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**Kellner-Heinkele, Barbara and Jacob M. Landau. *Language Politics in Contemporary Central Asia: National and Ethnic Identity and the Soviet Legacy*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2012.**

This is the second work of this nature produced by this team of authors, their first having covered roughly the first decade beyond the collapse of the former Soviet Union (1988-98), entitled *Politics of Language in the ex-Soviet Muslim States* (London: Hurst and Company, 2001). Concentrating, in this work, on roughly the second decade following Soviet collapse (1998-2010), the authors' main concern is, again, the official language policies of the six independent Central Asian states of Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan, each treated separately chapter-by-chapter in that order (cf. p. XIV). With respect to "their course, motivation and aims," the authors set out to evaluate, in terms of success or failure, how these language policies and their implementation or, as the case may be, non-implementation impact three main groups within each respective state: 1). the "titular ethnic," that is, indigenous or native ethnic groups; 2). the large Russian minorities remaining after colonization; and 3). "other" smaller minorities (pp. XIII-XIV, 17-18, 198). While making room for special issues arising in each unique political context, the chapters provide consistent coverage of the same select topics, providing opportunity for transregional comparison. An introduction and conclusion likewise provide comparative treatment of general themes and issues. One thing is certain: The "language and educational policies of the state" are "crucial," that is to say, vital or necessary in the eyes of each national state -- particularly if and when they are viewed as a means of achieving state liberation from "Russian cultural aggression against indigenous tradition" (pp. 4-5).

Against this backdrop, the central thrust of the work is perhaps best distilled in the following passage:

Language reforms were couched in laws and decrees which have shown that in authoritarian regimes, there are hardly any limits to what can be legislated or decreed. The new legislation set rules which – explicitly or implicitly – treated the titular language preferentially.

Although many legislative documents promised that the state would treat all languages equally, implementation very frequently neglected the language interests of the minority ethnies. One could say that the main issue in language policy in each of the six independent states was the shift from one dominant language, Russian, to another, the titular language. (pp. 200-1).

This "impl[ied] a hegemonic standing for the titular majority" (p. 7). These conditions have arisen because "post-independence nationalism has assumed an ethnic character cloaked in the guise of civic nationalism" (p. 3). But an ethnic-based nationalism which "turn[s] the titular language into the dominant one leads to the exclusion or at least the downgrading of the others, rather than creating an environment of inclusion" (p. 3). Indeed, it "has alienated the other ethnic groups, Slavs and others, who often feel downgraded and disempowered" (p. 207), all because the governments have shown "only limited concern for the views and wishes of the minority ethnies" (p. 5). They "look askance at the 'otherness' of the minority ethnic groups" (p. 203), "ignoring (in practice, at least) other ethnies" (p. 6), even "striving to marginalize and denigrate the languages of other ethnies as obstacles to nation-building" (p. 208; cf. p. 17). While the titular ethnic groups themselves participate in all this, the main responsibility for much of it, we are told, should be placed upon "the elites," who "determined and controlled the political, economic, ... and cultural reforms imperative in the new situation" (p. 5; cf. pp. 3-4, 7, 198, 204, 208).

All of this, according to the authors, "follow[s] the patterns of the Soviet legacy" (p. 210; cf. 3-4), only applied now to ethnic nationalist causes grounded in "monoculturalism... instead of multiculturalism" (p. 208). Indeed, "[a] multilingual solution could have been the answer," but "there has been little real understanding of the importance of investing in multilingualism, cultural pluralism, ethnic coexistence, and regional cooperation; all of them keys to a more viable and

sustainable future” (p. 9). This is in spite of the idea that multilingualism “is common in many advanced societies” (p. 208). The conclusion of the authors, therefore, is that “the lack of language rights within the minority ethnies denotes a failure of the central government and its machinery” in each of the six Central Asian states, “due, among other causes, to a seemingly total neglect of linguistic research oriented to international models” (p. 209). We should, however, “cautiously evaluate success or failure in language reform” since such an assessment “is especially problematic when the period examined stretches over less than two decades” (p. 199; cf. p. 210). Another “serious difficulty is the frequent absence of uncontested statistics” (pp. 199-200). There are, of course, numerous other important details addressed by the authors, particularly in relation to each unique socio-political context, but this accurately represents the main thrust of their overall concern and message.

