

# Western Multicultural Theory and Practice and its Applicability to the Post-Soviet States

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**ABSTRACT** *Will Kymlicka's views on the post-communist world are welcomed because they introduce the 'nationality' issue into the standard 'triple transition' which has ignored it. At the same time, the 27 former communist states should not be treated as one group in such discussions and policy formulations as it does not follow that the application of one set of policies to Central-Eastern Europe and the Baltic states means they are equally applicable to the CIS. This paper argues that Kymlicka's views in support of multiculturalism are not applicable to the Soviet successor states of the former USSR. The article critically engages with Kymlicka's views as they are applied to the post-colonial USSR and argues that they lack the depth of understanding of issues such as regional separatism, Russian designs on the CIS, inherited ethnic inequalities, difficulties in defining who are 'minorities', 'colonists' or 'immigrants', amorphous weak identities and support for affirmative action by previously discriminated languages and cultures.*

The application of Will Kymlicka's views on the post-communist world are a positive development because they introduce the 'nationality' issue into the standard 'triple transition' which has ignored this issue. At the same time, the 27 former communist states should not be treated as one group in such discussions and policy formulations as it does not follow that the application of one set of policies to Central-Eastern Europe and the Baltic states means they are equally applicable to the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

This article examines the applicability of Western theory and practice of multiculturalism to the CIS. The article argues Western multicultural theory is difficult to apply to this region. This argument is discussed within the context of key issues in the CIS: regional separatism, Russian designs on CIS states, inherited ethnic inequalities, difficulties in defining who are 'national minorities', 'colonists' or 'immigrants', weak national identities and support for affirmative action for languages and cultures discriminated against in the former USSR.

Until the second half of the 1990s transitology treated post-Soviet states no differently to other post-communist states in central-eastern Europe or former authoritarian states in

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Latin America and southern Europe. That is, they were only undergoing democratisation and market economic reform.

Scholars then began to understand that something was missing. Post-Soviet states inherited only quasi states with few of the institutions that nation-states traditionally possess. Stateness was then added by transitologists to democratisation and marketisation. This 'triple transition' has been seen as sufficient by the majority of scholars to understand post-Soviet transition (see Kuzio, 2001a, for a lengthy bibliography).

Unfortunately, the 'triple transition' fails to encapsulate the full picture as it either ignores or subsumes the nationality question under 'stateness'. The 'triple transition' also fails to grapple with the reasons why the post-communist world is dividing into two groups since the late 1990s—an increasingly authoritarian CIS and a democratising central-eastern Europe and the Baltic states (Kuzio, 2002d). The CIS has been shut out of future EU membership and its integration into NATO also remains questionable.

National integration (i.e. 'people building' or 'nation building'), minority policies, centre-periphery relations, inter-ethnic conflict and separatism, national symbols, changes in historiography, discussions surrounding the content of the 'national idea', national identity and foreign orientation ('returning to Europe', 'away from Russia!', 'to Europe with Russia!', etc.) are all actively debated in Ukraine and other CIS states. These facets are therefore also central elements of the post-Soviet transition.

In many post-Soviet states, such as Ukraine, the Communist Party was the largest party throughout the first decade of the post-Soviet transition. The Communist Party is not only hostile to the political and economic reform process, but, more importantly, opposed to independent statehood and in favour of a revived USSR.

In the 1990s reformers, unable to command majority support, chose an alliance with the 'lesser of two evils'—post-communist centrist oligarchs. An alliance with Communists would have been impossible because of their negative stance on national statehood. The Communist Party's refusal to recognise the severity of Soviet crimes against humanity continued to hold back the creation of a united democratic opposition. The largest reformist bloc, Our Ukraine, refused to cooperate with the Communists due to its unreformed nature. How then is the Communist Party to be factored into a 'triple transition' which ignores the nationality question?

Another factor which the 'triple transition' model ignored is the relationship between national identity or consciousness and the reform process. This is an area most Western scholars shy away from discussing or incorporating into their 'transition' frameworks (Kuzio, 2002b). Centre-right national democrats have traditionally been castigated by Western scholars and the media as 'nationalists' (Wilson, 1997). Yet, the national democrats are the main (non-Communist) opposition to authoritarian, corrupt oligarchs (Yushchenko, 2002). In 2004 Yushchenko won the elections after an Orange (democratic) Revolution.

Those political forces often assumed to be more liberally pre-disposed, such as the social democrats and liberals, are controlled by the same oligarchs who prefer an authoritarian, corporatist model for the state (Kuzio, 2002e). As former reformist Prime Minister and head of Our Ukraine Viktor Yushchenko said, the difference between his potential rival for the presidency in 2004, head of the presidential administration Viktor Medvedchuk, and himself is that they have, 'two different political views on Ukraine's future' (Yushchenko, 2002).

In Belarus the weakness of the national idea was the main contributing factor to the election of the Sovietophile president Alyaksandr Lukashenka in 1994 who has sought reunion with Russia (Eke & Kuzio 2000). Lukashenka is usually described as the 'last dictator in Europe' against whom a temporary visa ban was introduced by the EU and EU aspirant states in late 2002 after the Minsk OSCE office was de facto closed.

In Moldova the return to power of the Communists in parliament and the presidency in early 2001 led to cardinal changes in state policy. Moldovan Communists support the Soviet contention that Moldovans are a separate nation to Romanians and have, as in Belarus, re-introduced Soviet historiography in the education system.

