

HOW NATIONALISMS SPREAD – EASTERN EUROPE ADRIFT THE TIDES AND CYCLES OF NATIONALIST CONTENTION¹

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‘One word dominated our conversation – struggle. . . . Struggle, struggle, struggle.’ Two Soviet journalists attempting to interview activists of the Latvian Popular Front, as reported in *Pravda*, March 1, 1989.

‘We are living in an extremely condensed historical period. Social processes which earlier required decades now develop in a matter of months.’
Literaturnaia gazeta, September 13, 1989.

NATIONALISM, John Breuilly tells us, ‘is, above and beyond all else, about politics, and that politics is about power’ (1982: 1–2). Yet, in explaining how and why nationalisms spread, many scholars write about nationalism as if it were more a matter of communication or contagion than contention.

Early theorists of nationalism, such as Hans Kohn, Carleton Hayes, and Elie Kedourie, treated nationalism as an ideology and approached the subject as a branch of the history of ideas. Whereas Kohn attributed the spread of nationalism as a ‘state of mind’ to the ‘the power of an idea’ (specifically, the overwhelming attractiveness of notions of self-determination provoked by the French Revolution (1967: 16)), Kedourie (1993) viewed its spread as an almost accidental infection, a false and dangerous ideological obsession kindled by political philosophers in the human mind.² Hayes failed altogether to produce an explanation for why nationalism spread.³ For other early theorists,

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Le Bon's notion of the 'maddening crowd' and understandings of nationalism as ideological or emotional dementia were appealing explanations for addressing what appeared to them as the essential irrationality of ethnic separatism and national self-assertion.⁴ For primordialists, residues of 'primordial sentiments' were seen as spreading in emotional contagions in societies experiencing the stresses of modernization, leading to intergroup conflicts that threatened to overwhelm the rational, modernized sector of society (Shils 1957; Geertz 1963). Such images remain common today in the study of nationalism. They have little to do with the reality of nationalist mobilization, as a careful analysis of the most recent waves of nationalism in the former Soviet Union and East Europe indicates.

To some degree, the continued power of these images has been due to an excessive focus on the activities of nationalist intellectuals as opposed to what are arguably the two most important *dramatis personae* in any nationalist politics: state and society. Liah Greenfeld, for instance, in her magisterial study of the rise of nationalist discourse, argues that the spread of nationalism from a small intellectual elite to society at large, 'an important and interesting topic in itself, doubtless increased the efficacy of national identity as a force of social mobilization, but it had no significant impact on the character of specific nationalisms' (Greenfeld 1992: 22–3).⁵ Miroslav Hroch similarly focuses his attention on what he terms Phase B in the development of nationalism (the period of patriotic agitation), which he calls 'the most important phase,' largely ignoring how and why the emergence of nationalist counter-elites leads to the rise of mass national movements (Phase C), although he notes that 'Phase B was not necessarily destined to pass over into Phase C' (Hroch 1985: 22–4). In an article entitled 'When Is a Nation?' Walker Connor bemoaned the fact that scholars of nationalism have focused excessively on the 'musings of elites whose generalizations concerning the existence of national consciousness are highly suspect.' By contrast, nationalism should be understood as 'a mass, not an elite phenomenon,' although the moment when 'a sufficient portion of a people has internalized the national identity in order to cause nationalism to become an effective force for mobilizing the masses' does not lend itself to easy identification (Connor 1990).⁶

Understanding the origins of nationalist ideas is a different exercise than understanding how and why nationalism attains its political potency as a mass phenomenon and how it manifests itself in a specific location, in a specific manner, at a specific moment in time. 'Nationalism as such is fated to prevail,' wrote the late Ernest Gellner, 'but not any one particular nationalism' (1983: 47).⁷ As Kedourie came to recognize on the eve of his death:

To narrate the spread, influence and operation of nationalism in various politics is to write a history of events, rather than of ideas. It is a matter of understanding a polity in its particular time, place and circumstances, and of following the activity of specific political agents acting in context of their own specific and peculiar conditions. The coherence of contingent events is not the same as the coherence of contingent ideas, and

the historian has to order his strategies accordingly . . . (Kedourie 1993: 139).

Nations exist, we are told, because people 'think the nation' (Anderson 1991). But in spite of the importance of culture and ideas in nationalist politics, in reality the only way that we know that nationalisms exist is through behaviors: through the collective behaviors and state actions that they engender. In this respect, nationalist discourse should be understood less as the history of ideas than as a form of collective behavior – one greatly influenced by the context in which the speaker is located. Nationalism achieves political potency only in the form of collective discourse, mass mobilization, or state practice. But it manifests itself in other areas of social behavior as well. There is a 'quiet' politics of nationalism, a politics in which state institutions remain dominant and nationalist contestation turns around efforts to institutionalize behaviors and identities to prevent challenges to official conceptions of nationhood or to prepare for moments when direct contestation becomes possible, the latter often revolving around what Scott calls 'hidden transcripts of resistance' (Scott 1991). And there is a 'noisy' politics of nationalism, precipitated by an opening of political opportunities in which the political order and its institutions come under direct challenge and contest. As Gellner noted, '[n]ationalism is like gravity, an important and pervasive force, but not, at *most* times, strong enough to be violently disruptive' (1994: xi).

