

As the Forest is Chopped, the Chips Fly: The Fall of Soviet Internationalism and Late Perestroika's "Refugee" Problem, 1988–1990

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In February 1989, Valentina Shevchenko, the Deputy Prime Minister of the USSR Supreme Soviet, met with citizens from across the Soviet Union concerned with emergent nationalism in the *priem* (reception) of the Supreme Soviet.¹ Citing nationalism unchecked by party and state bodies of the republic, a group of workers in a self-declared “internationalist” labor collective from Lithuania beseeched Shevchenko for transfer to Russia.² The nationality-mixed collective consisted of 28 members of Belorussian, Ukrainian, Russian, Kazakh, and Bashkir nationalities, some of whom were in mixed families with Lithuanians. “What if there is another Karabakh?” they begged, in reference to nationalist tensions in the Caucasus that recently exploded into violence. When Shevchenko denied their petition to relocate, they despaired, “We, who considered ourselves full members of a large family of Soviet peoples, have turned into ‘migrants,’ ‘aliens (*inorodtsy*),’ people without a clan and tribe.”³

At least one in five Soviet citizens lived outside of “their” national territories or did not have one by 1989.⁴ Yet their voices, complaints, and experiences—especially poignant amid the breakdown of the Soviet project—have been overshadowed by dominant narratives that have focused on early Soviet nation-making, the rise of national movements, and “top-down” accounts of the USSR’s collapse.⁵ The Bolsheviks designed an ethnofederal system with

1. Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (hereafter GARF), fond (f.) R9654, opis' (op.) 10, delo (d.) 369, list (ll.) 1–230 (correspondence, proposals, and complaints from the citizens' reception to deputy chairmen and members of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR). To preserve anonymity of the authors, I do not include last names.

2. GARF, f. R9654, op. 10, d. 369, ll. 157–67.

3. *Ibid.*

4. The highest estimation I have seen is from the Chairman of the Soviet of Nationalities, who reported that 73.1 million people lived outside of “their” territories in the USSR in 1991 (about one quarter of the USSR’s population as compared to the 1989 census). This number evidently included those who did not have “home” territories. Sources often conflate these groups. GARF f. R9654, op. 6, d. 221, ll. 2–11 (Materials received by the Chairman of the Soviet of Nationalities, R.N. Nishanov, on issues of interethnic relations: conflicts, problems, refugees). See also Bohdan Nahaylo, “(After the Soviet Union)–Population Displacement in the Former Soviet Union,” *Refugees*, no. 98 (December 1994).

5. Scholars of early Soviet nationality policy have established how the USSR became a “maker” and not “breaker” of nations. These scholars, however, have discounted the lived realities of groups outside of or without “their own” national territories after the late 1930s when state policies shifted toward favoring titular nationalities and Russified centralization. Some key works include, Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Revenge of the Past*:

territories “national in form, but socialist in content” to promote the development and eventual merger of equal national groups once subjected to Russian imperialism into communism. The dialectical nationalizing and centralizing processes that promised to lead all into communism, or at any rate, to support mutual Soviet aims, were finally upended when nationalization accelerated during perestroika. The consequences of this policy’s failure cannot be understood without examining the everyday realities of those who lived outside of or without the ethnoterritory ostensibly designated to them in their passports. More likely to rely on, support, or identify with the Soviet project (particularly when nationalist contentions intensified), as this paper argues, many of these communities mobilized in reaction to major events of titular nationalism and violence, like the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, in the Soviet Union’s final years. Through collective and individual action rooted in decades of internationalist practice, they appealed to central organs as Soviet citizens, internationalists, or as Russian speakers, to demand an eleventh-hour central intervention or transfers, most often to Russia, the Soviet metropole. Their responses to titular nationalism and violence, even when it mainly concerned other ethnic communities, disclosed how Soviet lived realities had for many become far more complex than the nationality inscribed in their passports.

How did millions of Soviet citizens end up outside of or without “their own” national territory in an ethnofederal state? The radical early Soviet answer to the problem of minorities was to create thousands of national units of the very smallest level (national districts, village soviets, collective farms) to extend the system of national promotion, or *korenizatsiia* (nativization). After the 1930s, however, this intricate territorial solution for minorities was phased out, and the union republics subsequently became the main beneficiaries of national promotion (and to a lesser extent, the autonomous republics,

Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union (Stanford, 1993); Yuri Slezkine, “The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism,” *Slavic Review* 53, no. 2 (Summer 1994): 414–52; and Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939* (New York, 2001). On perestroika nationalist mobilization, see Mark Bessinger, *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State* (Cambridge, Eng., 2002). Bessinger’s “tidal wave” theory of national mobilization argues that in the glasnost era of “thickened history,” nationalist events and challenges to the state fed off one another. Similarly, and less recognized, however, were the mobilizations against nationalist movements that called on centralist intervention. Major historical works on the collapse have focused on the Soviet Union’s systemic failures as an explanation for why it failed to cope with the perestroika reforms. Vladislav Zubok also argues that Mikhail Gorbachev’s indecisive leadership played a critical role in the state’s breakdown, and that it was a factor in the state’s inability to address rising titular nationalism and violence. See Vladislav M. Zubok, *Collapse: The Fall of the Soviet Union* (New Haven, 2021), and Stephen Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse 1970–2000* (New York, 2001). On Gorbachev’s response to ethnic unrest, see also Mark Kramer, “Official Responses to Ethnic Unrest in the USSR, 1985–1991,” *Russian History* 49, no. 2-4 (2022): 289–335. Few scholars have moved historical debates regarding perestroika’s impact on the USSR’s nationalities policy beyond state or intelligentsia accounts. One exception is Jeff Sahadeo’s oral history, *Voices from the Soviet Edge: Southern Migrants in Leningrad and Moscow* (Ithaca, 2019). The final chapter of Sahadeo’s oral history discusses how perestroika exposed and exacerbated national tensions. He makes an important point by noting that center-periphery ties “nurtured by decades-long mobility and networks” deepened even as the union unraveled.

regions, and okrugs that became subordinate to them). The peoples who lost, never had, or were separated from “their” national units were still entitled to national development by principle.⁶ There were many differences between the minority groups living in a dominant nation’s territory that emerged after the late 1930s, but perhaps the most important was that some became extraterritorial, meaning that they were ascribed “home” republics or relegated to sub-republican territory, while others were nontitular, possessing neither.⁷ Despite their large number and diversity, historical scholarship on extraterritorial and nontitular communities after the late 1930s is limited and, due to widely varying histories, discloses few interconnections between them.⁸ Once eligible for national units of “their” own, these groups were stranded by a Soviet nationality policy that favored nationalizing republics and a Russified centralization of the USSR. The elaborate system of national units that once wove the country together was replaced by the greater empowerment of many titular nations, while Russians (whose extraterritorial populations the Bolsheviks once considered minorities entitled to national units) were positioned to play a special unifying role as “first among equals” across the USSR.

Soviet, or internal, internationalism became vital in legitimizing, safeguarding, and promoting the presence of people living outside of or without “their own” national territories. The Marxist concept, which once stood for global proletarian revolution, was modified by the USSR to represent more pragmatic aims.⁹ Internationalism widely came to symbolize the bridging of the (newly expanded) Second World in the postwar era, but it became just as

6. “Equal political, economic, state, cultural, and social rights” irrespective of one’s nationality were bedrocks of the Soviet constitutions that applied to all citizens at least in theory. Krista Goff, *Nested Nationalism: Making and Unmaking Nations in the Soviet Caucasus* (Ithaca, 2021), 3.

7. Most works use “nontitular” to refer to Soviet ethnic groups living outside of “their” ethnic homeland and to those who did not have one. Historian Krista Goff, however, has adopted the term to specify groups in the Soviet hierarchy of nations who had no titular ethnic homeland and were more likely to be subject to titular assimilation after the late 1930s; see Goff, *Nested Nationalism*. To recognize this critical historical difference, I use “extraterritorial” to refer to groups living outside of legitimated “home” republics or territories and “nontitular” for those groups who did not have one.

8. Erik Scott was of the first to focus on the “evolution” of “internal diasporas” in the Soviet Union by centering on prominent Georgians in Moscow. See Erik Scott, *Familiar Strangers: The Georgian Diaspora and the Evolution of Soviet Empire* (New York, 2016). In a recent monograph, Krista Goff concentrates on the more vulnerable nontitular nations in the Caucasus left at the mercy of both titular nationalism and Russified centralization after the late 1930s to claim that it was the former, not the latter, that many nontitular peoples blamed more for everyday inequalities. See Goff, *Nested Nationalism*. See Sahadeo, *Voices from the Soviet Edge*, for another recent monograph. On some historical linkages between extraterritorial, nontitular, and local communities, see Rebecca Manley, *To the Tashkent Station: Evacuation and Survival in the Soviet Union at War* (Ithaca, 2009); Michaela Pohl, “The ‘Planet of One Hundred Languages’: Ethnic Relations and Soviet Identity in the Virgin Lands,” in Nicholas B. Breyfogle, Abby Schrader, and Willard Sunderland, eds., *Peopling the Russian Periphery: Borderland Colonization in Eurasian History* (London, 2007), 238–62.