Kymlicka and Opalski's (2001) study is therefore timely as it expands our discussion of post-communist transition to include the area of nationality policies which has been traditionally ignored within transitology. Nevertheless, the integration of nationality issues into discussions of post-communist transitions remains problematical in the area of multiculturalism.

### *Defining Our Terms*

This article uses two terms—multiculturalism and nationalising state—which are often counter-posed as two opposite poles, the former 'liberal' and the latter 'illiberal'. The manner in which the majority of Western scholars have usually treated post-Soviet states is to argue that the choice open to them is either multiculturalism (allegedly equating to a 'liberal' civic state) or a nationalising state (allegedly equating to an illiberal state) (Brubaker, 1995; Wilson, 1997). Not surprisingly, the majority of them have come down in favour of multiculturalism (Kymlicka & Opalski, 2001).

Multiculturalism seeks to ameliorate the difficult task of reconciling nationalist particularism with universal liberalism. In other words, the relationship between the titular nation(s) and national minorities, and this informs the following discussion of multiculturalism.

The purpose of multiculturalism within a democratic society is to teach its citizens to value diversity and differences, thus helping to integrate diverse cultures into the larger society without cutting them off from their (collective) pasts. The legitimacy of the nation-state is reinforced as citizens are willing to make sacrifices for those with whom they share a common destiny. This helps to forge a common 'We', which is particularly necessary in the event of an external threat to the country.

Multicultural societies are distinguished by equality of opportunity, a rejection of the French assimilationist nation-state model, a single culture promoted in the public domain is combined with tolerance for different cultures within the private sphere. Within the public domain the legal system, politics and economics are dominated by the common culture of the nation-state. At the same time, the languages of national minorities are not subjected to assimilationary pressures and the state can provide equal opportunities to integrate into society.

Kymlicka (1996) has been the most prolific advocate of multiculturalism and hence his ideas will be mainly used in my critique of multiculturalism later in this article. Kymlicka believes that culture and national identities are ideally suited to be the primary foci of identification. This is because being part of a clearly defined and respected cultural group is a requirement for personal identity. According to Kymlicka (1996), it is impossible to separate the state from its ethnic components.

Culture, Kymlicka (1996) believes, cannot be divorced from liberal polities because it provides additional meaning, facilitating participation in a recognised community, a sense of belonging and mutual recognition. Freedom and equality make most sense to the majority of citizens within their own ‘societal cultures’, as defined by language, history, shared memories and values, common institutions, religion, economic and recreational life:

Cultural membership provides us with an intelligent context of choice, and a secure sense of identity and belonging, that we call upon in confronting questions about personal values and projects. (Kymlicka, 1996: 105)

Kymlicka (1996) believes that nationalist particularism can be reconciled with universal liberalism and group with individual rights within Western and Eastern European nation-states (Kymlicka & Opalski, 2001). A nation-state based on individual rights can also provide multicultural rights to minority groups. Kymlicka (1996) therefore rejects the traditional view of liberals who believed a democracy could only function if all of its citizens were united by a common civic culture which assimilated everybody into the core nation. Liberals also opposed group rights because this stressed difference and maintained ethnicity which would be detrimental to maintaining the unity of the nation-state. In Kymlicka’s view, difference is not a threat to the nation-state but a way of maintaining its integrity in the face of its multi-ethnicity.

Advocates of group rights assert that a strong sense of identity can only arise within cultures. In other words, all identities are created through interactions within a cultural context. This leads to the belief that group rights afford greater political tolerance than policies based upon universal liberalism, which emphasises the rights that an individual possesses; regardless of the culture they belong to.

Kymlicka’s (1996, 1997) major criticism was to correctly point out that a multi-ethnic state, which he believed is true of the majority of nation-states, could never be ‘neutral’ with respect to its various national groups. The core (i.e. titular) nation would always remain privileged in certain ways through the choice of which language to use within schools, the courts and government services; which public holidays and historical myths to prioritise; and how to draw, or re-draw, internal boundaries.

Most Western nation-states have been willing to recognise greater cultural diversity since the 1960s and 1970s. But, only Canada has been willing to respect group rights. In Australia multiculturalism was introduced 6 years after indigenous peoples obtained the vote in 1967. But, only three Western nation-states—Canada, Australia and Sweden—chose to fully adopt multicultural policies. The majority of nation-states opted to instead liberalise their traditional policies of assimilationism by moving towards integrationist, rather than multiculturalist, policies.

Most Western nation-states have continued to therefore view multiculturalism with some degree of suspicion, fearing that it would undermine national integration. This has not though prevented Western academics and policymakers from advocating multicultural policies in post-communist states. While advocating these policies for one region (Central Europe and the CIS) the same policies are increasingly being questioned in the West. Since the terrorist attacks on 9 September 2001 concern about the lack of integration of Muslim minorities in Western Europe has prompted greater support for moving away from multiculturalism to national integration.

Brubaker (2001) has gauged a growing tendency for some nation-states to be concerned that cultural pluralism may have gone too far, particularly within the USA and France but even, to a lesser degree, within Germany. In the USA assimilationism was the dominant policy until the 1960s. Between the mid 1960s to the mid 1980s the USA evolved towards a greater degree of cultural plurality in the private domain if it did not contradict an overall American identity.

