

FROM "POST-" TO "POST-POST-" AND BACK. *QUID TUM?*

"What next?" may not be an untimely question to ask as the map-makers scramble to keep up with the rush of events cascading a myriad of changes upon these custodians of the here and now. No sooner have they marked a new revision of a border, noted the latest alteration of a name or shift of a capital, than yet another tremor forces them to print anew a further up-dated edition to reflect the consequences of the most recent shock wave to effect an ever shorter *status quo*. Long gone are the days of Soviet "stability," so long, in fact, that it is time to take stock and answer the gnawing question "Where are we?" more accurately than with the increasingly vague "In the 'post-Soviet' period." "*Quid tum?* What next?" deserves a more precise reply.

Since December 1991, the profession, aided and abetted by the press, has contented itself with convenient but largely substanceless prefixes and their equivalent. "Post-" appeared everywhere: *post-Soviet*, *post-Communist*, *post-Cold War*. A substitute that has had less popularity *vis-à-vis* the *post-USSR* era has been the short-lived, once useful "former," which now gets subsumed in the acronym *FSU*. (So far, no one has come up with variations, such as "the heretofore" or "the once." Too awkward, no doubt, and, possibly, too whimsical and 'dangerous,' inasmuch as they might expose the increasing ineffectiveness of this terminology, often a camouflage hiding the absence of something more concrete.) How long, after all, if at all, did one speak about the *Post-Tsarist* era? True, the US did not recognize the USSR until 1933; but did it refer to the Soviet Union before then as the FRE (*Former Russian Empire*)?

Former Sovietologists and transitionalists have led the way in posting *post*-signs in their eagerness to arrive on the 'other side,' namely, the much desired 'market economy' and 'democracy.' They presume(d) Pavlov-like that the demise of the Soviet order would, miraculously, as though inevitably, usher these two developments onto the territories of the ex- (we nearly forgot to mention this little prefix!) authoritarian Soviet order and its self-destructive command economies.

Well, the gremlin of ethno-nationalism, that toxic energy that helped do away with the *once* Moscow-dominated order, is still at work, gnawing away at whatever *status quo* seeks to maintain itself. Czechoslovakia split up non-violently but not democratically under the insistence of its rival ethno-separatists, the latter half eventually opting for a government of *post-communist* communists (as, incidentally, in Poland, which, therefore, according to prefixological logic has now entered the *post-post-communist* stage. Or would *ex-post-communist* be better?). *Post-communist* Yugoslavia has fragmented, with *former* communists in all *ex-republics* in

high places, with the exception (so far) of Slovenia. Caucasia is wracked by ethno-conflict, with Chechnya as the latest reminder that there are forces everywhere in the *ex*-world of Communist domination, exerting tectonic centrifugal influences.

Another tendency during the *post*-, *ex*-, *pre*-, and *former* years, has been to treat the entire USSR real estate as if it were still a coherent whole, *malgré tout*, by referring to the fifteen new states collectively as the “successor states.” *Successor*, of course, is a loaded term and rich with implications that need to be mined, examined, and tested, though none of its practitioners does so other than to justify collective treatment. There is already a well-stocked shelf of books on the *successor states* with little attempt to rearrange these new countries into newly emerging regions or individual clusters and new constellations of relationships with *successor* and *non-successor* states. One suspects this appellation allows professors *once* of things-Soviet, to continue instructing Soviet history, economics, *etc.*, by any other name, thus making simplistic order out of the *post*-1991 ongoing fragmenting mess that we all must contend with and make sense out of.

A moratorium, therefore, on the prefix approach to what followed on the heels of December 1991 is in order in 1995. We all have had time to cogitate and meditate and analyze what, in fact, is happening in the space that was until 1989–1991 Moscow’s sphere of influence. It is high time the profession try to find the appropriate terminology to indicate what has been and continues to happen, without hiding behind facile monosyllabic prefixes signifying very little. In Russia, some pessimistic observers have experimented with the historically weighted *Smuta*; others, such as this writer, have stubbornly toyed with *Raspad 2*, implying a continuum of the crisis of devolution set in motion by Gorbachev’s policies. However short-lived any new terminology may prove, anything is better than a further reliance on what are now vapid prefixes that are little more than transparent evasions and, ultimately, confessions of intellectual defeat.

So, let a thousand minds bloom and risk new, however tentative, appellations for that time that has followed the momentous occurrence when the Soviet Union and its satellites were no more a single *bloc*. Colleagues, we have nothing to lose but our prefixes: what should we name the *post*-1991 new reality?

This is no idle question. As authors for *Nationalities Papers* ponder past and present themes related to the ethnic dimension, they each must operate within a conceptual framework for their texts. The convenient but falsely simplistic, indeed dichotomous Soviet/post-Soviet, Communist/post-Communist, or Yugoslav/post-Yugoslav paradigms and periodization will no longer suffice; they must, sooner rather than later, give way to more nuanced and insightful models: because what is happening today already resonated in years (and decades!) prior to 1989–1991; and, concomitantly, what happened before 1991 is still having its repercussions today, and its reverberations will echo significantly in years to come, well into the next century. If editorial policy has any merit, it is this journal’s determination to encourage, gently but persistently, on behalf of an on-going re-understanding of the complexities

of the nationalities question in the multi-national states of Eastern Europe and within the territorium of the multi-national Russian/Soviet (colonial) empires. We cannot meaningfully speculate on what is likely tomorrow (*quid tum*) unless we can claim to know where we are today and where we came from yesterday.

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The staff and Editorial Board of *Nationalities Papers* welcome the arrival of two sister publications, the new *Nations and Nationalism*, based in England, and the amended, reincarnated *Problems of Post-Communist Studies*, based in the United States. We wish our counterparts a long life and friendly but stimulating competition.

Meanwhile, the sad news of the demise of Radio Free Europe's Munich-based Research Institute has been tempered by assurances that similar quality work will emanate from the Prague-based Open Media Research Institute (OMRI). We sincerely hope that the promise of the weekly *Transition* and its companion daily reports will become an on-going reality for many years to come.