9. See Rachel Applebaum, *Empire of Friends: Soviet Power and Socialist Internationalism in Cold War Czechoslovakia* (Ithaca, 2019).

significant domestically, as scholars have begun to show.¹⁰ Within the USSR, internationalism represented the modernizing trajectory of the Soviet project that would eventually exhaust national difference. On one end, it provided the right to national development within the “friendship of nations” (indeed, the concept was often employed to make sense of national interests). On the other, it represented the realization of a supranational, though Russified, Soviet *narod* (people). Those who transcended national divisions by living and working outside of “their” national units or by establishing mixed families (especially through the Russian language) embodied the modernizing Soviet ideal.¹¹

Yet internationalism was more than a symbol with multiple connotations; it was also national policy. The *sblizhenie* (drawing together) or *sliianie* (merging) of Soviet peoples was the telic aim of Soviet internationalism, and it became an increasingly important state objective in the post-Stalin era.¹² As the autonomy of local and republican communist parties expanded in many republics under Nikita Khrushchev and Leonid Brezhnev and the non-European republics became more nationally consolidated, the state also increasingly deployed international *vospitanie* (education, or cultivation) to counterbalance or prevent instances of overt nationalism that threatened Soviet unity.¹³ In Kazakhstan’s industrial Mangyshlak region, for instance, “thousands of lecturers and propagandists” reportedly inculcated internationalism in 1970 to account for the multiethnic population.¹⁴ Teachers of Russian across the USSR (particularly in national schools) were encouraged to instill how command of the language was necessary to foster an “international culture of Soviet peoples” and to avoid “national-linguistic antagonism.”¹⁵

10. See Erik Scott, *Familiar Strangers*; Stefan Guth, “USSR Incorporated Versus Affirmative Action Empire? Industrial Development and Interethnic Relations in Kazakhstan’s Mangyshlak Region (1960s–1980s),” *Ab Imperio* 4 (2018): 171–206; Artemy Kalinovsky, *Laboratory of Socialist Development: Cold War Politics and Decolonization in Soviet Tajikistan* (Ithaca, 2018); Sahadeo, *Voices from the Soviet Edge*.

11. On Soviet intermarriage, see Adrienne L. Edgar, “Marriage, Modernity and the ‘Friendship of Nations’: Interethnic Intimacy in Postwar Central Asia in Comparative Perspective,” *Central Asian Survey* 26, no. 4 (December 2007): 581–99; and Adrienne L. Edgar, *Intermarriage and the Friendship of Peoples: Ethnic Mixing in Soviet Central Asia* (Ithaca, 2022).

12. Guth, “USSR Incorporated Versus Affirmative Action Empire?” See also Edgar, *Intermarriage and the Friendship of Peoples*, 23–24, and the epilogue to Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca, 2005).

13. On the use of international *vospitanie* at local, republican, and national scales, see RGANI, f. 100, op. 5, d. 407 (letters on nationalism in various republics of the USSR: 1966–1990). On the relaxation of republican controls in the post-Stalinist period, see Jeremy Smith, *Red Nations: The Nationalities Experience in and after the USSR* (Cambridge, Eng., 2013). On Soviet demographic trends, see Barbara A. Anderson and Brian D. Silver, “Demographic Sources of the Changing Ethnic Composition of the Soviet Union,” *Population and Development Review* 15, no. 4 (December 1989): 628–35.

14. Guth, “USSR Incorporated Versus Affirmative Action Empire?,” 186.

15. I. V. Barannikova and M.V. Cherkezovoi, eds., *Vospitanie sovetskogo patriotizma i sotsialisticheskogo internatsionalizma v protsesse izuchenii russkogo iazyka i literatury* (Leningrad, 1985); N.A. Baskakov, eds., *Puti razvitiia natsional’no russkogo dvuiazychiia v nerusskikh shkolakh RSFSR* (Moscow, 1979).

Groups perceiving nationalist intimidation, or the denial of their own national interests, could, and did, report breaches in internationalism in their letters to the state.¹⁶ Post-Stalinist reforms, in fact, enabled such letter campaigns and other forms of activism.¹⁷ In 1969, for instance, self-proclaimed communists in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Georgia sent a petition to Brezhnev in complaint of “rampant nationalism” that they alleged had recently made life in these republics unbearable for other nationalities.¹⁸ They wanted party organizations to amplify internationalist “vospitanie” to ensure that there were no further “indulgences” of one nation over another.¹⁹ Though local and republican authorities were most often tasked with evaluating and resolving such complaints, the center sometimes validated petitioners in important ways. It oversaw frequently reported or serious issues (like the indifference of authorities to nationalist crimes) and it could send special commissions from Moscow to investigate these reports. The “promise of internationalism,” as Artemy Kalinovsky has emphasized, evoked the “social contract” of social welfare essential to Soviet rule—and it was harnessed to hold officials to account.²⁰

The simultaneous empowerment and impairment of titular nationalism laid the groundwork for exclusionary and sometimes violent nation-making processes that existed earlier but intensified with the emergence of national movements. When Mikhail Gorbachev’s liberalizing reforms lifted further constraints on titular nations by loosening party controls and lessening fears of unsanctioned political activity, national frustrations exploded into conflict. The practice of petitioning for citizen rights vis-à-vis alleged encroachments of nationalism had already become entrenched, but the threat of mass violence in connection with emergent national movements provoked an unprecedented outpouring of letters from different threatened or intimidated communities. I concentrate on two violent crises that set off these responses across the country: 1) the conflict over the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh (a majority Armenian autonomous region in Azerbaijan) from 1988–90, perestroika’s first episode of mass fatal unrest and displacement provoked by titular nationalism; and 2) the conflict between Uzbek and Meskhetian Turk groups (Islamic

16. See RGANI, f. 100, op. 5, d. 407; RGANI, f. 100, op. 5, d. 408 (letters on the manifestations of nationalism in various republics of the USSR, volume 2 1980–1987); RGANI, f. 100, op. 5, d. 405 (letters on the nationality policy of the CPSU, January 1966–April 1972); RGANI, f. 100, op. 5, d. 422 (letters from citizens of Tajik nationalities on the aggravation of interethnic relations in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan).

17. See Krista A. Goff, “‘Why Not Love Our Language and Our Culture?’ National Rights and Citizenship in Khrushchev’s Soviet Union,” *Nationalities Papers* 43, no. 1 (January 2015): 27–44.

18. RGANI, f. 100, op. 5, d. 407, ll. 77–79.

19. Party organizations for the “patriotic and international education of workers” functioned throughout the country. See, for example, RGANI, f. 100, op. 5, d. 439, ll. 1–19 (Letters from citizens of various nationalities demanding recognition of their nation, language, culture, 1966–1988). See also Vladimir Emel’ianovich Naumenko, “Deiatel’nost’ Checheno-Ingushskoi oblastnoi partiinoi organizatsii po internatsional’nomu vospitaniiu trudiaschikhhsia (1959–1971 gg.)” (PhD diss., Dagestan Friendship of Peoples University, Makhachkala, 1984).

20. Artemy Kalinovsky, *Laboratory of Socialist Development*, 11.

peoples deported under Stalin from Meskheta, Georgia on the Turkish border) that culminated in Uzbekistan's Fergana Valley massacre of June 1989, the first majority-minority mass casualty conflict in Central Asia that displaced tens of thousands more.²¹

More than local "ethnic" conflicts, these events (hereafter referred to as Nagorno-Karabakh and Fergana Valley) became major Soviet-wide and regional issues that revealed how the increasingly defunct centralizing apparatus struggled to manage titular nationalism and to protect the groups pitted against it. These conflicts displaced hundreds of thousands of different people during perestroika, producing the phenomenon of a Soviet "refugee" crisis that made titular nationalism and violence, and the center's growing impotency, even more alarming. The perception that central authorities yielded to titular violence, namely, by not doing enough to counter the indifference (and, arguably, the provocations) of local and republican authorities to titular aggressions and opting instead to evacuate targeted communities, played a significant role in spreading fears and the urge to flee. Following these conflicts, many reported a more perceptible or intensified minoritization—or the attempts of the dominant group, now regarded as the "the *real* citizen," to exclude, expel, and intimidate others believed to not belong or be an affront to, the national(izing) imaginary.²² In other words, the center's unraveling made many communities who it once ostensibly protected or privileged more fearful of, or vulnerable to, emboldening titular groups who turned to violent persecutions in some large-scale cases. The conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, for instance, came to symbolize nationalist violence that provoked widespread anxieties and preemptive action in places as distant as Lithuania.

Of course, the way that minoritization was experienced when titular nationalism hastened varied; nor did it apply to ethnic groups in their entirety. Some communities were historically repressed and especially vulnerable (Meskhetian Turks) or were part of an escalating geopolitical conflict (Armenians, Azeris) and were subjected to systemic campaigns of violence and expulsion. At the other end, the primary concern was language laws that made the titular language the "state language" throughout the non-Russian republics between 1988–90 despite nearly ubiquitous and "'fierce' Russophone

21. The Meskhetian expulsions targeted "Turks, Kurds, and Kemschins [Muslim Armenians]." Historically, the "Turk" label has been used to refer to various groups, including Azerbaijans, Tatars, subjects of the Ottoman empire or Turkey, and Muslims. I use "Meskhetian Turks," which underscores Georgian origins, because this is the ethnic label used most often in letters and party and government documents in this period, and by the Meskhetian Turk Organization "Vatan." On the Meskhetian expulsions, see Claire P. Kaiser, "What Are They Doing, After All, We're not Germans": Expulsion, Belonging, and Postwar Experience in the Caucasus," in Krista Goff and Lewis H. Siegelbaum, eds., *Empire and Belonging in the Eurasian Borderland* (Ithaca, 2019), 80–94. On debates related to the ethnic category, see Stephen F. Jones, "Meskhetians: Muslim Georgians or Meskhetian Turks? A Community without a Homeland," *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees* 13, no. 2 (May 1993): 14–16.