Brubaker (2001) does not believe that there will be a return to the full blown 'arrogant assimilation' found in nation-states prior to the 1960s. Instead, there will be a re-introduction of policies within education, citizenship and other areas that will tolerate heterogeneity. The problems that these new policies aim to deal with are segregation, ghettoisation and marginalisation that were inadvertently encouraged by emphasising cultural plurality at the expense of national unity. Brubaker (2001: 534) argues that this new marriage of assimilationism and plurality, 'does not seem to be morally objectionable' as it is not the same as pre-1960s assimilationism.

The term 'nationalising states' was brought into popular use by Brubaker (1995) in his celebrated article and has been picked up and elaborated upon by many other scholars. Brubaker's paradigm focused upon the alleged inter-relationship between three factors:

- *domestic 'nationalising state'* defined as essentially, 'ethnically heterogeneous yet conceived as nation-states, whose dominant elite's promote (to varying degrees) the language, culture, demographic position, economic flourishing, and political hegemony of the nominally state-bearing nation' (Brubaker, 1995: 109);
- *national minorities* which are organised and self conscious, demanding autonomy while resisting assimilation;
- *external 'homelands'* which seek to protect the minorities from assimilation because there is a sense of shared nationhood across political boundaries;

Brubaker focused on how 'nationalising' policies in the host state were inevitably not conducted in isolation from the other two fields (national minorities and national homelands). The ruling elite's of the 'nationalising state' often accuse the national minorities of 'disloyalty'. The policies of the 'nationalising state' create a real or perceived image within the national minorities and external homeland of an 'oppressive' state that is attempting to homogenise the country and eradicate regional identities. National minorities mobilise against the 'oppressive' host state with the help of the external homeland.

Brubaker only applied his 'nationalising state' to post-communist states, ignoring assimilationist pressure and 'banal nationalism' that exists in western democracies (Kuzio, 2001b, 2002a). In turn, other scholars have further selectively applied the concept to only certain post-communist countries whose 'nationalising' policies they dislike. The concept, for example, was never applied to Russia but very often to Ukraine.

A major criticism of Brubaker's concept of a 'nationalising state' was that it reinforced stereotypes about an alleged difference between Western 'liberal' civic and Eastern 'illiberal' ethnic nationalism. This dichotomy was popularised by Kaufmann (2000). In reality, most nation-states, including those mature democracies in western Europe and north America, combine elements of both civic and ethnic (or cultural) nationalisms. The inclusive nature of western states did not immediately appear in 1776 or 1789, but after decades and centuries of widening the definition of who could be included as citizens. The USA, for example, has broadened its definition to include who has a right to be an

'American' since 1776 by bringing in Catholics, Slavs, Blacks, women, Asians and Native Americans. Until the mid nineteenth century the American Anglo-Saxon and Protestant national identity opposed a widening of how 'Americans' should be defined (Kaufmann, 2000).

### **Pitfalls in Applying Multiculturalism to Post-Soviet States**

#### *Multiculturalism and the Former USSR*

The multiculturalist policies that have been proposed for post-Soviet states tends to support the freezing of the inherited ethno-cultural and post-colonial status quo in seven different ways. This would do little to foster national integration or reduce regional disparities:

- introduce two state languages (titular and Russian);
- recognise Russophones as constituting a coherent 'people';
- add a second titular nation (Russian);
- introduce a federal state;
- provide group rights to national minorities;
- do not introduce any 'nationalist historiography';
- adopt no 'nationalist symbols'.

By positing the choice in such stark terms of multiculturalism (equating to a liberal state) or a nationalising (illiberal) state hostile to minorities ignores a middle ground of policy options lying between them. I define the alternative set of middle ground policies as 'unity in diversity'. Unity in diversity supports both national integration and affirmative action for the titular nations of post-Soviet states, on the one hand, while providing for the ethno-cultural rights of minorities. My 'unity in diversity' is similar to Brubaker's (2001) 'moderate assimilation'.

Problems in the application of multicultural policies to post-Soviet states are now discussed using examples that have been widely debated (Brubaker, 2001).

### **The Crimea**

Kymlicka (2002) mistakenly places the Crimea alongside other former Soviet regions where autonomy was abolished (Georgia, Azerbaijan) or refused (Moldova). The local Russian elites elevated the Crimea from an *oblast* to an autonomous republic with the consent of the Soviet Ukrainian and later Ukrainian authorities. At the same time, Kymlicka's (2002) remarks on the Crimea fail to appreciate the delicacies at work in the peninsula. It is debateable if its autonomous status improved the lives of the Tatar and Ukrainian minorities during Leonid Kuchma's two terms in office (1994–2004).

The Crimea was an *oblast* from 1945 until 1954 in the Russian and from 1954 in the Soviet Ukrainian republics. The Tatars had been ethnically cleansed in 1944 after which Crimean autonomy was abolished. Ukraine upgraded the status of the Crimea from an *oblast* to that of an autonomous republic in January 1991. Autonomous status for the Crimea was demanded by the Russian ethnic majority in the Crimea in response to the growth of Ukrainian nationalism in the late Soviet era. It undoubtedly contributed to a peaceful resolution of its dispute with Kyiv.

In the absence of autonomous status events may have gone the way of Moldova which refused to grant regional autonomy to the Trans-Dniester region. The result was violent conflict. The abolishing of Abkhaz autonomy in Georgia in the early 1990s led to civil war and a coup d'état against nationalist President Zviad Gamsakhurdia.

