

the state,” as opposed to: “Glittering on the brand-new buttons were birds’ head, the emblem of the state” (5).

The Rushes’ translation is equipped with a wealth of supportive material, which is most welcome given the number of obscure historical characters and events treated in the novel, as well as Tynianov’s generous use of foreign words and expressions. In addition to an informative introduction by Angela Brintlinger, there are two appendices at the back of the book, the first, a glossary of foreign words, mostly of Persian origin, and the second, a glossary of names, followed by endnotes. The most successful of the supplemental material is the glossary of names, as this is truly parenthetical information; most of the historical figures are briefly described in the body of the novel, so referencing that glossary need not disrupt the reading process. On the other hand, the glossary of Persian words and the endnotes, which contain translations of many words and phrases from European languages, would have been more useful as footnotes as these translations are often necessary to make sense of a passage, and it is quite unwieldy to access those definitions at the back of a volume of this size. Moreover, the endnotes provide nothing more than close English translations of the foreign expressions, even when they are citations or plays on words. So, for example, Griboedov’s utterance—“Paris vaut bien une messe”—is rendered in the endnote as: “Paris is worth a mass (Fr.)” (27), with no mention that this was purportedly uttered by Henri IV when offered the French throne on condition that he convert to Catholicism. Without that explanation, the meaning of the expression is as obscure in English as it is in French. In a 600-page novel, these are trifles, but in my view worth mentioning for future translators.

BRIAN JAMES BAER  
*Kent State University*

***Central Peripheries: Nationhood in Central Asia.*** By Marelene Laruelle. London: UCL Press, 2021. x, 252 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Figures. \$25.00, paper. doi: 10.1017/slr.2023.87

In this collection of articles, Marelene Laruelle presents a comprehensive picture of the nation-building efforts of the Central Asian states (with the exception of Turkmenistan) since 1991. A fundamental task for these states has been to formulate a national narrative that can consolidate the nation as well as legitimate the state as it enters the international community. These narratives show the unique path and history of each of them, resulting in a competition regarding national “ownership” of legends, myths, heroes, and literature, as well as how far back to date their national nascence. In spite of differences in narratives, these states share the same approach to viewing their national history. Laruelle shows how important the Soviet academic and political heritage has been, and remains, in this regard.

In the first part of the volume the author discusses the Soviet roots of national story-telling, the centrality of the concept of *ethnogenesis*, and how this intellectual heritage is reflected in the formation of national narratives in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan. The second part, comprising half the volume, deals with Kazakhstan and details responses to contemporary challenges to the national narrative. The book was published before the turmoil in Kazakhstan of early 2022.

Their Soviet heritage explains why the Central Asian states emphasize an approach of primordial indigenous continuity that traces each population of their nation to one original group of people and claims that national characteristics have been maintained over the centuries in spite of waves of migration over the steppes

and centuries. The Soviet regime gave the Central Asian people their territorial status as republics within a Soviet federation (Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan in 1924, Tajikistan in 1929, and Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in 1936). This encouraged a history-writing that legitimated this specific territorial division. Ethnicity was identified by multiple criteria but language was central. In the late 1930s the concept of *etno-genetika* (ethnogenetics) was born as the science of the historical genesis of ethnic groups. Although *ethnos* was considered a historical-cultural phenomenon, not a biological one, once ethnic identity was established it became the prime marker. When in the 1940s the principles of *ethnogenesis* were introduced in the study of Central Asia, each of these peoples had to establish a dynasty of reference and identity and establish a chronologically well-defined historical period for the formation of their nation. The Soviet Central Asian republics entered a race for antiquity: the older the roots, the better.

The fall of the Soviet Union abruptly ended the process of national history-writing, and boosted the competition for a national heritage. Tajikistan, a Persian-language country, officially traces its state origin to the Samanid dynasty (875–999) and its people back to the proto-Indo-Europeans. Uzbekistan claims its origin from the Turkic-speaking but sedentary population—not from the nomads of the steppes. Irrespective of whether Uzbeks regard themselves as offspring of the Kipchaks, they consider themselves to be part of a Turkic population that came on the scene before the Indo-Europeans. The greater degree of ethnic diversity in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan is problematic for their formulation of national narratives. These two countries especially well illustrate the problems involved in building an inclusive civic narrative while still maintaining an emphasis on the ethnic majority. This difficulty is discussed with regard to Kazakhstan as a tension between the concepts of *Kazakhness* (ethnic-oriented), *Kazakhstaness* (civic-oriented), and a third concept, *transnationalism* (emphasizing integration into the world community), introduced by Nursultan Nazarbayev during the first decade of the 2000s. Nazarbayev's previous insistence on *Eurasianism* as an identity marker guiding foreign policy was toned down after 2014 and replaced by a more North Asian identity orientation. Laruelle lays out two issues as too politically sensitive to be easily or unequivocally integrated into the national narrative: the role of the Soviet experience, and the significance of Islam for these countries. Laruelle claims that “the need to fully integrate Islam into efforts to craft nationhood will become increasingly apparent in the coming years and decades.”

The presentation of the history of official narrative-formation and the debate around it as well as the challenges posed by the realities of today's society is fascinating reading. It sheds light on the general problem that states encounter in promoting a common past, which aspects to emphasize, and which to ignore. That said, as a reader I would have preferred that Laruelle's editing had more rigidly structured the book into one whole, so that the part on Kazakhstan would better correspond to the presentation of the other Central Asian states.

LENA JONSON

*Swedish Institute of International Affairs*