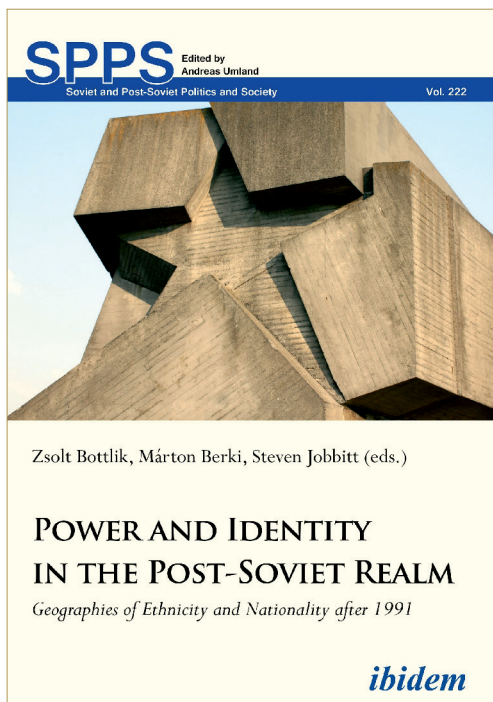


Bottlik, Zs., Berki, M. and Jobbitt, S. (eds.): Power and Identity in the Post-Soviet Realm: Geographies of Ethnicity and Nationality after 1991. Stuttgart, *ibidem*-Verlag, 2021. 311 p.

Zsolt BOTTLIK, Márton BERKI, and Steven JOBBITT have produced a thoughtful and remarkable volume on ethnicity and nationality in the former Soviet republics that emerged as independent states in 1991 – minus the Russian Federation and the three Baltic states, the latter of which quickly joined the European Union. Many studies on ethnicity and nationalism preoccupy themselves with the origin and development of national movements and focus on dominant and competing discourses as articulated by key historical figures, often intellectuals, who expressed their thoughts in writing. They then trace the evolution of a national idea through intrigue and conflict, often war. All too often, such studies express to some degree the Romantic notion that ethnicity and nationality are essential and that language is the essence of such identities. Subsequently, the struggle or national self-determination is seen as a struggle for the right to read, write, and speak one's national language. Unfortunately, such studies rely heavily on the written record of a small group of historical figures, who presumably speak for the masses and represent their presumed historical yearning.

Fortunately, the editors of this volume take a different approach to ethnicity and nationality. They begin from the starting point that social identities are a product of a complex set of historical, geographical, and socio-economic factors. For the post-Soviet states in particular, geopolitics, namely competing empires, which, by attempting to integrate these territories in their respective empires with specific policies, shaped the identities of these territories' inhabitants. Of course, the Russian Empire and its successor the Soviet Union was the common denominator for these eleven states, and indeed the latter drew the political boundaries for all of these states. However, the other empires that played roles depended on location and affected differing groups of these states that can be grouped into subregions. The first subregion is located to the southeast where the Russian Empire competed with the Ottoman and Persian Empires, giving rise to the modern South Caucasian states of Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia. The second subregion lies to the southwest. Known as "In-between Europe" or *Zwischeneuropa*, the countries found there on the map today are Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine. They emerged where the Russian Empire competed with the Habsburg Empire, then with its successor the Austro-Hungarian Empire, as well as the Kingdom of Poland and then the Second Polish Republic. The German and Ottoman Empires also exerted their influences in parts of this subregion at times. The third subregion is found farther to the east in what was "Turkestan", which then became known as "Soviet Central Asia", out of which the Soviets carved today's Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

In examining ethnicity and nationality, the editors and contributing authors not only group the post-Soviet states into subregions but also examine these states temporally. The template for each chapter consists of three historical periods: imperial (with emphasis on the 18th and 19th centuries), Soviet, and post-Soviet. Each is distinct yet remarkable continuity is found through history. For example, both imperial Russia and the Soviet government sought to integrate their territories through socio-economic and cultural, more specifically, language policies. During imperial times, Russification was seen as the primary tool for integration, especially at the end of the 19th century as the winds of modern nationalism blew ever stronger from where they originated in western and then central Europe almost a century before. However, while modern nationalism inspired Russia's imperial leaders to lean evermore heavily on Russification as an integration tool, modern nationalism likewise inspired non-Russian speakers to resist and seek in-



dependence. Later, Soviet leaders also used language policy to reassemble the old Russian Empire as the new Soviet Union by recognizing a sort of right of self-determination of many of the minority peoples. Indeed, the number and choice of republics were rooted in the concepts of ethnicity and nationality. Over time, however, the desire to integrate the Soviet state, led Soviet authorities to create the concept of “*homo Sovieticus*”, which in turn led them to policies of Russification. Despite ostensibly rejecting the imperial past, Soviet thinking and practices simply illustrated the old adage that “the more things change, the more they stay the same.” Indeed, as the Soviet government attempted to restructure the economically weakening Soviet Union at the end of the 20th century, the non-Russian republics seized the opportunity for independence, in part as a negative reaction to the Russification policies. After independence was achieved, the desire for national homogenization within each of the post-Soviet states made language policy a continuing issue and a source of conflict, witness for example eastern Ukraine where Russian-speaking separatists have created the separatist territories of Donetsk and Luhansk.