There was also an additional two-fold incentive to upgrade the Crimea from an *oblast* to that of an autonomous republic. First, Crimean leaders threatened to petition the USSR Supreme Soviet to annul the 1954 decision to transfer the Crimea back to the Russian SFSR to Ukraine, thus returning the peninsula to Russian sovereignty. Second, any violence in the Crimea would have inevitably escalated into a Russian-Ukrainian war, which would have had disastrous consequences both for European security and for democratisation in both countries. Ukraine was a nuclear state until June 1996 and therefore any conflict would have been between two nuclear states (Russia and Ukraine).

Kymlicka (2002: 19) should be careful in denying the strategic importance to new states of neighbouring states who harbour territorial claims against them. After all, in the West border disputes were also a common feature during the formative period of their nation and state building in the nineteenth century. Russia has also long reserved for itself the right to intervene in the former USSR in defence of 'compatriots' (i.e. Russophones, not only ethnic Russians). In Moldova, Georgia and Azerbaijan, Russian or Russian proxy forces did intervene in support of separatists. These separatist regions continue to remain outside central control. In Moldova the new Russophile, communist leadership initially agreed to Russia's long held proposal to federalise Moldova as a *de facto* confederal 'common home' of two independent states.

Russia has protested the placing on trial in Estonia and Latvia of former members of the Soviet NKVD for crimes against humanity because Russia has continued to officially subscribe to the Soviet policy that Soviet troops were 'invited' into the Baltic States in 1939. Should the non-Russian successor states of the USSR simply ignore these aspects of Russian policy towards what it defines as its 'Near Abroad'?

The Crimea is a good example of the dilemma facing policy makers and elite's in the Soviet successor states in trying to find a middle path between allegedly 'liberal' multiculturalism and 'illiberal' nationalising policies. Liberal support for group rights in regions such as the Crimea often ignores the limitations imposed upon other minorities found in the new autonomous republic.

The dominant ethnic Russian leadership of the Crimea limit the minority rights of Ukrainians and Tatars, who account for one-third of the inhabitants, to have education and media in their own language. Ukrainians and Tatars have only four and six, respectively, of the 582 schools in the Crimea, while only two of the 392 publications in the Crimea are in Ukrainian and Turkic (Russian NTV 27 January 1999).

As Kymlicka (1996: 100) points out, 'We should not establish a system which enables the majority to profit from their own injustices'. The majority ethnic Russian community in the Crimea is mainly composed of post-war immigrants who replaced the ethnically cleansed Tatars. A case could be made on the grounds of natural justice that to rectify a previous injustice (i.e. the 1944 ethnic cleansing of the Tatars from the Crimea) may require the transformation of the Crimea into a Tatar autonomous republic. There are many examples within the Russian Federation and Georgia (e.g., Abkhazia) where the national minority is itself a minority within its autonomous republic.

Kymlicka (1996: 29) argues that, 'Federalism can only serve as a mechanism for self government if the national minority forms a majority in one of the federal sub units,

as the Quebecois do in Quebec'. Ideally, it is preferable for the national minority to be in a majority in its region but this is not always the case and should not always be used as a pretext for refusing group rights for indigenous ethnic groups, such as the Abkhaz or Crimean Tatars.

The Abkhaz were only a minority within their autonomous republic when the USSR existed but are now the majority after they ethnically cleansed the Georgians during their 1991–1992 secessionist campaign. In the USA there were national minorities (Navaho Indians, Chicanos, the native peoples of Hawaii) which when incorporated were majorities in their homeland and could have been granted group rights. However, group rights were refused after Anglophone settlers swamped these regions.

A similar policy is being implemented by China in Sinkiang and Tibet in an attempt to turn the local indigenous peoples (for example, the Uighurs and the Tibetans, respectively) into minorities within their own autonomous regions by promoting the influx of Han Chinese settlers. In the former USSR, Russians and Russophones were encouraged to move to many republics. In Latvia this nearly led to Latvians falling below 50% of the population; in Kazakhstan this actually happened.

Kymlicka (2002: 18) is critical of the view allegedly found only in post-communist Europe that autonomous units will be led by 'petty tyrants'. In Canada its multicultural policies, which Kymlicka is a strong advocate of, are only applied in Anglophone Canada. In Quebec, traditional French-style assimilationist policies are still in place (Juteau, 2002). Indeed, multiculturalism, some scholars would argue, was introduced in Canada in response to Quebec separatism. Do not Anglophones therefore have cause to be concerned if they are living in Quebec?

Autonomy is not only an unpopular concept in eastern Europe but also in the West. In France, which legally does not recognise 'national minorities', autonomy will be only granted to Corsica after a long period of separatist violence. Greece has always ruled out even recognising its Macedonian Slavs as a minority, let alone giving them autonomy.

In the former USSR it is not at all clear that local elites will be democrats within ethnic enclaves who obtained autonomous status. The Abkhaz ethnically cleansed their Georgians while the Georgian autonomous region of Ajaria was run as a petty fiefdom until President Mikhaïl Saakashvili led a popular revolt against the Ajarian leadership following the example of his own Rose Revolution. In many autonomous republics in the Russian Federation, such as Tatarstan, the local elites have no interest in democratic norms. In the Crimea the Russian elite denies minority rights to Tatars and Ukrainians.

### *Colonists or Immigrants*

Kymlicka makes a distinction between colonists and immigrants. The first settlers in the USA and Canada, for example, were Anglo-Saxon and French colonial immigrants. Immigrants came later into these societies created by the colonial settlers. But, when do colonial settlers become 'indigenous'? In Ulster the Protestant ('loyalist') community is largely composed of Scottish and English colonial settlers but after centuries of settlement in Northern Ireland they claim the title of an indigenous 'Irish' people. Irish Catholics ('nationalists') disagree (Neuberger, 2001).

