NATIONAL STALINISM: IDEOLOGY BETWEEN ASCRIBING CLASS AND RE-IMAGINING COMMUNITY (II)

BOGDAN CRISTIAN IACOB

Citizenship and primordialism

Until now I have attempted to discuss how class as a category for identity in Stalinism was employed. The fluidity of the concept and its porousness to status related aspects, under circumstances of radical transformism and political leveling brings forth further categories of nationality and citizenship. The backwardness of the country and the acute mobility of the population in the Soviet Union did not only require the representation of individuals as class members, but also their identification within the community of peoples in the USSR.[1] The 1930-1931 laws concerning citizenship proclaimed that "an individual was considered a citizen of the USSR by virtue of birth when at the time of birth both parents were citizens of the USSR or one of them was. The new formula removed parental discretion over a child's citizenship." By 1938, Stalin issued another law that "was especially illustrative for the 'Stalinist concern for children' […] children over the age of 14 and Soviet women would not automatically take on the citizenship of the male head of household."[2] From this type of maximum ascription of citizenship by means *jus sanguinis* to a primordial justification of belonging to the socialist body politic there is only a step. For example, in Romania, when the party leadership was faced with the problem of mass emigration to Hungary, Ceauşescu had the following to say: "the whole people and especially the youth must be fully aware of the fact that more than 2000 years our forerunners, the most enlightened men, the people itself – the real history maker – have waged hard battles and made many sacrifices, but have always borne in mind the past, the present as well as the future of the people, of our country, have done their utmost and even laid down their lives to secure a bright future for our nation (…) the broad masses never thought of deserting the land where they were born, where their ancestors lived and where our descendants should live for ever."[3]

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[1] The importance of going past class analysis when assessing the problem of identity under Stalinism (one may even say under really existing socialism) is best summarized by Golfo Alexopoulos' statement: "In the Soviet Union there were citizens and there were citizens." In one of the most interesting proposals of explanation for the dissolution of state socialism in Eastern Europe, Kenneth Jowitt (*Weber, Trotsky and Holmes on the Study of Leninist Regimes*, in "Journal of International Affairs," 2001, pp. 31-49) states that "the critical issue facing Leninist regimes was citizenship. The political individuation of an articulated potential citizenry treated contemptuously by an inclusive (not democratic), neotraditional (not modernized) Leninist polity was the cause of Leninist breakdown."

[2] Golfo Alexopoulos, *Soviet Citizenship, More or Less. Rights, Emotions, and States of Civic Belonging*, in "Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History" (hereafter: "Kritika"), 7, Summer 2006, 3, pp. 505-508.

[3] Nicolae Ceauşescu, *Exposé on the Political, Ideological, Cultural, and Educational Activity, of Molding the New Man, Conscious and Devoted Builder of the Multilaterally Developed Socialist Society and of Communism in Romania*, *26 October 1989,* Bucharest, 1989, p. 16. Romania was a notorious case for the difficulty and massive paperwork in cases of persons willing to renounce citizenship. At the same time, Romania was one of the countries that would seldom exile dissenters/dissidents.

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Earlier, in 1976, another party document argued that in matters of marriage with foreign nationals, even decision-making ought to be restricted in accordance with both the state's and the relatives' discretion: "It is precisely by acting in the spirit of humanness of revolutionary humanism that we are duty bound to take into account the agreement of the family, of the relatives, who according to ancient customs of the Romanians have a word to say when the young ones get married. The parents have a right to call on the State authorities and the authorities have the duty to take into account their objections which are justified."[4]

Citizenship during Stalinism was defined as labor in the service of the state: "labor determined one's status in society, and the failure to work would result in criminal punishment." Golfo Alexopoulos remarks that "what makes the Soviet case different is not the promise of social welfare. It is the assertion of material security as constituting *the* principal right or fundamental privilege of Soviet citizenship, as well as the disproportionate emphasis on obligations over rights."

In a similar vein, in Romania, membership in the socialist body politic was immutably defined by work: "The people has to consciously act for solving the problems that appear in the process of building the multilaterally developed society, it has to consciously forge its future (…) *All citizens must perform a useful work!*"[5] [my italics] Furthermore, "everyone should understand that it is their moral and patriotic duty to dedicate all their energies, capacity and power of work to the growth of socialist property – the main source of economic and social progress of the country, of the welfare and happiness of the whole nation. (…) Each citizen should be aware that his welfare and happiness are strictly dependent on the way in which he works for developing national economy, for increasing out whole people's wealth."[6] One can argue, based on the above statements, that another element of determining one's identity under Stalinism was, besides "speaking Bolshevik," "acting like the state," or "taking onto its class," the effort and enthusiasm in building socialism in one's country.