The most significant weakness of the book is that, other than shallow, glossed-over references to “the Soviet legacy,” no historical context is provided. It is simply impossible to offer fair and effective evaluation of any current state of affairs, language policies or otherwise, without thoroughly and carefully grounding one’s analysis in the history which gave that state of affairs its shape. It is not simply a matter of how many ethnic groups there are and what respective percentages of the population they constitute; questions of how and when each group got there are of vital importance, particularly in a post-colonial environment. Along these lines, the authors fail to address the relevant question of “reparations,” which are so central in the debates regarding post-colonial states in the modern global era.<sup>1</sup> Second, the authors themselves are guilty of “ignoring (in practice, at least) other ethnies” (p. 6), including the “titular” ethnies of each of the six independent states. Out of a total of 600 sources in their bibliography, 154 (25%) are Russian, while only nine (1.5%) are drawn from the titular ethnies – four Uzbek, three Azerbaijani, one Tajik, one Kyrgyz, zero Turkmen, zero Kazakh – and none (0%) from “the other ethnic minorities” for which they carry such genuine, deep concern. This is not due to a lack of such publications, certainly not in Kazakh, and little less in Kyrgyz and Uzbek. This seriously biases their study toward a Western and Russian perspective, as evidenced by their critical, even discriminatory views toward the titular ethnies. (Note here that the 12 Turkish works, totaling 2%, should not be counted as ‘national’, but ‘foreign’ language sources.)

A problem of comparative world historical context also lies behind their work. It is entirely commendable, even admirable, that Kellner-Heinkele, as a German writing from out of her post-Nazi German context, addresses her concerns for vital issues of ethnic relations within political states, and that Landau, as an Israeli Jew writing from out of his own Israeli-Palestinian context, addresses his concerns for the same<sup>2</sup>. But the solutions to ethnic relations are not the same in all states. Here again, history matters. And the history of the Central Asian states is *not* the same as that of post-Nazi Germany or post-Ottoman Palestine-Israel. It is, likewise, not the same as post-Apartheid South Africa or post-Segregationist America, to name two additional historical contexts from which socio-political imperatives concerning “ethnic minorities” are commonly drawn for the modern “international” world. While shared laws and standards are essential to human society, absolutist-universalist approaches can themselves too easily become coercive and hegemonic. The authors’ attempt to tie their multilingual “international models” (p. 209) to “advanced societies” (p. 208) moves in this direction, carrying uncomfortable echoes of earlier nineteenth and twentieth-century Western supremacist approaches to “civilization” in the classic “Orientalist” tradition. This could easily have been tempered by providing minimally 20-25 pages of historical background, from the

<sup>1</sup> John Torpey, ed., *Politics and the Past: On Repairing Historical Injustices*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007 and Fernne Brennan and John Packer, eds., *Colonialism, Reparations and Trade: Remediating the ‘Past’?* Oxon and New York, Routledge, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. esp. Landau’s works on *The Arab Minority in Israel, 1967-1991: Political Aspects* (Oxford University Press, 1993) and *Jews, Arabs, Turks* (Magnes Press, 1993).

beginnings of Russian colonialism in Central Asia to the present, tracking population statistics along the way, including the nature and causes of the shifts involved.

As for strengths, concern for the “minority ethnics” is a welcome contribution to the debates. So also is the rich amount of data and the detailed discussion that the authors provide in relation to each state, particularly with respect to language laws and practices within the respective educational systems of those states. The authors also offer an overall fair picture of the dynamics between the titular and Russian ethnics in each context, noting how “opposition to language shift is [commonly]...encountered within the sizeable population of monolingual Russian speakers living in all six states” (p. 202), buttressed by strong support from Moscow (pp. 9, 12, 204, 207). And while at times overemphasized, the concern for authoritarianism and exclusivist tendencies among the titular ethnics in each state is real. Finally, the lack of national and minority literatures aside, the bibliography remains extensive and helpful. Overall, the book makes an important and welcome contribution to understanding language law and practice in Central Asia in relation to the various ethnic groups which are affected.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For other strengths of the book, I refer the reader to Kreindler’s helpful review (*Middle Eastern Studies*, 48:5 (2012), 851-53).