In the former USSR, Soviet nationality policies deliberately fostered the in-migration of ethnic Russians into the non-Russian republics in an attempt to ensure central political control and Russification of the local populations. Industrialisation and urbanisation in

Estonia, Latvia, Moldova, Kazakhstan and Ukraine led to the influx of large numbers of ethnic Russians. By the last 1989 Soviet census, ethnic Russians accounted for 30.3, 34, 13, 37.8 and 22.1% of the populations of these five states, respectively. Should Russians living in the non-Russian republics of the former USSR be therefore considered 'indigenous' peoples or colonial settlers? Maybe, the latter designation would be more appropriate. If so, and because they possess an external homeland, they are not indigenous peoples and are not necessarily entitled to ethno-cultural rights (e.g., Russian as a second state language or Russians constitutionally designated as a second titular nation).

Kymlicka has argued that most immigrants choose to leave their cultures voluntarily (unless they are, for example, political refugees). Ethnic Russians did not largely migrate voluntarily as they were usually sent to these non-Russian republics where they obtained various forms of privileges. Few of them had any cause to learn the local language as Russian was the *de facto* (and *de jure* from 1990) state language of the former USSR. Ukrainians sent to the Russian SFSR—where they are the second largest national minority after the Tatars—did not obtain the same privileges and were subjected to Russification. As these Ukrainians are regarded as 'immigrants', and not as a local 'national minority' living in their ancestral homeland (e.g., Tatars or Yakuts), they are not provided with ethno-cultural rights. Russian policymakers argue that Ukrainians cannot be defined as a national minority because they have an external homeland (Ukraine) and are not an indigenous group. If such a policy is applied by Ukraine then the same could be said of Russians in Ukraine. Russians in Ukraine also have an external homeland (Russia). Should they be then provided with ethno-cultural rights in republics such as Ukraine if Ukrainians in Russia are not granted similar rights?

Ukraine has consented to one region (the Crimea) being granted the status of territorial autonomy because it has an ethnic Russian majority. In addition, the Ukrainian state has provided minority rights to ethnic Russians in other regions of Ukraine in education, culture and the media. Although the 1997 Russian-Ukrainian treaty called for both states to provide these rights to Ukrainians in Russia and Russians in Ukraine thus far only the Ukrainian state has followed through on these provisions of the treaty.

The Russian Federation has promoted homogenising policies of assimilation to all non Russians living outside their autonomous regions (e.g., Tatars outside the Tatar autonomous republic) or those forcibly sent to work in Russia during the Soviet era (e.g., Ukrainians). A total of 300,000 Ukrainians, for example, live in the Tyumen region of Western Siberia and half a million are reportedly of Ukrainian extraction in Moscow. Yet, the Russian Federation does not possess a single Ukrainian language school or publication.

In making his distinction between national minorities and voluntary immigrants, Kymlicka (1996: 96) believes that the latter, 'in deciding to uproot themselves ... voluntarily relinquish some of the rights that go along with their original national membership'. Although they should be afforded minority rights they cannot demand group rights because they do not fit Kymlicka's definition of a 'nation' or 'people'. It is perfectly reasonable, Kymlicka therefore believes, for the country to promote the integration of these immigrants.

Although minority rights have increasingly been provided for ethnic Russians in Ukraine, the state is encouraging their integration into Ukrainian mainstream culture through state and nation building policies. Integration, particularly after a number of

generations and within such close cultures and similar languages, will inevitably lead to assimilation of some ethnic Russians in Ukraine. The December 2001 Ukrainian census, the first census since 1989, recorded a decline of three million Russians in Ukraine.

Both the mainstream society and the immigrants should strive to adapt. The mainstream society may devise nationality policies which cater for the polyethnic needs of its non-titular ethnic groups. In Ukraine, self-governing rights have been granted to Hungarians and Romanians who live compactly in the Trans-Carpathian and Chernivtsi *oblasts* respectively. National minorities have been strongly encouraged by the state to revive languages and cultures that had largely been Russified (for example, Poles, Bulgarians and Jews). Opposition to ratification of the European Charter for Minority Languages, which was ratified by Ukraine in 2003, rested on the Russian question, not on hostility to supporting non-Russian minority languages (*Kyiv Post* 21 November 2002). A state programme introduced in late 1994 allowed the continued re-transmission of television from Russia and made available Russian-language books and media to cater to the ethno-cultural needs of Russians (Stewart, 1993; Resler, 1997).

Complaints have only come from the Russian minority, but not non-Russian minorities. Jewish community leaders, for example, regularly praise Ukrainian nationality policies as one of the most liberal in the former USSR. The only complaints to have surfaced are from the largely passive Russian minority. As I argue later in this article, this has less to do with discrimination than with opposition to moving from a position of ethnic dominance to minority status, a status the European Charter reinforces.