Citizenship then became both a weapon of integration and of repression.[7] It was the criteria upon which inclusion and exclusion were performed. Getty, Rittersporn and Zemskov noticed that the two years after the announced end of class struggle (1937-1938) witnessed 86 percent of all death sentences that were carried out for the entire 1929-1952

[4] Idem, *Exposé on the Political, Ideological, Cultural and Educational Activity of the Molding of the New Man, Conscious and Devoted Builder of the Multilaterally Developed Socialist Society and of Communism in Romania*, *June 2, 1976*, Bucharest, 1977, pp. 109-110.

[5] Idem, *Propuneri de măsuri pentru îmbunătăţirea activităţii politico-ideologice, de educare marxist-leninistă a membrilor de partid, a tuturor oamenilor muncii*, *6-9 iulie 1971,* Bucureşti, 1971, p. 36.

[6] *Ibidem*, p. 67.

[7] See Alfred J. Rieber's evaluation of the comments upon Alexopoulos's article: *The Problem of Social Cohesion*, in "Kritika," 7, Summer 2006, 3, pp. 599-608. Timothy Snyder (*The Elusive Civic Subject in Russian History*, ibidem, pp. 609-617) stresses what he calls the "elusive civic subject in Russian history," phenomenon caused by the indeterminate criteria of citizenship both during the Tsarist Empire and the Soviet Union. He argues that the amalgamation and interchangeability of class, occupation, family, nationality, gender, religion in the definition of the civic subject makes very difficult the description of social structures and of their dynamics.

period.[8] As many authors argue (Holquist, Weiner, Halfin, Viola, etc.), integration within the state on the basis of civic belonging proved to be the source of a resurgence and intensification of "excisionary" practices by the state. He who was labeled incorrigible became eligible to *only* elimination. One of the means of controlling the population during Stalin's reign was the internal passport. The regime of passaportization was established in 1932, continuing unreformed up to 1953. It had double function: to count (*uchet*) and to cleanse (*ochistit'*). David Shearer argues that "a passport fixed an individual occupationally, ethnically, and socially through categories written into the document […] If the system worked correctly a citizen could not have a social identity that was not open to police scrutiny […] Those who fell into the category of former kulaks or recidivist, as well as members of certain ethnic groups – Germans, Poles, Finns – were never rehabilitated or allowed to repatriate.[9] Such a system was established in order to administer the identity of the units within the human power (*liudskaia sila*) of the "first proletarian state." It functioned as both a means of surveillance and of homogenization. It was an instrument that assessed, directly and by implication, both the loyalty and the status of the "new man." It insured and nourished the possibility for an individual *Gleichschaltung*, politicizing and rationalizing all aspects of one's identity.[10]

Discrimination based upon passport-ascribed identity (substantiated with surveillance reports, confessions, denunciations, past personal history, work status, etc.) brings us to the dichotomy nature vs. nurture[11] in relation with the Soviet body politic. There are two prerequisites for the analysis of identity within this framework: a Lamarckian vision of society and Marxism-Leninism as a *sociological* science. The hierarchies established under Stalinism within community and in relation to the state reflected a fundamental preeminence of nurture over nature. The health of the metabolism of the party, the state, the Soviet society, and of the new man was dependent upon "an all-encompassing drive to purify the socio-national body." (Weiner) However, the system of surveillance in place and the end of class antagonism coupled with the breakneck drive for state-building (the inception of the Five-Year Plans) under circumstances of permanent shortage determined a shift within identitarian dynamics in the Soviet Union. Again, in the words of A. Weiner, "with socialism

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[8] J. Arch Getty, Gabor Rittersporn and Viktor Zemskov, *Victims of the Soviet Penal System in the Pre-War Years: A First Approach on the Basis of the Archival Evidence*, in "American Historical Review," 98, 1993, 4, pp. 1017-1049.

[9] David Shearer, *Elements Near and Alien: Passaportization, Policing, and Identity in the Stalinist State, 1932-1952*, in "The Journal of Modern History," 76, December 2004, pp. 8835-8881.

[10] David Shearer (*ibidem,* p. 8878) stresses the fact that "it was only after the ideological catharsis of the war and the bureaucratic separation of the political and civil police that the regime again treated criminality and other social deviances as social problems and not as political threats."