22. On minorityhood as socially and historically constructed, see Janet Klein, "Making Minorities in the Eurasian Borders: A Comparative Perspective from the Russian and Eurasian Borderlands," in Goff and Siegelbaum, eds., *Empire and Belonging in the Eurasian Borderlands*, 17–18.

resistance.”²³ Yet, even changing language laws could influence harassment, tensions, and fear of titular violence. Experiences with Soviet collapse and titular nationalism also differed at the collective and individual levels. Some members of the most targeted ethnic groups did not report any changes vis-à-vis titular groups when mass hostilities toward their co-ethnics occurred.²⁴ Contrastingly, groups who were not at the center of mass ethnonationalist violence reported fears because of it. While emergent conflict involved the more immediate threat of violence for some, others were driven by more diffuse fears, other means of intimidation, or a justifiable panic after these events. The latter was perhaps more common for Russians as their special status in the USSR made them a more daunting rival, but archival evidence suggests that they were also directly engaged in, and displaced by, “ethnic” conflict, especially as members of mixed families, when national movements emerged.

Nationalist violence or harassment displaced over 600,000 Soviet citizens between 1988 and 1990 alone, compelling the state to employ the term “refugee” in reference to those who were still technically internally displaced.²⁵ “Refugee,” however, also became a prevailing form of self-identification. This newfound identity could connote a triple alienation: from place of origin, historic homeland, and from the Soviet Union as one’s conceptual fatherland. Despite the many ruptures of this moment on daily life, the literature on nontitular and extraterritorial communities in the Soviet Union’s final years has not yet incorporated the voices and everyday realities of those distressed and displaced by titular nationalism through archival research.²⁶ Similarly, scholarship on mass migration to Russia from the former Soviet republics has primarily come from outside the historical field and has, therefore, focused primarily on the post-Soviet period.²⁷ At the time of writing, to my knowledge,

23. Pål Kolstø, “Nationalism, Ethnic Conflict, and Job Competition: Non-Russian Collective Action in the USSR under Perestroika,” *Nations and Nationalism* 14, no. 1 (January 2008): 151–69.

24. Regional head of the Meskhetian Turk Organization “Vatan,” phone interview, North Ossetia, January 18, 2022.

25. GARF, f. R9654, op. 6, d. 221, ll. 9–10 (letters on the need to assist refugees and on the draft law “On forced migration in the USSR”). It would not be until February 1993 that the Russia Federation would finally legally differentiate between “forced migrants”—those who could claim Russian citizenship—and “refugees.” Until then, the terms were used interchangeably.

26. See Yaacov Ro’i, “Central Asian Riots and Disturbances, 1989–1990: Causes and Context,” *Central Asian Survey* 10, no. 3 (1991): 21–54; Pål Kolstø, “Nationalism, Ethnic Conflict, and Job Competition,” 151–69; Matteo Fumagalli, “Framing Ethnic Minority Mobilization in Central Asia: The Cases of Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 59, no. 4 (2007): 567–90; Sato Keiji, “Mobilization of Non-Titular Ethnicities during the Last Years of the Soviet Union: Gagauzia, Transnistria, and the Lithuanian Poles,” *Acta Slavica Iaponica* 26 (2009): 141–57.

27. See Vladimir Shlapentokh, Munir Sendich, and Emil Payin, *The New Russian Diaspora: Russian Minorities in the Former Soviet Republics* (New York, 1994); Paul Kolstoe, *Russians in the Former Soviet Republics* (Bloomington, 1995); Hillary Pilkington, *Migration, Displacement and Identity in Post-Soviet Russia* (London, 1998); Igor Zevelev, *Russia and Its New Diasporas* (Washington, DC, 2001); Moya Flynn, *Migrant Resettlement in the Russian Federation: Reconstructing Homes and Homelands* (London, 2004); Ismailbekova, “Mobility as a Coping Strategy,” 49–68; Cynthia J. Buckley, Blair A. Ruble, and Erin T. Hofmann, eds., *Migration, Homeland, and Belonging in Eurasia* (Baltimore, 2008); Alexia

there have been no archival-based studies on Soviet displacement during the USSR's final years.

So, what do the archives show us? They complicate our understanding of Soviet dissolution and nationality studies to reveal how the legacy of Soviet nationality policy made “ethnic” conflict far more complex than a targeted minority and a repressive majority. This paper focuses on archival letters and party and government documents pertinent to the State Committee on Labor and Social Affairs (Goskomtrud) from 1988 to 1990, which was tasked with overseeing the developing displacement problem in the Soviet Union's last years. To understand the broader social and personal experiences extraterritorial and nontitular communities had with the Soviet collapse, I have additionally reviewed hundreds of letters on titular nationalism shuffled to central organs. This paper is part of a larger project for which I have also conducted interviews with five heads of migrant and diaspora organizations and about a dozen migrants and refugees.

The logic of Rogers Brubaker's concept of “groupness,” which conceives of national identity as relational with moments of crystallizing or waning cohesion—as this paper underscores—applies similarly to intercommunal identity.²⁸ For decades, internationalism had been vital to the legitimacy and security of many extraterritorial and nontitular communities who counted on the Soviet system to check nationalism. The emergence of national movements and interrelated titular violence triggered a moment of shared reckoning among different communities made aware of their mutual vulnerability. Many cited their internationalist credentials in pleas for central oversight and transfers. Others used multinational or ethnically ambiguous collective petitions as leverage to demand redress from central organs or the protections (and rights) they believed were owed to them as Soviet citizens. Often Russian speakers and members of mixed families, many extraterritorial and nontitular peoples left with few other options demanded relocation, or fled, to Russia. Many of those displaced, as archival records show, did not fit neatly into national categories, which frustrated official efforts in managing the subsequent migrant crisis. To prevent snowballing the issue, central authorities encouraged the displaced to return to their abandoned homes, even when this was perceived as dangerous, or to turn to “their” titular territories, a proposition that sometimes baffled those born and raised elsewhere. They also discouraged further migration while, incongruously, deploying evacuations to manage “ethnic” conflict. This did little to remedy the escalating problem. Some determined to stay in their homes—or in the Soviet metropole—taking matters into their own hands, formed internationalist oppositions, sit-ins, and other initiatives. Against the wishes of authorities, Soviet citizens boldly fled to, and recalcitrantly remained in, spaces restricted to them in the dissolving country's core.

Bloch, “Citizenship, Belonging, and Moldovan Migrants in Post-Soviet Russia,” *Ethnos: Journal of Anthropology* 79, no. 4 (August 2014): 445–72; and S.V. Ryazantsev, “Nashi” za granitsej: Russkie, rossiiane, russkogovoriashchie, sootechestvenniki: rasselenie, integratsiia i vozvratnaia migratsiia v Rossiuu (Moscow, 2014).

28. Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups* (Cambridge, Mass., 2004).

Living Soviet Outside of or Without One's "Own" National Territory

Multi-dimensional, evolving, and, as Krista Goff has shown, negotiated processes complicated the Soviet national hierarchy.²⁹ These varied national and personal histories could inform how groups processed, were affected by, and reacted to the rise of national movements amid the center's devolution. By 1989, there were 53 ethnic homelands in the Soviet Union overall, but 128 nationalities were officially listed on the census.³⁰ Seventy-five (acknowledged) national groups thus lived without the potential benefits, security, or special recognition that came with having existing titular lands within the ethnofederal structure. An incredible forty-three million of the republics' titular populations also lived outside them when the USSR dissolved, with the legitimacy, potential recourse, and social-cultural advantages that came with their national status.³¹ By far the largest (and most privileged) among them were self-identified ethnic Russians (approximately 25 million people by 1989). The option to choose the language of education (titular, native, or Russian) offered after Khrushchev's 1958 reforms also pushed many extraterritorial and nontitular Soviet citizens toward the Soviet lingua franca as it offered more chances of social mobility.³² In the postwar period, the Russian language became more dominant in school instruction, in publications, and as a form of communication, particularly in urban and industrial spaces.³³ Between 1959 and 1989, members of national communities living outside of "their" titular homeland were generally more linguistically Russified—even in rural areas—than titular groups living in urban spaces in "their" homeland.³⁴ By 1989, 36 million people living outside "their own" territory, or lacking one entirely, identified themselves as Russophone.³⁵

The range of groups living outside of or without "their own" territories meant that their relationships vis-a-vis titular majorities and Soviet policy also differed. Stalinist deportations of purported fifth column nations to "special settlements" made these repressed and sometimes continually marginalized peoples particularly vulnerable targets of national movements. Deportees also varied. The historic homelands of some "special settlers" were restored during Khrushchev's regime, while others had the legitimacy of external homelands (Greeks, Poles, Germans), some of which supported their

29. Goff, *Nested Nationalism*.

30. Timothy Heleniak, "Migration Dilemmas Haunt Post-Soviet Russia," Migration Policy Institute, October 1, 2002, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/migration-dilemmas-haunt-post-soviet-russia> (accessed June 26, 2023).