These evolutionary characteristics of ethnicity and nationality in the post-Soviet states are hardly revelatory and are not what makes this volume unique. Instead, the great contribution of this volume is founded on the highly detailed spatial analysis of data. In the first chapter, Gábor DEMETER describes the means of spatial analysis, which begins with a comparison of the 1897 imperial census with post-Soviet census data collected in the 2000s and 2010s (pp. 8–9). The more recent data, which is collected and mapped at the rayon-level and covers 740 territorial entities, is a much finer spatial resolution than usually applied in studies, especially studies over such vast areas. The 1897 census was composed of only 340 entities. Thus, the spatial alignments are not exact. Moreover, the overall spatial extent of the censuses is not completely coterminous because political boundaries have shifted. For example, the Russian Empire did not include part of today’s western Ukraine because it was in Austrian Galicia in 1897. Similarly, the Russian Empire included areas of contemporary Poland and the Baltic states that now are found outside the boundaries of the post-Soviet states. On the one hand, perhaps there is no point in collecting and analyzing the most recent census from Poland and the Baltic states for those areas that once were included in the Russian Empire precisely because they do not currently lie within any of the post-Soviet states. On the other hand, the study could have been enhanced by considering data from the Austrian census in Galicia in 1900. Though it is not a particularly large area, it is in the zone of shifting politically boundaries. Thus, Austrian data and its comparison with recent data could bolster assertions of the effects

of shifting boundaries on social and economic processes and expressions of ethnicity and nationality. Because the authors already processed and analysed such large data sets, it hardly can be considered a weakness of their studies that they did not include Austrian census data for Galicia. Nevertheless, such an inclusion could be considered for future study.

The main result of the overall spatial analyses reveals the existence and effects of “phantom boundaries” (p. 3), taken from the translation of the German term *Phantomgrenze* as employed by Béatrice von HIRSCHHAUSEN, Hannes GRATIS, Claudia KRAFT, Dietmar MÜLLER, and Thomas SERRIER. In short, phantom boundaries are political boundaries that no longer exist, for example, many of the ones of imperial Russia. Nevertheless, they mark previous spatial arrangements of territory and mark dividing lines of previous socio-economic policies and practices of differing states. They not only mark differences in state ideologies but also very concrete differences in levels of economic development, including differing transportation systems with differing degrees of density and cardinal orientations. Because the locations of previous but no-longer-existing political boundaries are already known, the point of the spatial analyses is to reveal a deeper point. By comparing census data from 1897 and the early 2000s, it is possible to determine how responsible these phantom boundaries are for current social divisions and conflicts. In short, the editors and contributing authors of this volume argue that phantom boundaries go a long way in explaining today’s conflicts in the post-Soviet states. If true, this volume makes a powerful contribution to the scientific literature.

The vastness of the study area provides the editors and contributing authors many opportunities to prove their argument and in many nuanced ways. The ethnic and linguistic diversity of the Russian Empire, especially on its territorial edges was great and continued through the Soviet period and continues to exist in the post-Soviet period. Moreover, the Russian Empire’s and Soviet Union’s external boundaries pushed up against and resisted the external boundaries of a variety of differing other states (e.g. Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires). This overall situation has left a series of zones where varying policies and practices of differing state ideologies imposed on a variety of ethnicities and nationalities can be analysed and assembled into a typology of case studies. Indeed, the volume is structured accordingly. Specifically, the volume is comprised of three sections, each with four chapters. The first section, entitled “Formation of National Identity”, contains chapters that discuss broader concepts and illustrates the overall picture. This is particularly true of Gábor DEMETER’s chapter entitled “The Historical Roots of Regional Inequalities and Their Relationship with Present-Day Peripheries and Conflict Zones in

the Post-Soviet Realm (1897–2010)". The next three chapters explore different facets of the broader issues. Margit KŐSZEGI more examines "The Faces of Russian Nationalism". Zsolt BOTTLIK concentrates on "Geopolitics and Language in the European Post-Soviet Realm", and Géza BARTA, Tamás ILLÉS, and Zsolt BOTTLIK focus on "Russian and Soviet Censuses in Ethnic-National Context."