[11] Some of the best contributions to this topic are Yuri Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North,* Ithaca, 1994; Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939,* Ithaca, 2001; Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of War: The Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution*, Princeton, 2001; *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin*, ed. by Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin, New York, 2002; Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union*, Ithaca, 2005.

built, ethnic hostility replaced class antagonism as the primary category intruding on harmony […] the ethnicization of categories intensified the drive to homogenize the Soviet body social."[12] But the most important ingredient of the mix was the permanent war scare during Stalin's reign: the notions of anti-social element and of enemy of the people gained a new meaning in reference to one's membership to an ethnic community component of the Soviet "empire of nations." "Soviet xenophobia" was based upon two phenomena: "the coincidence of status and ethnic divisions with the conflicts over land and territory, some of the most important diaspora nationalities (Koreans, Germans, Finns, Poles)," which led to sociological stigmatization by both central and local authorities of these nationalities. And, "the Soviet belief in the political salience of ethnicity" led to the Bolshevik party's "attempt to exploit cross-border ethnic ties, to project the influence abroad" – [the Piedmont Principle]. However, the exaggerated Soviet fear of foreign capitalist influence and contamination combined with strategic territorialization also made such cross-border ties potentially suspect.[13] Under circumstances of war and *raison d'état*, what was suspect became potentially lethal to the health of the Soviet body social, thus suffering indiscriminate excision. Starting with the 1930s, especially from 1935 onwards, the USSR officially becomes a space of ethnic cleansing. The category of "enemy nation" is institutionalized becoming a constant of the purge "publics."[14] If the policies of *korenisatsiia* legitimized an ethnic identity by granting it territory, government, elites, culture, and language, the

[12] Amir Weiner, *Nature, Nurture, and Memory in a Socialist Utopia: Delineating the Soviet Socio-Ethnic Body in the Age of Socialism*, in "The American Historical Review," vol. 104, October 1999, no. 4, pp. 1114-1155.

[13] I am extending here the definition of Soviet xenophobia given by Terry Martin (*The Affirmative Action Empire,* pp. 341-343). He defines it only as being identified to be foreign in relation to the Soviet brotherhood of peoples. I added the facet of being shelved as alien based upon the perceived dominant social practices of one's ethnic group. I see both features of xenophobia from the standpoint of their identical result: an ethnic becomes a hated and maybe dispensable *other.* Amir Weiner in his study of identity politics during the World War Two hints to this interpretation when analyzing the ascribed position of the Jews in the war narrative. The Jews were refused a discourse of suffering and overcoming because, among other things, of their perceived immutable petit-bourgeois behavior, cosmopolitanism, and ultimately socio-political backwardness. He makes a very important point, which I consider worth transposing upon the Romanian case: "if the myth of the October Revolution was perceived as Judaized beyond repair, then the new myth of the Great Patriotic War would not suffer the same fate." Two of the identitarian *topoi* in inter-war Romania were those of Judeokomuna and of *alien* communist element. This discourse was rejuvenated officially in communist Romania starting with the mid 1960s, as the RCP attempted to develop legitimacy in contradistinction to the errors of the party-line in the past (e.g., the fallacy of the Comintern and the antinational stand toward the unitary nation-state). I believe that one of the lines of ethnic discrimination originated in this historiographical build-up which shed a permanent suspicion upon representatives of those minority groups who in the past used communism against the nation-state. Party history integrated xenophobia as a means of self-legitimization. For an excellent survey of this issue see Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Stalinism for All Seasons: A Political History of Romanian Communism*, Berkeley, Calif., 2003; Robert Levy, *Ana Pauker: The Rise and Fall of a Jewish Communist*, Berkeley, 2001, and Pavel Câmpeanu, *Ceauşescu, anii numărătorii inverse*, Bucureşti, 2002.

[14] For example, a 31 January 1938 politburo decree extended until 15 April 1938 branded the "national operations" as aimed at "the destruction of espionage and sabotage contingents made up of Poles, Latvians, Germans, Estonians, Finns, Greeks, Iranians, Kharbintsy, Chinese, and Romanians, both foreign subjects and Soviet citizens, according to the existing decrees of the NKVD. This decree also authorized a new operation "to destroy the Bulgarian and Macedonian cadres." See Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire,* p. 337.

withdrawal of these grants would automatically "denationalize" that community.[15] Its members bearing individual passports prescribing their ethnicity suffered a wholesale loss of identity (by suspension of citizenship rights and/or imprisonment/deportation) or were left to attempt integration by means of class, status, occupation, or gender identifiers.[16] Under the circumstances, "the national line in Soviet passports became one of the single most important factors in not only reinforcing the belief, but also creating the social fact, that national identity was primordial and inherited."[17]