31. Timothy Heleniak, "An Overview of Migration in the Post-Soviet Space," in Cynthia J. Buckley, Blair A. Ruble, and Erin T. Hofmann, eds., *Migration, Homeland, and Belonging in Eurasia* (Baltimore, 2008), 46.

32. On pushback to the reforms, see Jeremy Smith, "The Battle for Language: Opposition to Khrushchev's Education Reform in the Soviet Republics, 1958–59," *Slavic Review* 76, no. 4 (Winter 2017): 983–1002.

33. Robert J. Kaiser, *The Geography of Nationalism in Russia and the USSR* (Princeton, 1994), 250–324.

34. *Ibid.*

35. Those who named Russian as their native or second language said that they could "freely command." Zevelev, *Russia and Its New Diasporas*, 94–95.

repatriation when Soviet emigration policy liberalized by the late 1980s.³⁶ Among the most vulnerable were deportees who were denied the rehabilitation of, or return to, their historic homelands and did not have a recognized external titular homeland (Meskhetian Turks, Kurds, Crimean Tatars). The lack of national-cultural institutional support for nontitular peoples who did not have a “home” republic or territory after the late 1930s also caused some to adopt titular identities, which offered higher chances of mobility and social status.³⁷ Some native communities who did not have “their own” ethnic territory, like Lezgins in Azerbaijan, or were not incorporated into “their” national unit when it was formed, like Tajiks in Uzbekistan, were also subjected to titular assimilation.³⁸ Sometimes citing titular animosity and assimilation, some of these repressed and native groups would continue to push central organs for the (re)instatement of autonomous territories.³⁹

There were numerous other complicating factors, like the categorization of nationality. Censuses were designed to elicit subjective responses, which were skewed toward nationalities, like Russians, with clear advantages. Census practices also sometimes restricted self-identification to recognized nationalities, while some census workers interfered in the collection and reporting of data (both purposefully and accidentally) to deny minority identification.⁴⁰ Census options for mixed nationalities were not included. As one might expect, in comparison to the rest of the USSR population, intermarriage was more common for nearly all nationalities who lived outside of “their” constituent territories.⁴¹ By 1988, for instance, Armenian women entered mixed marriages fifteen times more often outside of Armenia; Azeri women were three times more likely to intermarry outside of Azerbaijan.

Most of the Central Asian and Caucasian republics where the Nagorno-Karabakh and the Fergana Valley conflicts transpired and had the most impact were relatively diverse in population despite trending toward national consolidation. In these regions, neighboring ethnic groups made up a significant portion of republican residents. People self-identified especially heterogeneously in Central Asia. In 1989, 22% percent of Tajiks lived in Uzbekistan, while 24% of Uzbeks lived in Tajikistan.⁴² Uzbekistan also had large populations of Kazakhs and Kyrgyz, while Uzbeks made up 9% of Turkmenistan and 13% of Kyrgyzstan. In Kyrgyzstan, Russians constituted 21.4% of the

36. See, for example, Olga Zeveleva, “Political Aspects of Repatriation: Germany, Russia, Kazakhstan. A Comparative Analysis,” *Nationalities Papers* 42, no. 5 (2014): 808–27.

37. See Goff, *Nested Nationalism*.

38. See RGANI, f. 100, op. 5, d. 422, ll. 55–69; ll. 29–46. See also Goff, *Nested Nationalism*.

39. On Volga German, Kurd, and Lezgin petitions for autonomous territories in 1988 and 1989, see GARF, f. R9654, op. 10, d. 369, ll. 119–24; ll. 208–30, and RGANI, f. 100, op. 5, d. 433, ll. 11–13 (letters from Lezgins addressed to party congresses and conferences, the Central Committee of the CPSU). See also Keiji, “Mobilization of Non-Titular Ethnicities,” 141–57.

40. See Goff, *Nested Nationalism*, 166–78.

41. Mark Tolts, “Personal Life Reflected in Statistics: Interethnic Marriages,” *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 42, no. 4 (February 1990): 31.

42. Heleniak, “An Overview of Migration in the Post-Soviet Space.”

republic, and other non-Kyrgyz nationalities comprised 26.7%.⁴³ Even in Kazakhstan, where Russians made up 37.6% of the total, non-Russian non-Kazakhs accounted for 22.9% of the population. Though Armenia was the most ethnically consolidated republic (93.9% Armenian), Armenians were the least concentrated within “their” republic (66% lived in the titular area). One third of self-identified Armenians living outside of Armenia made up 6% of Azerbaijan’s population in 1989 (when mass out-migration was already underway).

The Soviet Union also became an increasingly interconnected space in the postwar period. The vast country had been bridged in the minds and realities of millions through common trials and tribulations, like the Great Patriotic War, and other shared experiences. The war, which dispersed and displaced many, relocated 20% of the USSR’s industrial enterprises east, particularly to Kazakhstan and Central Asia, where some chose to stay for good.⁴⁴ In his bid to replace Stalin and enhance Soviet influence, Khrushchev committed to leveling development, which stimulated further investment in the southern periphery and turned Central Asia into a showcase of Soviet anti-imperialism.⁴⁵ The Virgin Lands campaign in northern Kazakhstan, an infamous postwar undertaking, brought “hundreds of thousands of the most varied people opportunities to build new lives and reinvent themselves.”⁴⁶ Virgin Landers worked, mixed, intermarried, and sometimes violently clashed with native residents and “special settlers” of different nationalities. Across the USSR, all-union enterprises drew workers, youth, and Russian-speaking specialists (who, due to the prevalence of Russian in higher education, tended to be better qualified and more mobile).⁴⁷ Cross-border migration, or “transnationalism in one country,” was also facilitated by public transportation, including air travel, which became readily available and affordable.⁴⁸ Some citizens had become so “Soviet” that amidst the debate on the 1970 Soviet constitution they argued against the need for passport nationality indicators.⁴⁹

The prospect of meaningful membership in the Soviet community remained a disingenuous notion for some, while for others, even those “at the margins” of society, it provided hope of equality.⁵⁰ By the late Soviet period, when investment in Central Asia and the Caucasus declined, people from the southern republics, including seasonal traders and rural groups, for example,

43. Anderson and Silver, “Demographic Sources,” 609–56.

44. Shlapentokh, *The New Russian Diaspora*, 14–15.

45. See Kalinovsky, *Laboratory of Socialist Development*; Sahadeo, *Voices from the Soviet Edge*.

46. Pohl, “The ‘Planet of One Hundred Languages,’” 239.

47. Those who lacked Russian-language skills were sometimes disadvantaged even in “their” national territories. See Stefan Guth, “USSR Incorporated Versus Affirmative Action Empire?”

48. Lewis H. Siegelbaum and Leslie Page Moch, “Transnationalism in One Country? Seeing and Not Seeing Cross-Border Migration within the Soviet Union.” *Slavic Review* 75, no. 4 (Winter 2016): 970–86.

49. Anna Whittington, “Citizens of the Soviet Union—It Sounds Dignified,” in Maarten Van Genderachter and Jon Fox, eds., *National Indifference and the History of Nationalism in Modern Europe* (London, 2019).

50. See Bloch, “Citizenship, Belonging, and Moldovan Migrants,” 445–72.

frequented Moscow and St. Petersburg, cities many had envisioned as more “international” and offering better chances of upward mobility.⁵¹ The national movements that emerged in the late 1980s spelled the beginning of the end for Soviet centralization and for much of the influence that internationalism had had as its buttressing ideology and practice. This was a cataclysmic shock for many, especially for extraterritorial and nontitular communities, including Russians, threatened or made vulnerable by titular nationalism and violence.

Soviet “Refugees”: Nagorno-Karabakh, Pogroms, and their Broad Implications

In the late 1980s, central authorities progressively lost influence to national popular fronts in the Caucasus, which in following the Baltics organized mass support for republican sovereignty and evoked an outpouring of letters from citizens concerned with rising nationalism. The conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, as the first episode of mass fatal unrest and displacement fueled by nationalism during perestroika, sparked pervasive insecurities especially because Moscow failed to stop the escalating nationalist violence. The “refugee” crisis that ensued amplified the conflict’s impact. In 1987, Karabakh Armenians started taking advantage of glasnost “openness” to build on earlier movements to mobilize support for the transfer of the Azeri territory to Armenia. After a petition pressing for the transfer there was rejected in early 1988, the momentum swiftly passed to Armenia, where hundreds of thousands of demonstrators took to the streets to demand unification with Nagorno-Karabakh.⁵² Protests and clashes followed in Stepanakert, Nagorno-Karabakh’s capital, and its surrounding regions between members of both communities. Throughout 1988, mass expulsions of Azeris in Armenia transpired.⁵³ The situation continued to spiral until it was revealed that two Azeris died. The latter revelation, made on Baku Radio on February 27, led to a three-day-long pogrom against the Armenian population in Sumgait, Azerbaijan, a Caspian Sea town just north of Baku, in which an estimated thirty-two people lost their lives, and hundreds more were injured.⁵⁴ When a “refugee” crisis developed, the State Committee on Labor and Social Affairs (Goskomtrud) was compelled to oversee the problem, as no organ existed to regulate asylum seekers.

51. Jeff Sahadeo, *Voices from the Soviet Edge*.

52. See Arsene Saparov, *From Conflict to Autonomy in the Caucasus: The Soviet Union and the Making of Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabakh* (London, 2015).