### Internal Colonialism and Inherited Inequalities

In the non-Russian former Soviet republics, large ethno-cultural inequalities were inherited when they became independent states. Ethnic Russians often dominated culture, politics and economics in these republics. The Kazakhstan riots of 1986 were sparked by the sending by Moscow of an ethnic Russian to lead the republic. By the late 1980s ethnic Ukrainians in Ukraine outnumbered ethnic Russians in only two professions—agriculture and forestry (Kuzio, 1998). After the former Soviet non-Russian republics became independent states, the titular nationalities began to reclaim some of the political, cultural and economic positions of power from ethnic Russians in an attempt at redressing some of these aspects of Soviet internal colonialism.<sup>1</sup>

In line with official Soviet nationalities policy, Belarus and Ukraine were considered not as separate ethnic groups but rather as regional branches of the *Ruskii narod* (Russian people), a concept that most ethnic Russians still adhere to (Tolz, 2001). In the Soviet era Ukrainians and Belarusians had allegedly temporarily separated from Russians but were slated to merge once again in a new Russian-speaking *Homo sovieticus* (Weeks, 1997). Therefore, ethnic Russians preferred to be defined as another titular nation—not as a ‘national minority’. Ethnic Russians are resisting being labelled as a ‘national minority’ in the non-Russian successor states of the former USSR.

Kymlicka warns us that even in Western democracies, ‘not all groups fall neatly into either the ‘national minority’ or ‘ethnic group’ category ...’ (Kymlicka, 1996: 131). Belarus under President Alyaksandr Lukashenka has accepted the Russian argument that Belarusians are a regional branch of the *Ruskii narod*. Russians and Belarusians are therefore both titular nations in Belarus. A weak national identity has, in turn, negatively impacted upon Belarus’s democratic transition (Eke & Kuzio, 2000; Kuzio, 2002b).

These inherited ethno-cultural inequalities are particularly visible in spoken and written culture in the former USSR because the Russian language had previously been privileged. By insisting that immigrants acquire a command of the 'state language' (English in North America, Ukrainian in Ukraine or Estonian in Estonia) this does not follow that they have to abandon their mother tongue. These former colonial settlers/immigrants may therefore become bilingual, particularly in countries such as Ukraine where the local language is similar and bilingualism was already a widespread phenomenon. Demands that non-titulars learn the state/official language should not be necessarily construed as evidence of an illiberal nationalising state.

Affirmative action should only be condemned if its aim is to nationalize the state on behalf of the titular nationality while ignoring the provision of minority rights for other ethnic groups. Such a policy is what I would define as an illiberal nationalising state and is usually considered to be the arch opposite of multiculturalism.

To make Russian the second 'state language', together with the titular, may seem to be in line with liberal policy (or that of a 'civic' state). However, the continued dominance of the Russian language in many non-Russian successor states means that this would *not* promote equality. Although Russian was elevated to the status of a second state language in Belarus in the May 1995 referendum this has not made Belarusian and Russian equal languages. Kymlicka (2002: 17) is wrong to see this step towards 'official bilingualism' in Belarus in a positive way. Lukashenka's aim was never linguistic equality but a return to the Soviet era where Russian was the *lingua franca* and Belarusian's subjected to Russification. Lukashenka believes there to be only two worthwhile languages in the world—Russian and English. Belarus was the most de-nationalised of the non-Russian successor states and its language subjected to the greatest degree of Russification. The Belarusian language is unable to compete with Russian; something that President Lukashenka—who openly derides the Belarusian language—understood perfectly well when he held his 1995 referendum.

The titular languages of the non-Russian successor states can only hope to compete with the Russian language after a period of affirmative action in their favour by making them exclusively the state language. By affording Ukrainian the privilege of being the only state language, its prestige is rising in line with its everyday use in state institutions. Kymlicka has long been an advocate of affirmative action for the French language and culture in Canada. Why not then in the former USSR? Such an approach, one could argue, is in line with his own views (1996: 78):

In fact, it is very difficult for languages to survive in modern industrial societies unless they are used in public life. Given the spread of standardized education, the high demand for literacy in work, and widespread interaction with government agencies, any language which is not a public language becomes so marginalised that it is likely to survive only amongst a small elite, or in a ritualized form, not as a living and developed language underlying a flourishing culture.

By making Russian a second state language President Lukashenka therefore effectively passed the death sentence on the Belarusian language. In such a situation Kymlicka (1996: 83) is absolutely correct in his argument that if a culture is, 'threatened with debasement or decay, we must act to protect it'. But, such a view should not be only applied to Western democracies but also to post-colonial Soviet republics.

### **Are Linguistic Groups a ‘Nationality’?**

Should language groups be granted certain privileges in the crafting of multicultural policies? This case is sometimes argued by Western scholars—and indeed by the Russian government—when seeking to defend the rights of Russian speakers in the CIS (Wilson, 1997). However, Kymlicka cautions us against this because of the difficulty in defining such amorphous groups. In the United States the term ‘Hispanics’ should be used with caution because they identify first and foremost with their national identity.

The term ‘Hispanics’ (like ‘Russophones’) is therefore, ‘little more than a statistical category covering a range of minorities, immigrants, and exiles, all with their own distinct identities and demands’ (Kymlicka, 1996: 16–17). In Canada the case of the Francophones is different in that this refers principally to those of French Canadian identity in a state that recognises two ‘official languages’ (English and French). Immigrants, in contrast to the two founding colonial settler nations (the British and French) and national minorities (the Native Indians), are not granted language rights (Ponarin, 2000). The existence of a Russophone linguistic group was always a misnomer which has been challenged by scholars in recent years. I discuss this question later in my article.

