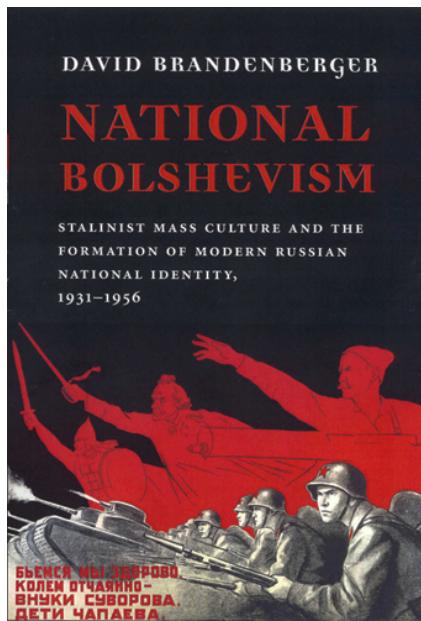


National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931-1956

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National Bolshevism is an investigation of the paradoxical emergence of a popular sense of Russian national identity during the Stalin epoch. Controversial in the sense that Soviet social identity is generally believed to have stemmed from class consciousness, this book argues that Stalin-era ideology was actually more Russian nationalist than it was proletarian internationalist. Detailing the production, projection and popular reception of this propaganda between 1931 and 1956, *National Bolshevism* identifies Stalinist ideological dynamics that continue to affect Russian society to the present day.

PROBLEMATICA

It has been known for a long time that the Stalinist party leadership occasionally appropriated imagery and symbols from the ancien regime. Resolving the long-standing debate over the nature and significance of this flirtation with the Russian national past (particularly the co-option of tsarist heroes, myths and iconography), *National Bolshevism* argues that such actions during the mid-to-late 1930s amounted to no less than an ideological about-face. Profoundly pragmatic and unabashedly populist, this ideological shift had a transformative effect on Russo-Soviet society that has remained unacknowledged among scholars until now.

Frustrated with the failure of propaganda campaigns during the late 1920s, Stalin and his entourage began to look for new ways to bolster the legitimacy of Bolshevik rule during the early 1930s. Their search was complicated by the need to mobilize popular support within a society that had proven to be too poorly-educated to be inspired by unadulterated Marxist-Leninism. Distancing themselves from fifteen years of idealistic, utopian sloganeering, Stalin and his colleagues gradually refashioned themselves as etatists and began to selectively rehabilitate famous personalities and familiar symbols from the

Russian national past. By 1937, party ideology had assumed a valence that I refer to as Stalinist russocentrism.

Having detailed this ideological volte-face within the party hierarchy, *National Bolshevism* traces the trajectory of the new official line into the 1950s in analysis organized both chronologically and thematically. Foregrounded is an original methodological approach that disaggregates Stalinist russocentrism into three distinct dimensions concerned with the production, projection and reception of ideology. In this vein, a broad survey of the party line's "production" is followed by analysis which tracks its "projection" into the Soviet public sphere through education and mass culture (e.g. the press, literature, film, theater, opera and museum exhibition). This research, in turn, is complemented by treatment of the popular "reception" of Stalinist russocentrism on the mass level, something that I accomplish through the use of a broad swath of letters, diaries, secret police reports and other material that can provide glimpses of public opinion under Stalin.

Appraising official russocentrism as the most successful ideological initiative of the Stalin era, *National Bolshevism* argues that it also precipitated the formation of a mass sense of Russian national identity, something which not only survived the death of Stalin in 1953, but remains in circulation to the present day. Inchoate and internally inconsistent before the revolution, modern Russian national identity turns out to be a strikingly recent development, having been systematized, rationalized and transformed into a mass phenomenon only midway through the twentieth century. The origin and persistence of this sense of Russian national identity explains why so many of the rallying calls favored by modern Russian politicians like V. V. Putin and G. A. Ziuganov display a clear Stalinist pedigree. These factors also account for why such sloganeering continues to find resonance among Russian-speakers in the former Soviet space today, almost two generations after Stalin's death. More than just a study of Stalinist propaganda between 1931 and 1956, *National Bolshevism* is an innovative treatment of the formation of modern Russian national identity over the course of the twentieth century.

