

Map 31

1926: An Ethnic Map Reflecting the First Soviet Census

Map 32

1926: Using the Census to Identify Russians and Ukrainians

In addition to shifts in the distribution of populations caused by the upheavals of the Civil War and interethnic wars of 1918–1920, the ethnopolitical map of the Caucasus was being influenced by other factors: the Soviet administrative ethnicization of territories, the “indigenization” of schools and government in these territories, and changes in the nomenclature of peoples (the official instrument of ethnic identification).

Adherence to the “national principle” in the 1920s created greater conformity between the administrative division of the North Caucasus and the distribution of ethnic groups. Highly homogeneous titular national territories began to emerge or were given Soviet legitimization. The Soviets’ practice of relying on the national principle in the administrative design of territory and the use of positive discrimination in favor of non-Russian minorities gave ethnicity a new instrumental and symbolic weight. Of course, the cultural notion of homeland and the symbolic connection between community and territory had already become deeply ingrained for a number of Caucasian groups before the Soviet or even the imperial era. But Soviet national design raised this connection to a new level and gave it an institutional underpinning. The Soviets sanctioned the use of ethnicity as a basis for authority and collective privilege (as well as collective responsibility), an arrangement that contrasted starkly with the estate (*soslovie*) system around which imperial Russian society had been structured. In destroying the “exploiting classes,” the Bolsheviks homogenized minorities’ internal social structure and thereby gave ethnic identity an entirely new significance. By the time of the revolution and Civil War the Bolsheviks were treating non-Russian minorities as akin to an exploited class—“the allies of the Russian proletariat” in the struggle against tsarism and the bourgeoisie. Postrevolutionary positive discrimination by the Soviets deployed this ide-

ology within new educational and administrative systems. The indigenization of schools and local government was designed to create a new, Soviet cultural and political infrastructure for this ethnic field.

At the same time, the authorities now required a clear definition of nationality as a separate, distinct, and exclusive characteristic. As a result, the strategy for organizing territory based on ethnic criteria, given that it was embodied in an actual administrative network and administrative practice, itself became a factor in determining ethnic categories and borders. The government’s determination of ethnic categories and boundaries depended on the outcome of rivalries between various well-established ethnopolitical goals, whether integrative or autonomizing, with a variety of institutional underpinnings (autonomous republic, oblast, raion). How the Soviet state divided up territory was fraught with contradictions—some nationalities (or nominal ethnic categories) that might have qualified as separate were combined with similar groups, while others equally similar were recognized as separate. The list of peoples in the 1926 All-Union Census generally continued to apply imperial nomenclature. The country’s still-emerging ethnic and administrative composition affected how people were classified throughout the country. For example, the appearance of Ukraine as a Soviet republic created a new ethnic category that had to be added to government forms throughout the Soviet state and also required the redrawing of identificational borders within the highly integrated Slavic population of the Caucasus. These borders were apparently also designed to help Ukrainian or Russian identity supplant Cossack identity and give former Host members a new affiliation.

Official instructions issued to census takers in 1926 required them, among other things, to record “Ukrainian, Great Russian, and Belorussian nationalities” (*Vsesoiuznaia perepis’*

naseleniia 1926 goda, vol. 5). For locales “where the word ‘Russian’ is used by all three of those peoples to define their nationality,” those being counted were required to choose only one designation. Another set of instructions took the opposite approach: all Kartvelian-speaking peoples (Georgians, Ajarians, Megrels, Svans, Laz) were to be placed under a single designation—Georgian (*ibid.*, vol. 14).

The existence of such administrative units as national republics, autonomous provinces (oblasts), and even ethnic districts (raions) was a factor in cultural engineering. During the early Soviet period Samurzakanians, who were primarily speakers of Abkhaz but at that time had already begun to identify themselves as Megrels, were officially designated Georgian. On the other hand the fact that “Abkhaz”—a term that had entered the Russian language from Georgian during the imperial period (the local ethnonym [“Abaza”] had entered Georgian from the Greek [“Abasgoi”])—had become entrenched in Soviet nomenclature served to strengthen official recognition of the ties between the Apsua people and Abkhazia, their native land. Considering the nature of Georgian claims to indigenous status in Abkhazia, it is clear that the Russian-Soviet canonization of the “Abkhaz” ethnonym for the Apsua greatly contributed to their standing in Abkhazia as both the indigenous and the titular group. However, in the 1940s and 1950s yet another attempt was made to subvert the ethnonymic connection between the Apsua and this territory and interpret the Abkhaz as “one of the Georgian peoples” or “ethnic Georgians.”

The term “Transcaucasian Tatars” was supplanted by the term “Azerbaijani Turks” and, ultimately, “Azerbaijanis.” This last would be initially applied to all the Turkic-speaking Muslims of Transcaucasia, from the Meskhetians in southwest Georgia to the Terekemes in south Daghestan and assimilated Tats and Talysh. Probably the temporary identification of the