### **National Integration and Self-Respect**

A major aspect of the affirmative action introduced by the non-Russian successor states of the former USSR was the widely felt need to regain self-respect. In Ukraine, for example, the Ukrainian language was derided in the Soviet era as that of a peasant, uncouth language not fit for use in high politics, state institutions or economics. When speaking in the Ukrainian language in the Soviet era, Ukrainians would be sometimes told to ‘Speak to me in a Human Tongue’ (that is, in Russian). Similar views of the Welsh and Irish languages in the UK and Breton in France were common place a century ago with English and French elevated to a more ‘superior’, ‘cultured’ level.

With little self-respect individuals can lose their self-identity, which is closely tied to cultural identity. A people’s self respect is intimately bound up with the esteem in which a national group is held: ‘If a culture is not generally respected, then the dignity and self-respect of its members will also be threatened’, Kymlicka (1996: 89) advises us.

Minority rights can promote the integration and inclusion of different ethnic groups into the political community by removing the fear of assimilation. Nation and state building policies could be therefore coupled with a recognition of the state’s multi-ethnic plurality. If there is no respect for ‘deep diversity’, coupled with an unwillingness to compromise by both the majority and minority cultures, it will obviously be difficult to inculcate a shared identity and values. Kymlicka (1996: 189) believes that, ‘People from different national groups will only share an allegiance to the larger polity if they see it as the context within which their national identity is nurtured, rather than subordinated’.

Fournier (2002) has surveyed how resistance by Russians to new language policies in Ukraine is not due to perceived discrimination. Instead, Russians resist being labelled as an ethnic group and national minority, preferring to be defined instead as part of a Russian ethno-linguistic community (i.e. compatriots). As a minority they are cut off from other non-Russian Russophones who are now encouraged to re-learn their language. Russians therefore prefer what Fournier calls an ‘empire-generated’ hybridity. As argued elsewhere in this article, such a hybridity is not conducive to implementing multicultural policies.

As with other more recent scholarship, Fournier also argues against the usefulness of a catch-all Russophone label. Ukrainians may be Russian speakers but they still possess an emotional attachment to their native language which many can still use on certain occasions. This subjective attachment to language is also the case in Ireland where attempts to revive Gaelic have been largely unsuccessful (Davis, 2003).

Often Ukrainians are bilingual. In the city of Kyiv one hears little Ukrainian on the streets. And yet, in the early to mid 1990s, between 80 and 90% of schools were converted to Ukrainian-language instruction. This process of Ukrainianisation was not accompanied by any protests. Fournier (2002) looks at the discourse in five different areas where Russians have opposed Ukraine's language and nationality policies. These include hostility to dividing two peoples (Russians and Ukrainians), the inadequacy of Ukrainian as a state language because Ukrainian is a 'backward' language, resistance to defining Russian as a 'foreign language' in Ukraine, protests against the alleged removal of Russian from Ukraine and support for a linguistic ethno-cultural definition of a Russophone identity rather than an ethnic one.

Fournier believes that this resistance draws upon an imperial legacy where Russians resist being part of a Russian-speaking 'imperial relic'. Ukrainian is understood as 'inferior' to Russian language and culture. In supporting 'official bilingualism' Kymlicka should note that Russians do not strive for the equality of their language with Ukrainian or Belarusian but to return to the Soviet era where Russian dominated the hierarchy of eastern Slavic languages. As Fournier (2002: 427) points out, 'pressures are aimed at the restoration of the Russian language's dominant status, not its equality to Ukrainian'.

The inferiority of Ukrainian and Belarusian to Russian is based on the Soviet ideology of 'Slavic brotherhood' and Russian nationalism which were in place in the USSR from the mid 1930s. Such a view was internalised by many Soviet people, especially those who were Russified. It is still accepted by the Communist Parties in the Soviet successor states. In Belarus, Lukashenka epitomises this viewpoint when he derides the Belarusian language. In Moldova, which is ruled by a Communist president and Communist-dominated parliament since early 2001, their revision of nationality policy has returned to defining Moldovans as a separate nation to Romanians, which was the standard Soviet view, coupled with proposals to elevate Russian to a second state language. In both Belarus and Moldova, Soviet historiography has been reintroduced which emphasises the superiority of the Russian language and culture based on Soviet internationalism and Russian nationalism (Kuzio, 2002c).

### **Problems Defining National Minorities**

A major problem in applying Western multicultural policies to the former USSR rests upon the problem of defining which national minorities and ethnic groups have a cultural identity (Tempelman, 1999). How would such policies therefore cope with individuals whose identity is unclear? Indeed, can multicultural policies be applied to those who define themselves as 'Soviet' or whose primary loyalty is to their region, not to the state? These categories include large numbers of Ukrainian and Belarusian citizens who cannot therefore be expected to act or vote as members of 'communities of interest' (Kymlicka, 1996: 136).

Multicultural policies assume that individuals hold an allegiance to a culture and possess a well-defined group identity—in other words, that there is some form of discourse

of 'Otherness' between their group and the 'dominant' culture. Yet, Russian speakers in Ukraine do not exist as a coherent cultural group or as a 'community of interest'; Russophones are an amalgam of ethnic Russian and Russophone/Russified Ukrainians, Jews, Belarusians and others. In a study of Russian speakers in the former USSR, Poppe & Hagendoorn (2001) argue that there is no conglomerate identity of Russians outside Russia in the former USSR and it is, 'unlikely that Russians and other non-titular Russophone groups will identify as a single group'. Russian speakers and even Russians within the former USSR outside the Russian Federation are therefore not a diaspora and do not constitute one united group (Poppe & Hagendoorn, 2001).