AUDIENCE

Situated at the intersection of an array of contemporary debates, *National Bolshevism* is designed for those interested in Stalinism, Soviet ideology, mass culture, the popular press, education and the history of everyday life, as well as those engaged in burgeoning new academic fields associated with the theory and practice of national identity formation. Moreover, *National Bolshevism*'s chronological breadth, spanning some twenty-five years between 1931 and 1956, assures the book the attention of audiences concerned with the interwar period, the Second World War, and the first Cold War decade.

But aside from these thematic points of reference, *National Bolshevism*'s methodological approach should also be of considerable interest. Addressing not only the production and projection of propaganda, but its popular reception as well, this study eschews many of the shortcomings that have limited more traditional work on ideology and popular mobilization in recent years.

Such an emphasis on popular reception and public opinion also distinguishes *National Bolshevism* from more conventional treatments of nation-building, both within the Russo-Soviet spectrum and throughout much of the rest of the literature on the subject. Most scholarship, after all, neglects the role that common people play in the process by focusing exclusively on either theory or national elites. *National Bolshevism*, however, uses the innovative work of prominent theorists (Anderson, Gellner, Hroch, Brubaker, Bakhtin, de Certeau, etc.) as a lens through which to evaluate an empirical inquiry into identity formation on the mass level. As such, this book's findings are notable for their precision, degree of nuance and subtle contextualization within the historical dynamics of the Stalin era.

COMPARABLE WORKS

The first book of its kind to address the production, projection and reception of russocentric ideology under Stalin, *National Bolshevism* fits neatly into a broad convoy of recent publications by prominent authors and university presses. A natural complement to theoretical work on Eastern European identity formation by Suny, Slezkine, Hosking, Dunlop, Brubaker, Laitin and Kaiser,¹ it supersedes dated accounts by Agursky, Barghoorn, Besancon and others.² *National Bolshevism*'s analysis of the Stalin period dovetails with another book that I regard as essentially an epilogue to my study—Brudny's monograph on Russian nationalism between the late 1950s and the collapse of the USSR.³

On the subject of Stalinist mass culture, *National Bolshevism* engages with many of the major publications in the field, especially those by Brooks, Clark, Lahusen and Dobrenko.⁴ *National Bolshevism* sharpens the analysis of Stalinist cinema found in the

¹ Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford, 1993); Yuri Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North* (Ithaca, 1994); Geoffrey Hosking, *Russia: People and Empire, 1552-1917* (Cambridge, 1997); *Russian Nationalism Past and Present*, edited by G. Hosking and R. Service (New York, 1998); John B. Dunlop, *The Faces of Contemporary Russian Nationalism* (Princeton, 1984); Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge, 1996); David D. Laitin, *Identities in Formation: the Russian-Speaking Populations in the Near Abroad* (Ithaca, 1998); Robert J. Kaiser, *The Geography of Nationalism in the USSR* (Princeton, 1994).

² Mikhail Agursky, *The Third Rome: National Bolshevism in the USSR* (Boulder, 1987); Frederick C. Barghoorn, *Soviet Russian Nationalism* (New York, 1956); Alain Besancon, "Nationalism and Bolshevism in the USSR," in *The Last Empire: Nationality and the Soviet Future*, edited by Robert Conquest (Stanford, 1986); etc.

³ Yitzhak Brudny, *Reinventing Russia: Russian Nationalism and the Soviet State* (Cambridge, 1998).

⁴ Jeffrey Brooks, "Thank You, Comrade Stalin": *Soviet Public Culture from Revolution to Cold War* (Princeton, 1999); Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Chicago, 1980); Thomas Lahusen, *How Life Writes the Book: Real Socialism and Socialist Realism in Stalin's Russia* (Ithaca, 1997); Evgenii Dobrenko, *The Making of the State Reader: Social and Aesthetic Contexts of the Reception of Soviet Literature*, translated by Jesse M. Savage (Stanford, 1997).

works of Kenez and Taylor, and opens a whole new discussion on Orientalism in the Stalin-era public sphere.⁵

Finally, in the debate over Stalinist social mentalité, *National Bolshevism* spars with one of the most influential books of the past decade by Kotkin.⁶ Complementing recent monographs by Fitzpatrick, Hoffmann and Davies,⁷ *National Bolshevism* extends and qualifies aspects of their work by looking beyond the mid-1930s into the 1940s and 1950s. An original study, my analysis of Stalinist russocentrism is nevertheless grounded squarely within the mainstream of scholarly literature on the Soviet experience.