53. Thomas de Waal, *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan Through Peace and War* (New York, 2013), 16. See RGANI, F. 100, op.5, d. 361–63 (letters and telegrams to the Central Committee of the CPSU and the XIX Party Conference with various proposals on perestroika and social issues in the country, and on Nagorno-Karabakh; vol. 1–3).

54. The brutalities committed toward Armenians and Azeris have been well-documented by journalists and eyewitness accounts. Here I emphasize how the conflict became a larger regional and countrywide issue. Total deaths remained difficult to verify. This number includes an unofficial body count from the Baku morgue, including 26 Armenians and 6 Azerbaijanis. See De Waal, *Black Garden*, 41; Samvel Shahmuratian, ed., *The Sumgait Tragedy: Pogroms Against Armenians in Soviet Azerbaijan, Volume I: Eyewitness Accounts*, trans. Steven Jones (Cambridge, Mass., 1990).

As the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh became more entrenched, hundreds of thousands of people identified as Armenians and Azeris were subjected to an ethnic “unmixing.” In August of 1989, mass rallies were held in Baku in recognition of the Azerbaijani Popular Front.⁵⁵ On September 23, 1989, the Supreme Soviet in Baku declared Azerbaijan a sovereign state within the USSR, revitalizing clashes in Armenia and Azerbaijan as both republics declared sovereignty over Nagorno-Karabakh. Fearing backlash, central authorities perpetually stalled in bringing in security forces while renewed violence in Baku left at least ninety people identified as Armenians dead. On January 19–20, days later, when most of those targeted in the Baku pogrom had already been expelled from the city, Soviet troops finally initiated a brutal crackdown that killed over a hundred people and injured many more in what became known as “Black January.”⁵⁶ By April 7, 1990, the USSR Council of Ministers reported that the failure of both Azerbaijani and Armenian authorities to “ensure and protect the constitutional rights of citizens” resulted in over 400,000 internally displaced people.⁵⁷ Of those displaced, approximately 230,000 were transported to Armenia, 200,000 to Azerbaijan (it is unclear if this number includes expellees from Armenia in addition to displaced persons transported from one part of Azerbaijan to another), and tens of thousands to other republics, mainly Russia. The displaced fled, or were evacuated, through different means: military helicopters, airplanes, buses, trains, horseback, or by difficult treks made on foot.⁵⁸ Some arrived in Turkmenistan by ferry and were subsequently flown to Erevan.⁵⁹

Many, no doubt, were able to take advantage of kinship networks in “their” republics (though the social consequences of this require further research), while others became unwanted “guests” upon arrival. The latter urged them to seek central protections or to stay on the move. One divided community of self-identified Azeri expellees from Armenia, for instance, petitioned the USSR Supreme Soviet for intervention because families now lived in both Azerbaijan and Georgia with “little to no rights (*na ptich' ikh pravakh*).”⁶⁰ After a relative witnessed the tragic events in Sumgait, Armen and Vika, a couple from the Azerbaijani capital and Armen’s sister-in-law, Alena, fled the city they once praised as “international”—a common imagining of (post-Stalinist) Baku as unfettered by ethnic conflict—to Armenia.⁶¹ Armen and Vika explained that widespread panic ensued in Baku after Sumgait, making

55. Its founding conference was held on July 16, see Vera Tolz and Melanie Newton, eds., *The USSR in 1989: A Record of Events* (Boulder, 1990), 382.

56. De Waal, *Black Garden*, 91.

57. “O merakh po okazaniiu pomoshchi grazhdanam vyzhdenno pokinuvshim Azerbaidzhanskuiu SSR i Armianskuiu SSR ot 7 aprelia 1990g. N 329,” *Biblioteka normativno-pravovykh aktov Soiuza Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh Respublik*, http://www.libussr.ru/doc_ussr/usr_16395.htm, accessed June 26, 2023.

58. Lewis H. Siegelbaum and Leslie Page Moch, *Broad is my Native Land: Repertoires and Regimes of Migration in Russia's Twentieth Century* (Ithaca, 2014), 270.

59. De Waal, *Black Garden*, 91.

60. GARF, f. R9654, op. 10, d. 369.

61. Here I have provided pseudonyms. Interview, December 15, 2018, Ann Arbor, Michigan. Many Armenians from Azerbaijan eventually settled in Michigan. See the Armenian Research Center at the University of Michigan Dearborn for an oral interview

finding tickets for flights impossible. Authorities, however, permitted departing flights to be packed “like a bus” with people standing in the aisles and behind seats. A month afterward, they faced the devastating 1988 December earthquake in Armenia, which killed more than 25,000 people and displaced thousands more. In the fall of 1989, the crisis was intensified when Azerbaijan imposed a railway blockade, causing severe food and energy shortages. As Russian speakers from Baku, Armen, Vika, and Alena felt like outsiders in Armenia since they did not know the titular tongue, making it difficult to land a job. “*Bakintsy* [people from Baku],” were classified separately, they noted, losing out in hiring processes. Tensions became especially high between newcomers and Armenian permanent residents following the earthquake and the Azerbaijani blockade of the land-locked country. After the geological and economic crisis aggravated the state-of-affairs, Armen, Vika and Alena made their way to Russia.

The Sumgait pogrom mainly targeted Armenians, and Azeris largely faced expulsions in Armenia, but the inaction of the central authorities and their failure to quell the violence and unrest sent a “powerful negative signal across the USSR” and continuously embroiled others in conflict.⁶² Letters and state reports suggested that extraterritorial, nontitular, and mixed communities in the Caucasus writ large faced increased danger, fear, harassment, and expulsions. For decades, Soviet internationalism monitored and mediated nationalism; in both rhetoric and in practice it legitimated and secured the presence of extraterritorial and nontitular groups living in another national group’s titular territory. Now, as central authority ebbed and nationalism accelerated, people of varied backgrounds perceived of as “non-native” or not a member of the titular nation—the “*real citizen*”—were minoritized, or excluded through different means.⁶³ In the Soviet Union, titular status was based on the premise of indigeneity, which served to ingrain the belief that territories historically allied to one principal nationality. The use of the “native” and “non-native” binary by the state and petitioners alike ironically reinforced the sense that one nation “belonged” to a particular national space. “Non-natives,” as the term was widely employed, however, included people born and raised in the territories of question, and some members of communities with historic lineages in those locations.

Extraterritorial and nontitular groups, who sometimes described themselves as part of multinational collectives, appealed for help from central organs, often citing internationalism. Many despaired the center’s inept response to titular nationalism and violence. “Sumgait is our source of endless pain,” wrote eight citizens of Russian and “other nationalities” from the “most international city in the entire Union—Baku.”⁶⁴ They similarly expressed indignation about the expulsions of Azeris from Armenia. “Is our state really unable to ensure the safety of its citizens and the inviolability

collection with those who fled Baku. See Bruce Grant, “Cosmopolitan Baku,” *Ethnos: Journal of Anthropology* 75, no. 2 (2010): 123–47.

62. Zubok, *Collapse*, 54–56.

63. Klein, “Making Minorities in the Eurasian Borders.”

64. RGANI, f. 100, op.5, d. 361, ll. 3–5.

of their homes?" they implored. "What are you waiting for?!" a collective from the "multinational Baku shoe factory no. 1" wrote to central organs.⁶⁵ "Through the "bitter experience" of Sumgait, the "people lost faith in the government," the workers concluded. On August 17, 1988, about six months after the Sumgait pogrom, the USSR Central Committee reported that frequent letters and telegrams from "non-native" residents in both Armenia and Azerbaijan cited titular harassment.⁶⁶

The Sumgait pogrom also sparked early insecurities about the volatility of other national movements channeling through newly permitted modes of expression across the country. Different groups living outside of "their own" republic reported nationalist tensions they feared would explode into violence like Sumgait. On August 15, 1988, five members of the Ethnographic Institute of the USSR Academy of Sciences warned the Politburo about fears that had spread across the country regarding the possibility of an antisemitic pogrom.⁶⁷ The Sumgait pogrom, they established, made such widespread fears not only tangible but warranted. "Sumgait shows that such a switch [to national violence] is possible," they noted, "people began to believe in the possibility of Jewish pogroms in the 71st year of Soviet power after Sumgait."⁶⁸ Indeed, a letter from forty-two Soviet citizens from across Russia to the CPSU Central Committee voiced distress about the nationalist movement *Pamiat'* (Memory) and the possibility of "bloody incidents."⁶⁹ The "recent tragedy in Sumgait," this group wrote, "gives this issue special urgency." In a similar tenor, a group of thirty-two workers in Moldova wrote to Gorbachev to report "uncontrollable" tensions they feared were "fraught with Sumgait" in March 1989, between Moldovans and the Russian-speaking population (which they defined as all non-Moldovans in the republic "Ukrainians, Russians, Bulgarians, Gagauz, Jews, etc.").⁷⁰ They requested a declaration of emergency, the installment of a curfew, and for a special commission from the central government to handle the situation.

Throughout 1989 and 1990, letters described continued violence that engulfed members of other nationalities, mixed families, and Azerbaijanis who defended the attacked.⁷¹ Many were afraid for their lives and security, especially as "ethnic" animosities were often fueled by other factors. In some cases, experiences were indirect, like stories passed by word of mouth. Some fled due to panic, or after they had been stuck in the crossfire by chance. Albert M., whose national affiliation was unclear, wrote to central organs that his apartment building was robbed simply because Armenians were known

65. *Ibid.*, l. 74.