Barrington (2001) has analysed much of the recent scholarly criticism of the formulations of Russophones as a unified group and potential nationality (Laitin, 1998; Barrington, 2001). Barrington believes there to be little potential for a Russian-speaking nationality in the former USSR. Post-Soviet populations are more likely to increasingly define themselves in terms of citizenship or in ethnic terms. The latter may be a reflection of their primordial attachment to ethnicity inherited from the former USSR. Barrington found that citizenship is a, 'new and powerful inclusionary device in the post-Soviet region as well' (Barrington, 2001: 150). Citizenship is far more popular as a term of identity reference than any other category.

At the time of the disintegration of the former USSR the majority of those who defined themselves as 'Ukrainian' or 'Russian' once every ten years in the Soviet census did not hold what we understand to be a modern national identity. Their identity is still in a great deal of flux, a condition not unusual in post-colonial states. The 2001 census recorded a large drop in ethnic Russians in Ukraine who re-defined themselves as 'Ukrainian'. Former President Kuchma did the same earlier. When elected to the March 1990 Ukrainian parliament his biography listed him as a 'Russian'. By the time he became Prime Minister in 1992 he had become a 'Ukrainian'.

The Soviet census forced respondents to choose the nationality of only one parent. In Ukraine, for example, a quarter of families had spouses of different nationalities. In the Soviet era, 58.9% of Russians and 74.7% of Jews in Ukraine married outside their ethnic group. Russian was the language of advancement, and consequently many of those with mixed ancestry chose 'Russian' as their ethnic identity. This was recorded in their passports and during Soviet censuses. In the post-Soviet era, internal documents no longer record 'nationality'.

Ethnic re-identification is caused by a higher birth rate among Ukrainians, who dominate rural areas in which the birth rates are higher (87.5% of Russians live in urban areas compared to 60.3% of Ukrainians). But, the major cause of the decline in 'Russians' in Ukraine has been due to their ethnic re-identification as 'Ukrainians', presumably because in an independent Ukraine it is more advantageous to be 'Ukrainian', unlike in the former USSR. Most self-declared Ukrainians have parents of the same nationality while approximately half of the self-declared Russians are of Ukrainian-Russian ancestry. Many of these self-declared Russians of mixed parentage are now re-identifying themselves as 'Ukrainian' (Rapawy, 1997), a process that has been confirmed by the results of the 2001 census.

## **Conclusion**

Kymlicka is over-optimistic about the possibilities of the application of multicultural policies to post-Soviet states. The majority of the policies he would support are usually

defined as 'multicultural' but would be difficult to apply to post-Soviet states. This does not rule out recognising diversity within the institutional, legislative and constitutional framework of post-communist states. At the same time, assimilationism is also not likely; where it has been attempted (Georgia, Serbia) it has failed to produce the desired results and instead has led to ethnic conflict.

This article has discussed problems in applying Western multicultural policies in the former USSR by investigating the legacies of territorial versus ethnic autonomy (Crimea, Abkhazia, Trans-Dniester) and the difficulties in defining who are 'colonists', 'immigrants' or 'minorities'. It has adopted a critical approach towards the concept of understanding linguistic groups as budding nationalities. It also argued that if it is morally just to adopt affirmative action policies in the West (i.e. Quebec. [see Juteau, 2002]) then double standards should not be applied when dealing with inherited ethno-cultural inequalities in the post-Soviet states.

Traditional studies of nationalism, and more recent work by scholars such as Kymlicka, find it difficult to incorporate case studies such as Belarus where the state is discriminating against the largest ethnic group (Belarusians). In addition, the former USSR is not included within post-colonial studies and many Western scholars find it therefore difficult to appreciate similar processes, such as affirmative action for previously discriminated ethnic groups who now possess successor states, that are taking place there. Instead, their primary focus (and sympathy) is towards non-titular groups (i.e. such as national minorities). As discussed in the Ukrainian case, Russians are opposed to being re-designated as a 'national minority' because this means the loss of their dominant status within the Soviet empire (Fournier, 2002) which is implied when they are defined as a 'national minority'.

The application of multicultural policies in post-Soviet states may be impossible or, at the very best, difficult until those holding unclear, regional or Soviet identities replace them with cultures that Kymlicka defines as exhibiting the criteria of 'nations' or 'peoples' (Kymlicka, 1996). Multicultural policies can be only introduced in states that have developed to a certain level of 'modernity', a level that still eludes the Soviet successor states where a 'quadruple transition' is taking place.

It is therefore wrong to describe the choice open to post-Soviet states in stark terms as either that of 'liberal' multiculturalism or 'illiberal' nationalising state. The first set of policies may be un-applicable and harm national integration. The second are reprehensible and create inter-ethnic tension that would also harm national integration. Post-Soviet states need to seek a middle path that is now also increasingly becoming the norm in the West (Brubaker, 2001) and which I define as 'unity in diversity'. Nationality policies that recognise the rights of both the titular nationality emerging from colonialism and national minorities, encouraging national integration while rejecting assimilation and discrimination, are the best way forward for post-Soviet states. This is what I define as unity in diversity. Multiculturalist or nationalising policies, on the other hand, are the wrong sets of policy prescriptions.

## Note

<sup>1</sup> Reversing the colonial past is seen as morally justified in the former Western colonies but often not in the former Soviet empire. Unfortunately, a discussion framed in such a manner has been unable to take place because 'post-colonial studies' refuses to include the USSR within its remit. Ireland is also excluded from 'post-colonial' studies.

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