OUTLINE

National Bolshevism opens with a survey of the historiographical controversy surrounding the Stalinist party's flirtation with Russian historical myths, heroes and iconography. It then segues into an extensive discussion of contemporary theoretical work on national identity formation and its applicability to the Russian context during the pre-revolutionary period.

Chapter one begins with an examination of Russian-speaking society at the turn of the century, a time when in many European countries, one could observe the acceleration of societal dynamics that typically contribute to mass mobilization and national identity formation (e.g. the spread of literacy and print culture). Chapter one argues, however, that although universal education and mass culture were already facts of everyday life in countries like France during this era, a variety of factors prevented Russian-speaking society from enjoying the benefits of such basic societal institutions before the early 1930s.

Chapters two through six address issues of identity formation in Soviet society during the decade preceding the Second World War by examining the party hierarchy's evolving strategy for societal mobilization and the inculcation of a popular sense of patriotism. Individual chapters analyze each of the dimensions of this process: the production of ideology within the party hierarchy; its projection through public education and state-sponsored mass culture; and its reception within the society at large. Such an approach foregrounds the complexities involved in the formulation of a sense of group identity without neglecting the difficulties of transmitting it to the popular level or the peculiarities of its mass reception.

⁵ Peter Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society, 1917-1953* (Cambridge, 1992); Richard Taylor, "Ideology and Popular Culture in Soviet Cinema," in *The Red Screen: Politics, Society and Art in Soviet Cinema*, edited by Ann Lawton (London, 1992), 42-65.

⁶ Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley, 1995).

⁷ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism — Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times* (New York, 1999); David Hoffman, *Peasant Metropolis: Social Identities in Moscow, 1929-1941* (Ithaca, 1994); Sarah Davies, *Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia: Terror, Propaganda and Dissent, 1933-1941* (Cambridge, 1997).

Insofar as identity formation is a long-term process requiring commitment and consistency, chapters seven through ten trace this dynamic through the war years, while chapters eleven through fourteen follow it into the mid-1950s. In each period, individual chapters address ideological production, projection and reception, detailing a tightly-controlled process in which mass agitation in the public schools was reinforced by broad attention given to the same themes throughout the society's mass culture forums (e.g. literature, the press, film, etc.). Long misunderstood, the deployment of Russian national heroes, myths and iconography was a pragmatic move to augment the arcane aspects of Marxist-Leninism with populist rhetoric designed to bolster Soviet state legitimacy and promote a society-wide sense of allegiance to the USSR. Ironic in the sense that the resultant social mentalité turned out to be qualitatively more "Russian" than "Soviet," this unintended consequence of the campaign is something which continues to reverberate throughout the former Soviet space to the present day.

National Bolshevism's analysis of Stalin-era ideology draws to a close with a wide-ranging discussion of the implications of Stalinist russocentrism for the post-1953 time period. Taking advantage of Yitzhak Brudny's study of Russian nationalism between the Khrushchev and Gorbachev periods, I identify dynamics that link Stalin-era russocentrism with aspects of present-day Russian national identity and argue that a thorough understanding of the latter requires acknowledgment of its origins between 1931 and 1956. In essence, *National Bolshevism* proposes that in order to grasp what is at stake in places like Chechnya today—particularly the imperial nostalgia, defensiveness and chauvinism displayed by the Russian political elite—it is necessary to approach the subject of Russian national identity as an unfortunate but remarkably tangible legacy of the Stalin years. Viewed in this sense as a syndrome of one of the most brutal, authoritarian regimes of the twentieth century, modern Russian national identity ceases to be the "riddle wrapped in a mystery inside of an enigma" that Churchill termed it some six decades ago. Instead, when properly contextualized, the formation of modern Russian national identity provides a host of intriguing new perspectives on the past, present and future of this post-Soviet society.

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