66. RGANI, f. 100, op. 5, d. 361, l. 73.

67. RGANI, f. 100, op. 5, d. 449, ll. 56–58 (letters from citizens about possible violent actions against persons of Jewish nationality, April 1988–January 1990).

68. RGANI, f. 100, op. 5, d. 449, ll. 56–58

69. RGANI, f. 100, op. 5, d. 449, ll. 30–38.

70. RGANI, f. 100, op. 5, d. 409, l. 72 (letters from citizens on nationalism in various republics of the USSR Volume 3, 1988–1990).

71. RGANI, f. 100, op. 5, d. 463, ll. 2–20 (letters from Armenian refugees from the Azerbaijan SSR requesting the lifting of the blockade from the NKAO, the end of a new wave of terror against the Armenian population living in Azerbaijan, November 13–December 26, 1989).

to have lived there.⁷² “There is no return to the fascists,” he resolved, “I don’t want my daughter to be killed or raped.”⁷³

The indifference of local and regional authorities to titular nationalism and violence—and in many cases their reported collusion—created a sense of lost protection, and it became a common motive for flight. Central organs received complaints alleging local and republican wrongdoing in relation to national discrimination, harassment, and violence in the late Soviet period, but such appeals multiplied with the emergence of national movements.⁷⁴ Letters pointed to the titular nation’s grip on local and republican bodies of authority, like the police (*militsia*), and, often, their passive and active support of titular nationalism and violence. The “All-Union Council” of Armenian Refugees from Azerbaijan, which submitted numerous such victim reports to central organs in December of 1989, for instance, claimed that in the Azeri city of Kirovabad (present day Ganja), where a pogrom against the Armenian population was reported, the police were entirely composed of Azeris despite a substantial Armenian presence.⁷⁵ Viktoria V., a woman with what appears to be a Russian surname, wrote that when she was attacked, “the *militsia* did not come, though they saw everything.”⁷⁶ One Baku resident appealed to leave the republic after seeing fliers demanding “Russians, Tatars, Lezgins, and others” leave the Republic before March 21, 1990, as afterward “measures would be taken as they were for Armenians.”⁷⁷ According to the letter, upon learning of the fliers from reports, the police position was that it was simply “the opinion of native people.” The USSR Supreme Soviet’s Office of Letters and Citizen Reception reported that throughout January 1990 “in many regions of the republic” entreaties describing mass turmoil were not controlled by republican or local authorities.⁷⁸ Pogroms, tumult, harassment, physical violence, and a feeling of being “unprotected” forced “non-native persons (*litsa nekorennoi national’nosti*),” though primarily Armenians and Russians, the Department concluded, to leave Azerbaijan.

Mixed families experienced additional challenges amidst the center’s decline. These families represented the modern Soviet ideal by overcoming national differences, yet the devolving state did not know what to do with them. Individual and collective letters from Azerbaijani mixed families, some citing their internationalist upbringing, painfully described forced family separation. Numerous mixed families pleaded to change their passport nationality to assert their rights to permanent residency in Russia, or to live safely in Azerbaijan. One woman from Baku whose mother was Russian

72. GARF, f. R9553, op.1, d. 5263, ll. 54–55 (materials related to Goskomtrud’s Department of Migration and Resettlement).

73. RGANI, f. 100, op. 5, d. 463, ll. 4–20.

74. See, for instance, RGANI, f. 100, op. 5, d. 407; RGANI, f. 100, op. 5, d. 406 (letters on non-compliance with the provisions of the national policy in the selection and placement of personnel, April 1966–August 1987). See also Goff, “Why Not Love Our Language and Our Culture?”

75. RGANI, f.100, op. 5, d. 463, ll. 2–20.

76. RGANI, f. 100, op. 5, d. 463, ll. 4–20.

77. GARF, f. R9553, op.1, d. 5263, ll.56.

78. GARF, f. R9654, op. 6, d. 329, l. 9–15 (material on interethnic relations: conflicts, problems, refugees).

claimed that her father was an “international” Armenian.⁷⁹ She asked to change her nationality to Russian to permanently move to Russia with her children, pleading that she could not “write all that is in the hearts of thousands like me,”—feelings, perhaps, of injustice and being torn between communities—though asserting, “we consider ourselves Russian.” As part of the standard Soviet practice for mixed nationality children, she chose between the nationality of her parents at sixteen. Selecting her father’s nationality as her “official” passport nationality was a decision with unforeseen consequences. Twenty years later, she asked to switch her nationality to that of her mother’s, so that her children would then have the option of selecting Russian on their passports (which implied that the children’s father was not Russian). Another woman from Baku whose mother was Russian and father Armenian detailed that her husband was Azeri. In explaining her request to switch her nationality, she alleged that her husband was being forced to divorce her or leave the republic and that her child was banned from school.⁸⁰ Because of the various threats, she “hid” with her child because she was “an Armenian in [her] passport, without, ironically, “knowing a word of Armenian.” Stella, a Baku Armenian, had been married to an Azeri man for twenty years with whom she had two children.⁸¹ Displaced in Moscow, she petitioned to change her first name and patronymic (her last name was already that of her husband’s) and her nationality to that of the titular nation, Azerbaijan, in order to safely return to her family in Baku.

Like most refugees, mixed families were encouraged by state and party authorities to return to their places of origin or to appeal to “their” nationalizing titular republics, the transfer to which often did not make sense. Thousands fled to, or preferred to live in, the Soviet metropole. Out of 41,000 Soviet citizens registered as refugees from January–March of 1990 in the city of Moscow and Moscow oblast, 18,000 were reported as Russian, 15,000 Armenian, and 8,000 as mixed nationalities.⁸² Some displaced mixed families physically refused transfer to “their” titular territories. In January of 1990, the Armenian Council of Ministers reported a deteriorating situation involving 300 Russian speakers in mixed families from the Azerbaijan SSR who ended up in Armenia.⁸³ According to the report, Russian-speaking families of Armenian-Azerbaijani, Armenian-Russian, and Russian-Azerbaijani mixed families categorically refused relocating to Armenia. Instead, they occupied the Armenian SSR’s Council of Ministers government building, “sleeping in the hallways and foyer, right on the floor” to petition for asylum in Russia. Most remained in “unbearable unsanitary conditions” through March of 1990, when the Armenian Council of Ministers reported that four children had been hospitalized. Ninety demonstrators succeeded, however, and were transferred to Russia.

79. GARF, f. R9553, op.1, d. 5263, 33–38.

80. GARF, f. R9553, op.1, d. 5263, 43–45.

81. GARF, f. R9553, op.1, d. 5263, l. 46.

82. GARF, f. R9553, op.1, d. 5263, ll. 79.

83. GARF, f. R9553, op. 1, d. 5263, ll.120–25.

The Fergana Valley Massacre and its Regional Aftermath

Like Nagorno-Karabakh, the Fergana Valley massacre of June 1989 had profound implications. Growing titular nationalism and violence not only threatened other extraterritorial and nontitular communities in the region, but also existentially compromised the Soviet Union, which broadened the impact of the conflict. Many deemed the evacuation of targeted Meskhetian Turks a further capitulation of central authority that widely exacerbated social tensions. Requests for transfers and out-migration from the region swelled as a result, while others organized for protection. Nationalist violence mainly targeted Meskhetian Turks, but it fostered shared concern—a “crystallization of group feeling”—among other distressed or jeopardized communities, some of whom were mobilized by internationalist ideals.⁸⁴

By early 1989, the *Birlik* (Unity) Movement, bent on making Uzbek the state language and eventually achieving republican secession, had attracted tens of thousands of followers in Uzbekistan, some of whom would take on a contentious stance: protesting against Meskhetian Turks who had been deported to the region in 1944.⁸⁵ Uzbekistan’s First Secretary, Rafiq Nishanov, claimed *Birlik* “distorted” Uzbekistan’s social situation by blaming the worsening standard of living on “migration” from other republics.⁸⁶ From February to March 1989, ethnic clashes were reported between people identified as Uzbeks and Meskhetian Turks and more than 66,000 Meskhetian Turks (or 62% of those who had lived there) left the republic by May.⁸⁷ By early June 1989, exacerbated by a rapidly destabilizing economy, growing tensions erupted into a massacre of 110 people (most of whom, reportedly, were Meskhetian Turks) and 1011 injuries in Uzbekistan’s Fergana Valley, a historically diverse border region inhabited by Uzbeks, Kyrgyz, Tajiks, and other ethnic groups who were either deported to the region or migrated there as part of the Soviet modernizing project.⁸⁸ Mass unrest dragged on for weeks. When a “refugee” camp was attacked, the USSR Supreme Soviet ordered a mass evacuation of Meskhetian Turks to the RSFSR.⁸⁹ Eventually, about 17,000 Meskhetian Turks were evacuated to parts of central Russia, where locals sometimes received them poorly,

84. Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups*, 10.

85. Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State*, 258–60.

86. “Report by R. N. Nishanov, First Secretary of the Uzbekistan Communist Party Central Committee,” *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 24, no. 41 (July 1989): 7. Some contend that *Birlik* was unaffiliated with nationalist extremism and became a scapegoat following the events. Deputy Chairman of the Organization for Meskhetian Turks based in Moscow “Vatan,” interview, January 28, 2022; see also Ro’i, “Central Asian riots and disturbances,” 21–54. The national movement was subsequently suppressed. See Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State*, 258–60.