This process of presupposing, from the part of entire nationalities, disloyalty to the Soviet state and to the Bolshevik revolutionary project produced, in ethnic terms, "multiple maps of 'they' and no clear definition of the hegemonic 'we'." (Alfred J. Rieber) However, one of the effects of these "national operations" was to identify the state with the Russian core. It happened along three paths: the formation of the Russian national space through the Russification of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic; the elevation of the status and unifying role of the Russian culture within the entire USSR; the integration of the newly central Russians into the preexistent Soviet national constitution through the metaphor of the Friendship of Peoples as first among equals.[18] A nucleus of the Soviet community was thus born. The history and population of the first proletarian state gravitated around an ethnic group endowed with both the best capability of building and defending socialism and a proven historical preeminence either across the Soviet territory or upon the world stage. The Soviet Union was not Russified, but the Russians became the populational model of *proveshchenie* (enlightenment), *vospitanie*, *kul'turnost'*, and *natsionalisatsiia*. This process of rapprochement (*sblizhenie)* of national cultures and their mutual enrichment upon Russian motifs[19] combined with exclusion on the basis of the category "enemy nation" gave birth to a hybrid identity marker characterized by a primordialist discourse of "national

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[15] Another mechanism of constructing identity effacing identity was the census. Entire nationalities could disappear from one census to the other, as for example the differences between census lists of nationalities from 1926 to 1939. On this interpretation and on more general assessments of demographic politics in the Soviet Union under Stalin see Alain Blum, *Society, Politics and Demography. The Example of Soviet History*, in "Czech Sociological Review," vol. 4, 1996, no. 1, pp. 81-95 and idem, *Social History as History of Measuring Populations. A Post-1987 Renewal*, in vol. *After the Fall. Essays in Russian and Soviet Historiography*, ed. by Peter Holquist, Michael David-Fox, and Marshall Poe, Bloomington, 2004, pp. 64-83.

[16] Yuri Slezkine, *The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethic Particularism*, in "Slavic Review," vol. 53, Summer 1994, no. 2, pp. 414-452.

[17] Terry Martin, *Modernization or Neo-Traditionalism – Ascribed Nationality and Soviet Primordialism*, in vol. *Stalinism – New Directions,* ed. by S. Fitzpatrick, London-New York, 2000, p. 355. Golfo Alexopoulos (*Soviet Citizenship, More or Less. Rights, Emotions, and States of Civic Belonging*, in "Kritika," 7, Summer 2006, 3, pp. 505-508) makes a similar point in arguing that the passport transformed nationality into an inheritable identity for the Soviet citizen with all its implications upon the status of the individual in society and upon its relation toward the state.

[18] Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, p. 394.

[19] At the level of Soviet historiography one of the examples of this phenomenon is the theory of the "lesser evil" when approaching tsarist colonial history: Konstantin F. Shteppa, *Russian Historians and the Soviet State*, New Brunswick-New Jersey, 1957; Lowell Tillett, *The Great Friendship: Soviet Historians and the Non-Russian Nationalities*, Chapel Hill, 1969.

authenticity." It was a form of patriotism relying upon a "national Bolshevism" that accepted the progressive role of historical Russian state-building and celebrated the role of the individual in history (also part and parcel of the Stalin personality cult). The result was a "new Stalinist ideology national in form, etatist in content."[20] Soviet patriotism was the expression of "a self-reliant state development, rejecting borrowing and kowtowing to things foreign, that realized the unique potential of the people […] Pride was taken in the Russian and the Soviet state for their being the foremost agents of socio-economic progress. As the proletariat was de-emphasized in relation to the 'people', there was a shift from rivalry of socio-economic systems to rivalry of nations."[21]

Concluding remarks

The present essay indicated the following markers of identity under Stalinism: class, status, gender, occupation, and nationality. They are integrated in a primordial definition of citizenship whose ultimate measuring stick is the level of commitment (by participation and faith) to the project of building socialism. The intricate interaction of these elements within the political practice of both the state and the individual is regulated by an exhaustive system of planning, surveillance, affiliation, purge, and acculturation. The logic of an individual's identity is fundamentally determined by the ideologically presupposed physiognomy and metabolism of the society as a whole. This radical intrusiveness is eschatologically motivated: the progress of the socialist community, characterized by a moral-political unity and self-reliant realization, can be fulfilled and continued across history only if all souls have been reformed or if those that proved incorrigible have been eliminated. As the "I's" merged in order to build an organization with one completely unified will (the charismatic-impersonal party of a new type), so the citizen's feature melted into the necessity for a continuous advancement of the "popular socialist state" (van Ree). Did such thing happen? Obviously not; the undifferentiated self and non-stratified society were discursive fictions. But the project did exist and was purposively pursued during Stalin's reign with horrible consequences. The most distinctive aspect of Stalinism is exactly this "etatization" of utopia: identity is ascribed in accordance with developmental tasks with the goal of homogenization. The criteria of its recognition are that of loyalty and revolutionary purity. Upon the end of class struggle, allegiance increasingly came under the guise of a

