

Introduction: Culture and Soviet Identities

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For a long time historians have been concerned with what the Soviet state did; now scholars are beginning to ponder the significance of what the Soviet state said, how it said it, and how this influenced the formation of a particularly Soviet identity. The essays collected here focus on production, circulation and consumption of Soviet ideology and propaganda, both oral and visual. It is not our intention to prove that Bolshevik propaganda was translated into reality. The utopian and unrealizable essence of Soviet propaganda constituted its most unique and interesting feature. These works deal instead with the ways in which the creation and consumption of utopian and mythical Soviet narratives might have shaped people's perception of mundane and difficult realities and their own position in Soviet society.

The interrelated concepts of narrative and audience tie these articles together. The attempt of the Soviet state to communicate its goals and visions entailed both constructing the message and finding the most effective means of transmission. By its nature, the art of propaganda meant fashioning an ideal audience or consumer who would read, understand and internalize the messages in the appropriate manner.

Bridging the gap between the people and the state was no easier in the Soviet context than it had been in the Russian one. "Going to the people" was a challenging endeavour, that like any other civilizing mission left marks on both the colonizer and colonized. The many and often contradictory transformations in Soviet discourse and Soviet policies detailed in these papers reflect the intersection of the changing imperatives of the top leaders with the ongoing search of Soviet intellectuals to find the language that would most effectively reach target audiences, audiences whose own perceptions were changed by the violence, upheaval, opportunities, and challenges caused by government policies.

Many of the narrative transformations that Soviet cadres communicated to target audiences were part of a discourse on modernity. While few of the articles explicitly deal with this issue, the conclusions presented validate implicitly the notion that the Soviet Union represented an alternative path to modernity. Unlike the convergence theorists of the 1970s, we do not focus exclusively on economic developments such as urbanization or industrialization, but on the cultural shifts and changes in mentality that accompany the process of modernization. Using a cultural and critical definition of modernity, we can identify the key elements of what constituted Soviet modernity.

Conceptualizing Soviet modernity is a challenging task as the category is freighted with cultural ascriptions from Western Europe, but the essays

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included here show that the Soviet Union fulfilled many of the conditions of modernity. It tried to create a media-dominated public sphere, engaged in aggressively nationalistic rhetoric, tried to impose linguistic uniformity on multitudes of dialects and patois, ruthlessly co-opted pre-revolutionary historical narratives to facilitate state building, promoted its industrial and technical achievements at home and abroad, and finally, tried to create the modern citizen, the Foucauldian object of disciplinary surveillance, who also participated in the rituals and practices of the modern state.

Choi Chatterjee's essay undertakes a historiographical review of western scholar's understanding of Soviet ideology in order to provide a taking-off point for future studies. She stresses the need to incorporate gender as a category of analysis in the study of ideology. Several of the essays collected here show how attention to the relative power of speakers and their linguistic exchanges can provide insight into the operations of power in the Soviet Union at both the elite and local levels. By imagining the invention of the Soviet Union as a dynamic process of exchange between speakers possessing widely varying levels of power, we can give Soviet audiences agency without denying the overwhelming coercive power in the hands of the state.

Party leadership used the inherited narratives of European social-democracy to justify and normalize their policies. As Lars Lih's paper shows, the adoption of foreign narratives as vessels for Soviet policy was innately problematic. While the desire to emulate the West revealed the European biases of the Russian/Soviet elite, these fictional strategies proved unequal to the task of encompassing both the relatively mundane events of Soviet history, and cataclysmic occurrences such as collectivization and regicide.

Lih argues that the revolution, war communism, and NEP all could be justified according to the narrative of social-democracy that mandated the capture of state power by the proletariat, valorized the steadfast leader, and justified the use of coercion against class enemies. Social-democratic narratives provided an acceptable parameter of analysis for Bolsheviks as diverse as Bukharin, Trotsky, Kollontai and Zinoviev until the project of collectivization rent such large holes in the inherited discourse that the repair strategies that were undertaken changed the generative frame of reference. Lih's article shows that nationalist narratives that seek to repair cataclysmic ruptures in a country's history are an integral part of the modern project of nationalism. This is especially apparent in post-colonial discourse where the heroic struggle against the colonizers is cast in the narrative mode of western nineteenth century nationalism that seeks to legitimize the bloody repression of ethnic conflicts, class struggles and battles for regional autonomy.

The socialist principles to which the Bolsheviks adhered sometimes hindered the modernizing process. Erika Wolf's essay shows that while the state tried to promote its industrial achievements in the journal *SSSR na stroike*, in the hopes of attracting foreign investment, it was forced to focus on

the socialist lifestyle of the Soviet worker in order to fulfil the demands of socialist readers abroad.

David Brandenberger's essay on the popular reception of nationalist ideology challenges the idea that the Stalinist state's co-option of the imperial past represented the end of Bolshevik internationalism and the resurgence of Russian chauvinism. Using archival documentation, Brandenberger documents the tortuous process through which the Stalinist elite strove to fashion the new historical narrative, one that eschewed the abstract sociological class analysis of Pokrovskii, in favour of a living history replete with identifiable national heroes. Brandenberger argues that the Russian population mistakenly interpreted a narrative of state-building as an affirmation of Russian superiority; yet Soviet leaders cynically encouraged this misinterpretation since it had popular resonance which could strengthen the defense of the country. By encouraging the hierarchies of Russian over non-Russians and men over women, the Soviet state mobilized its men for war and demobilized them afterward.

Soviet narratives constantly needed to be maintained and repaired by official speakers and writers so that readers would accept their omissions and gaps rather than challenging them. The ways in which Soviet writers narrated their beliefs also had profound implications for those included in or excluded from the narratives. By examining the works of the writers creating "leaps of faith" in Soviet narratives, the participation of readers in molding narratives, and the fate of those pushed to the margins, these essays show how Soviet texts and speech shaped the upheavals of the twentieth century.

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