87. GARF, f. R9553, op.1, d. 5263, ll. 336–40.

88. The number of casualties and injuries is from the USSR’s Prosecutor’s Office. RGANI f. 100, op. 5, d. 474, ll. 64 (letters from different nationalities about interethnic relations in Uzbekistan, from December 1987–November 1989), Tolz and Newton, eds., *The USSR in 1989*, 292–96; Madeleine Reeves, “Travels in the Margins of the State: Everyday Geography in the Ferghana Valley Borderlands,” in Jeff Sahadeo and Russell Zanca, eds., *Everyday Life in Central Asia: Past and Present* (Bloomington, 2007), 284.

89. Tolz and Newton, eds., *The USSR in 1989*, 292–96.

compelling them to move on.⁹⁰ Within the year, more than 90,000 Meskhetian Turks fled Uzbekistan, many under continued pressure, to Russia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine.⁹¹

Once again, other groups were affected, both directly and indirectly, by mounting nationalism and violence. Often evoking internationalism, many appealed to central organs for intervention and/or organized amid the threat and fear of violence. In their efforts to mobilize, or to call on the center to act, petitions often evoked rhetoric used for years under internationalist practices to flag and report incidents of alleged “extreme” or unorthodox nationalism. To confront Uzbek “extremists,” for instance, an “inter-movement”—international movement—formed in Fergana oblast after the massacre, mirroring similar “interfronts” across the Baltics and Moldova.⁹² The inter-movement’s leaders stated that what transpired with the Meskhetian Turks could have happened to representatives of any national group. The “extremists,” they believed, needed “a warning shot.”⁹³

Such intercommunal “groupness” did not, of course, negate one’s ethnic identification or the opportunity to engage in national group making. Soviet internationalism granted the right to ethnic particularism as a necessary mode of development. One’s support for the Union or its ideals, therefore, did not preclude national solidarity or identification, which were also sometimes strengthened in reaction to titular nationalism and violence, and by perestroika-era freedoms. Soviet “refugees,” for example, sometimes filtered their trauma through past victimhood grounded in national historical memory even as they called on the center for protection or aid.⁹⁴ To organize or demonstrate vis-a-vis accelerating titular nationalism, threatened nontitular groups also embraced different strategies. The Moldovan “Interclub” movement integrated Turkic-speaking Gagauz activists while the latter also moved to form a separate autonomy movement. Similarly, Kurds from nine different republics rallied the Supreme Soviet for “protection” ultimately envisaged through (re)gaining territorial autonomy.⁹⁵ With the latter, the dispersed peoples would not only gain increased access to the national rights owed to them,

90. Irina Levin, “Caught in a Bad Romance: Displaced People and the Georgian State,” *Citizenship Studies* 22, no. 1 (2018): 19–36.

91. Sergei Riazantsev, *Sovremennyyi demograficheskii i migratsionnyi portret Severnogo Kavkaza* (Stavropol, 2003), 129–42. See also A.G. Osipov, *The Violation of the Rights of Forced Migrants and Ethnic Discrimination in Krasnodar Territory: The Situation of the Meskhetian Turks* (Moscow, 1996).

92. Maks Lur’e and Petr Studenikin, *Zapakh gari i gorja: Fergana, trevozhnyi iun’ 1989-go* (Moscow, 1990), 30–31; Newton, ed., *The USSR in 1989*, 292–96. On (Baltic) interfronts, see Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization*, 392. See also Keiji, “Mobilization of Non-Titular Ethnicities,” 141–57.

93. Lur’e and Studenikin, *Zapakh gari i gorja*, 30–31.

94. Some displaced Armenians referenced a (repeat) genocide, while the evacuations of Meskhetian Turks are broadly referred to as a “double deportation.” See GARF f. R9553, op. 1, d. 5263. Some Armenians (interviewed in 1995–96 who resided in St. Petersburg for at least ten years) reported that their ethnic identification heightened after the pogroms. See Ol’ga Brednikova and Elena Chikadze, “Armiane Sankt-Peterburga: Kar’ery etnichnosti,” Viktor Boronkov and Ingrid Osval’d, eds. *Konstruovanie Etnichnosti: Etnicheskie obshchiny Sankt-Peterburga* (St. Petersburg, 1998), 227–59.

95. GARF, f. R9654, op. 10, d. 369, ll. 119–124.

but they would have enhanced status in the “brotherhood of nations” and a sense of collective security that would, theoretically, make them less vulnerable targets of titular violence. In appealing to August Voss, the Chairman of the Council of Nationalities, they cited *napadenie* (onslaught) on Kurds in Uzbekistan and elsewhere, calls to “liberate our territory,” and harassment.⁹⁶ Deeming an autonomous Kurd territory unfeasible in Azerbaijan, where “Red Kurdistan” had been located before its liquidation, they requested the creation of an autonomous entity in Russia. Encouraged by the Chairman’s response, one group member proclaimed, “We trust the international policy of the party.”

The Fergana Valley massacre stoked fears and requests for transfers among different communities in Uzbekistan, including privileged Russians, many of whom reported threats of violence. One petition to Gorbachev gained 60,000 signatures from people throughout Fergana oblast who were horrified with the brutalities committed against Meskhetian Turks, including torture, rape, dismemberment of children, and the burning of families in their homes.⁹⁷ “All this is done during the day, in front of the local authorities and the police, with their tacit consent,” the petition declared. The letter stated that the many nationalities who lived in Fergana oblast, including Russians, on whose behalf the petition was sent, were equally imperiled. “We hear such threats at every turn,” it warned. The petition demanded further oversight and the right to relocate to Russia. A letter from seven Russians in Fergana, most of whom were born and raised in Uzbekistan after their parents had been evacuated there during the war, proclaimed that panic arose within the diverse border community two to three months before the onset of the massacre as tensions flared.⁹⁸ “With the Turks gone,” their letter stated, the Uzbeks openly declared “to take us Russians on.” Many began to leave. As second-generation residents of the republic, they begged, “but what if there is nowhere to turn?” In a collective petition, eighty-eight female workers from Fergana oblast noted that it had become “scary” to live there.⁹⁹ They pleaded for central intervention to guarantee the security of “non-native residents” of Fergana oblast, which included the “organized departure” of those who now wished to depart for other republics. The USSR Interior Ministry reported a slew of collective letters from “non-native residents” of different oblasts recounting a “sense of uncertainty and suppression (*podavlennost’*)” after the violence in the Fergana Valley and a desire to leave.¹⁰⁰

The Fergana Valley massacre was another episode of mass titular violence that marked the waning of centralizing functions and their ability to counteract growing nationalism, which for decades had been curbed and monitored under Soviet practices. Collective letters from extraterritorial and nontitular communities thus marveled at the state’s incompetence—or reluctance—to defuse titular nationalism and violence. Seventy-three “Russian

96. Ibid.

97. RGANI, f. 100, op. 5, d. 474, ll. 35–38.

98. RGANI, f. 100, op. 5, d. 474, l. 38.

99. RGANI, f. 100, op. 5, d. 474, ll. 67–71.

100. RGANI, f. 100, op. 5, d. 474, ll. 61–63.

speakers” from Fergana criticized the state for its inability to “ensure the constitutional rights of Meskhetian Turks” and its decision to evacuate them, which they claimed aggravated interethnic tensions and gave new impetus to nationalist “extremists.”¹⁰¹ “We believe that in order to restore faith in the Soviet government,” they wrote, “it is necessary to return these unfortunate Meskhetian Turks, who suffered innocently, to their homes.” In July of 1989, a collective letter from 163 distressed Soviet citizens in Dushanbe self-identified only as “non-native persons (*litsa nekorennoi national'nosti*)” condemned the central organs for evacuating Meskhetian Turks following the Fergana Valley massacre, decrying that the “evacuation of an entire nation for the sake of another is not an option.”¹⁰² They appealed for central oversight to ensure the safety of “persons of non-native nationality” before the “wave of extremist nationalism” took over the whole country. As a final resort, they sought compensation for “non-native persons” to migrate to “any corner” of Russia. On August 31, 1989, the Politburo reported that interethnic tensions in the “Central Asian region as a whole” intensified after the Fergana Valley massacre and the evacuation of Meskhetian Turks.¹⁰³ The conflict spiked concerns about titular nationalism outside the region as well. Stunned by the implications of Nagorno-Karabakh and Fergana Valley, and the spread of regional conflict, two citizens in Georgia similarly beseeched the Politburo to organize an “international front” before it was too late.¹⁰⁴

The Perestroika “Refugee” Problem in Russia

Despite the country’s unraveling, many of perestroika’s displaced thought they were most secure in Russia, the Soviet metropole. As Soviet citizens fearful of titular nationalism and violence continually sought transfers to Russia, many asylum-seekers arrived without them, straining central and regional authorities who discouraged and sometimes physically thwarted them from returning. Some “refugees” who perceived other nationalizing territories as more dangerous or unfavorable, collectivized, evoking internationalism or their rights as Soviet citizens to remain in the metropole. Others, left with few choices, resorted to squatting. By April 15, 1991, 156,613 Soviet citizens of different nationalities were registered in the RSFSR as “refugees,” by far the most, including 43,983 Armenians and 48,805 Meskhetian Turks, were those affected by violence in Nagorno-Karabakh and the Fergana Valley.¹⁰⁵

