature of the book are chapters on ethnicity in Central Asia, in Kazakhstan, the plight of the Mezkhethians who are shunned by everyone (thousands are living wretchedly in Moscow as refugees), the Sakha (called Yakuts by Russians) and the rather despairing chapter on Chechnya. There is no reason given why these peoples are the ones to be especially considered and the chapters do not appear to be linked together unless by the theme that communism made a mess of the national question and that it will be a mess for years to come.

Is the mess the fault of the Russians? Sometimes he seems to suggest that it is: certainly in the sections from the Chechnya chapter already cited, there is more than a hint that the Russians cannot bring themselves to have any other national policy than the fist and a suggestion that Soviet policy favored Russians. On the other hand, in the chapter on Sakha, he seems to suggest that in old Russia, Russians lived together reasonably happily with the Sakha and that many Russians actually could speak the language. So maybe it's a legacy of communism and not Russianism.

The fact is that, in the post-USSR, the bulk of the violence has been between, not Russians and some other people, but as Georgia unhappily demonstrates, the titular majority and a minority. What was freedom for Georgians seemed to many Ossetians and Abkhazians to be slavery for them. The author knows this - as he says, the first Georgian president, Gamsakhurdia, "considered ethnic minorities living in Georgia the major threat to the Georgian people," but he does not seem to draw larger conclusions from it. A conclusion that he could draw might be that perhaps the nationalism preserved by the Soviet nationality policy was the nineteenth century exclusive or tribal form of nationalism rather than the sort of inclusive nationalism that we see today taking shape in Europe. Another might be that this form of nationalism left powerful impressions in the psyches of the so-called "little peoples" of the USSR because they were forced into Stalin's model of "socialist in content, nationalist in form." In short, every time you put on your national costume for the national holiday you were reminded a) that you were such-and-such a nationality and b) that the Communist Party actually ran things in your

republic. He suggests his awareness of this when he says, in his conclusion, that "[the USSR] has skipped the twentieth century and to some degree the nineteenth century also." An exploration of that thought would have been fruitful and interesting.

Moscow's relations with minorities in the Russian Federation, on the other hand, have been much more peaceful and creative. Sakha, for example, negotiated a treaty of mutual relations with Moscow in June 1995 after the book went to press, it is true, but Sakha was the fourth republic to do so. At present, ten national areas have negotiated similar treaties and so have 17 oblasts. With the exception of Moldova (which negotiated a similar arrangement with its Gagauz minority) none of the ex-USSR states has done so. And most of them Georgia again is an example have taken a lot longer to come round to a federalist solution than Russia did. These treaties suggest that there actually is some meaning to the word "federation" in the Russian Federation. But the author does not say very much about them indeed, he speaks of an "imperial tendency" on Moscow's part taking shape toward Tatarstan, the first to gain such a treaty (in February 1994). It's a pity that he doesn't discuss these treaties because they, much more than the stupid and horrible war in Chechnya, appear to be the pattern that Moscow favors. The process has not stopped five more oblasts got their treaties in July this year.

The best parts of the book are the sections in which the author knowledgeably discusses the ethnic situation in specific territories or countries as well as his essay on nationalism in Chapter 3. The weak part of the book is precisely the attempt to make it into something more general.

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[The opinions expressed are exclusively the reviewer's own.]