The second and third sections of the book delve into the case studies. The second section concerns itself with "Local Identities under Russian Rule", and the third section are cases falling under the rubric of "'Constructed' (Soviet) Ethnicities". The four chapters of the second section are devoted to the nomadic Turkic-speakers and the agrarian Iranian peoples. A common denominator for the section is that the creation of monolithic groups "can also be considered a Russian construct, since the relative cohesion among both smaller and larger groups scattered over this vast area [former Turkestani territories] was itself very much a reflection of the changing attitudes of Russian power" (p. viii). It means that integration extended far beyond Russification policies, which in many ways took a backseat to more prominent issues. Islam was the most obvious as it was the "enemy" religion, but integration involved more than the suppression and reorientation of religious beliefs. State power can act so profoundly that it has the ability to construct nationalities through (re-)organization and (re-)classification. Margit KŐSZEGI's and Zsolt BOTTLIK's chapter "The Layers of Post-Soviet Central Asian 'Nations'" illustrates such power and its processes. Not only were Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan constructed by the Soviets, the "titular" nations of these nation-states were themselves constructed by Russian imperial then Soviet policies. Though groups with these names already existed, they were not homogenous nations as understood by European definitions. Instead, they were only a few among a constellation of numerous groups with complex and overlapping sets of social relations. Russian imperial authorities then Soviet ones privileged these five and then slowly amalgamated the others to them over many decades. They sought to completely reorganize these peoples' social relations in the process. Though they were not completely successful and actually failed in many ways, their combination of successes and failures resulted in the creation of new nationalities that eventually jettisoned themselves from the Soviet state that they shared with Russians. Similar identities were constructed in the same ways for smaller groups that remain in the Russian Federation today and are analysed in the other chapters of the second section. Margit KŐSZEGI discusses the evolution of state relations with the "Tatars in Russia and the Post-Soviet Realm". She also authors "In the Net of Power: Small Nations and Ethnicities on the Black Sea

Coast." Tamás ILLÉS ends the section with "Living on the Edge: The Origins and Evolution of the Kalmyk Ethno-Religious Enclave along the Southern Russian Frontier."

The third section is comprised of cases falling under the rubric of "'Constructed' (Soviet) Ethnicities". The title of this section is a bit of mystery because all the previous chapters of the volume demonstrated that ethnicities in the study area have been "constructed". Nevertheless, the chapters in this section distinguish themselves from the second section with their own set of common themes. First, they examine groups that were divided from the Russian, then Soviet realm and other realms. The peoples who found themselves on both sides of the Russian Empire's then Soviet Union's boundaries were in "linguistically and culturally similar communities" (p. xiv). Géza BARTA provides the first case study of these chapters: "In the Contact Zone of In-Between Europe and the Post-Soviet Realm-Notions of Karelian Spaces". Karelians and part of Karelia are also in Finland. Tamás ILLÉS and Zsolt BOTTLIK wrote "Rescaling Moldovan Identities." Moldova is part of historic Moldavia, which is largely in Romania and many Moldovans speak a form of Romanian. Margit KŐSZEGI and Zsolt BOTTLIK examine "The Post-Soviet Azerbaijani National Identity". Some sources count more Azeris in neighbouring Iran than in Azerbaijan, not to mention many more in other states that neighbour Azerbaijan. And Csaba BAROCH addresses "Tajik Identities: Ageless Alternatives to an Unborn Nation". Though the last section of the volume, it is perhaps the most crucial. For if the amalgamation of groups into ethnicities and nationalities discussed in previous chapters may seem more the product of natural forces than they are the product of state power and geopolitics, then these case studies certainly demonstrate the power of state power and geopolitics.

Overall, *Power and Identity in the Post-Soviet Realm* is an excellent contribution to the study of ethnicity and nationality for many reasons. First, it is a comprehensive study that examines identities across a spectrum of circumstances through a series of compelling and convincing case studies. The editors and contributing authors are commended for their choices of cases studies and their success in integrating their case studies into a larger coherent work. Often, such volumes are uneven in their coverage and individual case studies are not well-oriented and well-linked to one another. Second, the volume makes a great contribution by integrating the interplay of internal political geographies with broader geopolitics to explain the evolution, character, and fluidity of ethnicity and nationality. Third, the editors and authors, by building on census data, show that language use does not necessarily reveal identity, at least not essential identity as an individual ultimately may see and define him- or herself. A person's selection of language

use on a census questionnaire is often more reflective of geopolitics and socioeconomics than identity. Moreover, census questions often do not capture the complexity of identities, namely that identities are multi-layered. Therefore, the answer to a question about language use often only captures one layer of identity at a specific point in time and may not be the most important one to an individual. Fourth, the editors and contributing authors illustrate the power

of geography by showing that the spatial analysis of ethnicity and nationality can reveal crucial aspects of these phenomena that studies without any kind of spatial awareness do not even detect. In sum, the volume's breadth and depth combined with its easy to read but nuanced writing styles make this volume a highly recommended read.

GEORGE W. WHITE¹

¹ South Dakota State University, Department of Geography & Geospatial Sciences, Brookings, South Dakota, USA. E-mail: George.White@sdstate.edu