In attempting to circumvent further migration to Russia, overwhelmed central organs encouraged “refugees” to return to or stay in their places of origin or to turn to “their” titular territories, even when they were perceived as unsafe. The USSR Goskomtrud thus became increasingly frustrated at the Moscow City Council’s (Mossovot) independent move in issuing temporary *propiskas* (the residency permits required in Soviet passports), which it

101. RGANI, f. 100, op. 5, d. 474, l. 57.

102. RGANI, f. 100, op. 5, d. 422, ll. 77–80.

103. RGANI, f. 100, op. 5, d. 422, ll. 71–72.

104. RGANI, f. 100, op. 5, d. 409, ll. 94–98.

105. GARF, f. 10121, op. 1, d. 32, l. 24 (Council of Ministers of the RSFSR on the problems of migration. Vol. 3. July 3, 1991–December 29, 1991).

claimed caused thousands to flock to the Soviet capital with false hopes of available support.¹⁰⁶ In attempt to direct “refugees” back to their abandoned homes, Goskomtrud led “roundtable” talks with various “refugee committees” that had formed to “explain the measures taken to stabilize the situation in the Azerbaijani SSR and to ensure the safety of returning citizens.”¹⁰⁷ Goskomtrud also pivoted hopeful migrants away from fleeing as a solution to titular nationalism. When Tamara L., pleaded for help in leaving Baku due to her family’s imminent danger, for example, Goskomtrud soberly replied in April 1990, “The possibility of moving to the RSFSR is limited due to the lack of free housing in cities”—thereby refusing assistance.¹⁰⁸

Soviet “refugees” consistently resisted being routed to spaces they perceived as dangerous or less favorable while authorities moved to make entire regions off-limits to them in Russia. The southern border regions of Russia (Rostov oblast, Krasnodar and Stavropol’ krai), which became major “refugee” destinations, were gradually restricted to the displaced.¹⁰⁹ As central Russia became a more frequent (and desirable) destination, a decree issued on April 7, 1990 then closed off Moscow oblast to “refugees” from Azerbaijan and Armenia, where many of the displaced came from.¹¹⁰ On April 20, 1990, however, the Committee on Nationality Policy and Interethnic Relations reported that Meskhetian Turks continued to arrive in Krasnodar krai, Rostov oblast, and elsewhere, aggravating the “refugee” problem.¹¹¹ Despite a moratorium on prospikas in place since August 1989, tens of thousands of refugees, Krasnodar Kraikom Executive Committee Chairman E. Nazarov explained, continued to arrive.¹¹² When the right of collective settlement was denied to Meskhetian Turks in the Kursk district of neighboring Stavropol’ krai, a community of about 530 Meskhetian Turks defiantly formed a “tent city.”¹¹³ In the fall of 1990, the Goskomtrud Deputy Chairman reported that the refugees continually attracted others from “hotbeds of ethnic tension,” who often resided unlawfully in hotels, dormitories, and other residential areas in Moscow.¹¹⁴ The accruing “refugee” problem there and the failure of authorities to resolve it was similarly epitomized by the formation of a “tent city” near the Hotel Russia.¹¹⁵

Notwithstanding their newfound status, some “refugee” collectives claimed their rights as internationalists and Soviet citizens to remain in Russia. Forming an “initiative group,” seventy-eight Baku refugees, for instance, expressed their indignation that the word “internationalism” was disappearing, and along with it, “entire territories, regions and cities were

106. GARF, f. R9553, op. 1, d. 5263, ll. 211–13.

107. GARF, f. R9553, op. 1, d. 5263, ll. 198.

108. GARF, f. R9553, op. 1, d. 5263, ll. 90.

109. “Regulirovanie migratsionnykh protsessov na Severnom Kavkaze.” In V. A. Tishkov, ed., *Vynuzhdennye Migranty i Gosudarstvo* (Moscow, 1998), 137–38.

110. “O merakh po okazaniu pomoshchi grazhdanam.”

111. GARF, f. R9553, op.1, d. 5263, ll. 336–40.

112. GARF, f. 10121, op. 1, d. 30, ll. 46–51.

113. Riazantsev, *Sovremennyi demograficheskii i migratsionnyi portret*, 130–31.

114. GARF, f. R-9553, op.1, d. 5263, ll. 219–221; 252–53.

115. GARF, f. R9553, op.1, d. 5263, ll. 219–21, 252–53; Riazantsev, *Sovremennyi demograficheskii i migratsionnyi portret*, 130–31.

closing off.”¹¹⁶ For the group, the April decree felt like discrimination. As Soviet citizens, they claimed to be in Russia “only because the central government is here,” and many “Armenian refugees,” they noted, were in mixed families. As part of a collective representing 250 Baku families stranded in Moscow in February 1989, Vladimir P. pleaded to remain in Russia.¹¹⁷ The group had been required to return home to Azerbaijan, or to turn to “their” titular nation, Armenia, both republics where nationalization was intensifying. Vladimir P. entreated that families from “proletarian” Baku could not live in a “mono-national republic.” Many Baku Armenians were in mixed families, he explained, or did not know the Armenian language or culture. Some of the desperate, however, turned to racist or entitled language to demand housing in Russia. On April 9, 1990, one Russian woman displaced from Sumgait complained that Russians “are being chased away like STRAY dogs” while “*natsmeny*” [national minorities, a term often used derogatively toward the USSR’s non-European nationalities] OCCUPY all of Moscow and Russia.”¹¹⁸ Perestroika’s reforms exacerbated discrepancies between the European core and the southern republics that also made many look to Russia to escape economic hardship. Caucasian and Central Asian migrants in Russia, unprecedented in number, were sometimes met with “open nationalism and racism” in lieu of the “friendship of peoples” as new press freedoms “reflected and drove street-level tensions.”¹¹⁹

Further signaling the demise of Soviet internationalism, authorities finally took liberties to physically relocate those who refused to leave the metropole for “their” titular territories, or their nearest equivalents, thus sending them to unknown fates. Local authorities in Stavropol’ krai resorted to transporting Meskhetian Turks by train to Azerbaijan, deemed the republic closest in affiliation for Turkic-speaking peoples.¹²⁰ Similar actions were taken with Kurd arrivals. In Moscow, the local authorities’ more liberal stance toward refugees (issuing temporary *propiskas*) backfired as more people arrived and were unable to receive help. In June 1990, Goskomtrud reported that, in accordance with the April 7 decree, three thousand people who were registered as refugees in Moscow and the Moscow oblast and who were not sent by various ministries to different regions of the country were “taken” (*vyvezeny*) to Armenia by the Armenian government.¹²¹ Once again, it was unclear to what extent this was voluntary.

In another paradox to Soviet history: even as it unleashed centrifugal processes, late perestroika cohered groups that identified beyond the confines of national units. Reinforced through decades of internationalist practice, these people spoke as Soviet citizens, internationalists, or as part of multi-national collectives. Fatal unrest in Azerbaijan amid perestroika’s strained social and economic climate initiated a process of “groupness” among disparate

116. GARF, f. R9553, op. 1, d. 5263, ll. 147–51.

117. GARF, f. R9654, op. 10, d. 369, ll. 10–22.

118. GARF, f. R9553, op. 1, d. 5263, ll. 175–76.

119. On racism and migration in the USSR, see Sahadeo, *Voices from the Soviet Edge*.

120. Riazantsev, *Sovremennyi demograficheskii i migratsionnyi portret*, 130–31.

121. GARF, f. R9553, op. 1, d. 5263, ll. 201–32.

communities made aware of their mutual othering vis-à-vis titular nationalism.¹²² The Fergana Valley massacre served as another reference point for many extraterritorial and nontitular groups that increased insecurities and tensions. Many were moved to act against episodes of titular violence by organizing and seeking transfer or autonomy (or, as in the case of the Gagauz of Moldova, even switching between national and “international” movements). Some made broad-spectrum appeals for central intervention or for transfers of “non-native persons.” “Refugee” collectives also coalesced to organize support to remain in Russia, a right they believed they were entitled to as Soviet citizens, but being denied.

The incongruity between the two antipodes of Soviet internationalism—nationalization and centralization—was one of the Soviet Union’s biggest failures. This was evident at the most basic level when Soviet citizens described how their passport nationality conflicted with their lived realities. Even as other ethnic groups became the main targets of violence, many extraterritorial and nontitular peoples perceived their place of origin as increasingly hostile *and* viewed “their” nationalizing titular territory as foreign or unsafe. They thereby turned their hopes to the Soviet metropole instead. These fears were especially poignant for mixed families. The very phenomenon of Soviet “refugees” reflected the center’s deepening ineptitude and its waning legitimacy. Despite official regulations, perestroika “refugees” defied authorities to remain in or move to Russia, and their preferred destinations within it. In some cases, the newly homeless boldly residing in places that became off-limits to them were even transported to other republics. By July 15, 1991, there were more than 800,000 registered “refugees” in the rapidly dissolving country.¹²³ The USSR did not simply break away at the seams according to national republics. Its collapse (and the global aftermath) involved one of the greatest displacements in modern history.¹²⁴ “As the forest is chopped, the chips fly,” observed one multinational collective on the rippling effects of the Soviet decline.¹²⁵

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122. Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups*, 12.

123. GARF, f. R9654, op. 6, d. 329, l. 16.

124. See Peter Gatrell, *The Making of the Modern Refugee* (Oxford, 2013).

125. RGANI, f. 100, op. 5, d. 428, ll. 53–56.