[20] David Brandenberger and A. M. Dubrovsky, *"The People Need a Tsar": The Emergence of National Bolshevism as Stalinist Ideology, 1931-1941*, in "Europe-Asia Studies," 1998, 5. D. Brandenberger (*National Bolshevism – Stalinist Mass and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931-1956*, Cambridge-London, 2002, pp. 183-196) also argues for a "Russo-Soviet hybridization" ultimately confirmed by "the victory in 1945, as the ultimate validation of Soviet state-building, most striking when styled as a feat *without* historical precedent." The Great Patriotic War became a symbolic mediator of collective identity, opening the door for a partial forgoing from the late 1930s and 1940s Russocentrism.

[21] Erik van Ree, *Stalin as Marxist: The Western Roots of Stalin's Russification of Marxism*, in vol. *Stalin: A New History*, ed. by S. Davies, J. Harris, pp. 177-178. Idem, *The Political Thought of Joseph Stalin – A Study in Twentieth-Century Patriotism*, London-New York, 2002, pp. 269-275.

patriotism motivated by the "building of socialism in one country." Membership in the body social pioneering the construction of the most advanced polity is ultimately the basis for personal dignity. And when this superiority of "historiosophical vision" translates itself into a re-imagination of community the narrative turns into primordialism.

In the end, I venture to state that Stalinism is a "civilizational model"[22] primarily focused upon legitimizing the building and the survival of a state through the instrumentalization of a myriad of interchangeable, cross-identitarian hierarchies that merge in a *popular* socialist community. In the words of Stephen Kotkin, "everything was invested in identity." With these premises and analysis in mind, the political practice and the historical narrative of the "socialist nation" in Romania circumscribe spaces for the individuals' belief exercitation and incantation, while also providing the justificatory fuel of the state socialism's reproduction. Recently, a member of the Commission for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania, one of the authors of the sections dealing with the history of the Hungarian minority during the regime, made the following baffling remarks: "… On the other hand, a fundamental reason for the difficulty to pursue this initiative [the condemnation of the communist regime] is *the undeniable fact* that the communist period in Romania overlaps with *an important epoch of accomplishments with a view to the national building* of Romania, of the consolidation of the nation-state. Any attempt that can be seen to be questioning these achievements obviously generates controversy and meets with resistance from a significant section of public opinion. It is clear that this phase of the strengthening of the unitary nation-state […] cannot be doubted."[23] [my italics] The benefits of using the conceptual and comparative lenses of "national-Stalinism" are apparent in understanding the hermeneutics and methodological prejudice of such statement. The latter's first layer consists of the premise that the evolution of the nation can have its own dynamic in relation to the communist state. The second, that the evolution of the nation-state can be distinguished from the development of the communist polity. The third, that individual membership in national community automatically implies autonomous niches of the self, surviving pure, unaltered decades of communist socialization. And the fourth (at least), that undifferentiated redemption comes with the collective belonging, which shielded aspects of self-realization from the abnormality of communist reality. In contrast to such tenets on facts of national and personal attainment, I chose a conceptualization of identity as inextricably infused with the imperatives particularizing the progress of the socialist body, politic and social, across present and historical time. If I were to rephrase L. Salat's statement along

[22] According to Stephen Kotkin (*The Magnetic Mountain*, Berkeley, 1995; *1991 and the Russian Revolution: Sources, Conceptual Categories, Analytical Frameworks*, in "Journal of Modern History," vol. 70, June 1998, no. 2, pp. 384-425, and *The State – Is It Us? Memoirs, Archives, and Kremlinologists*, in "The Russian Review," vol. 61, January 2002, pp. 35-51), Stalinism was characterized as "an Enlightenment ethos of scientific social engineering and accompanying modern practices of government mixed with a theocratic party-state structure and quasi-religious systems of dogma." It made the claim to its own "language" (Bolshevism), "religion" (Marxist-Leninism), a particular understanding of world history (negative legitimacy – "capitalist encirclement"), new and "modern" customs and institutions, and a self-identification as the superior modernity.

[23] *Raportul Comisiei Tismăneanu în dezbaterea istoricilor clujeni*, in "Tribuna," 16-31 August 2007, no. 119, p. 19.

these theoretical lines, I would rather say that opposition to declaring the communist regime as “criminal and illegitimate” originates in the reality of the self’s stake in a belief system which moved a whole society into Party guided action inscribed into a particular version of modernity.