When state and society are restored to their rightful places in the study of nationalism, it becomes clear that nationalism is essentially a contentious political activity, one which contests a particular crystallization of the state's physical, human, or cultural boundaries.⁸ The modern state as it emerged since the seventeenth century has inherently involved a bounded community, both in terms of physical territory, the populations afforded membership, and the dominant rules of cultural interaction.⁹ These boundaries represent, in Ian Lustick's terms, 'institutional constraints . . . which advantage certain groups and rival elites within the state at the expense of others' (Lustick 1993: 41). Nationalism is not about ancient enmities or even always about ethnicity, but rather about authority over a set of objects in politics, about the drawing of the physical, human, and cultural boundaries of the state and the life chances that people believe are associated with these definitions of boundaries. In this sense, nationalism differs from ethnic political action in much the same way that an object differs grammatically from a subject. Nationalism overlaps and intersects with ethnic political action but is defined not by the subject engaged in it, but primarily by its orientation toward a particular type of goal: the definition or redefinition of the physical, human, or cultural boundaries of the polity.

States need to be understood in part as repositories of cultural interest; while the degree to which cultural interests are embedded in states varies, no state is entirely culturally neutral. Nationalism is a contentious political activity in at least three senses. As a form of political practice, it generates controversy, for

interests are closely bound with any given crystallization of a state's physical, human, and cultural boundaries. As a mode of political discourse, nationalism inherently involves a contestable claim, an inherently ambiguous claim subject to contestation: there is no 'objective' answer to the question of what the proper human, physical, and cultural bounds of the state should be. Finally, as a form of action, nationalism involves groups that contest a given crystallization of a state's physical, human, or cultural boundaries through various forms of mobilization and state practice. Nationalist contention is an iterative process; the boundaries of states are continually subjected to challenge and normalization, and previous attempts to contest boundaries are connected with subsequent attempts, viewed by challengers as part of a broader drama of national struggle, and consciously embedded into collective memory (itself an act of nationalist contestation) (Halbwachs 1980).

'Every nation has several moments which may be called great,' Merab Kostava, the Georgian nationalist leader, told hundreds of thousands of Georgians massed outside of the House of Government in the late hours of April 8, 1989, the night of the infamous Tbilisi massacre, when army troops stormed the square, killing twenty and injuring hundreds in an attempt to seize back control over the city. 'For Georgia that time has come now' (*Ekspress khronika*, no. 15, April 10, 1990). Like other modes of political contestation, nationalist contention has tended to emerge in the political arena in defined historical periods – in the context of cycles of contention and in regional or world-historical tides of contention that encompass particular areas of the world or families of polities. I use the terms 'tide of contention' or 'tide of mobilization' to describe a series of related mobilizational waves and cycles that are transnational in character, encompassing multiple polities.¹⁰ Historically, these tides of contention have been accompanied by numerous bursts of nationalist discourse, waves of nationalist mobilization, and eruptions of interstate violence which, when reaching fruition, have brought about tectonic change in the character of the state system. Rarely has the remaking of the physical, human, or cultural boundaries of states been an isolated action without connection to other states. The noisy politics of nationalism is almost always a transnational phenomenon that is itself bounded by time and space. The French Revolution unleashed the first tide of nationalist contention, in which multiple polities within Europe became engulfed in a struggle to redefine the boundaries of their political communities (Dann and Dinwiddy 1988). The year 1848 was known for many years in Europe as 'the springtime of nations,' when, as Kedourie noted, 'a great upsurge of nationalist claims and ambitions' burst forth (1993: xii). Another tide of nationalist mobilization swept the Russian, Ottoman, and Austro-Hungarian empires from the second half of the nineteenth century through the First World War, when new states arose, in Peter Alter's words, 'like a wave sweeping across the land between Finland and Yugoslavia' (1989: 109). The rise of fascism in interwar Europe and the wave of decolonization that followed the Second World War represented the first truly

global tides of nationalist contention. Historically, tides of nationalist contention emerged concomitantly with the emergence of both the national state and the social movement, the latter, as Charles Tilly noted, pitting challengers 'against the people who run national states' (1984: 304). The notions of boundedness and the revolution in communications which gave rise to both the modern state and the modern nation also gave rise to the modern social movement and inserted it into a transnational dialectic with similar phenomena in other locales.¹¹

The latest tide of nationalist contention – emerging in 1987 in what was then the Soviet Union and subsequently spreading to the west and south – provides a unique opportunity to study how nationalism spreads to envelop numerous groups within a single polity and ultimately to encompass multiple states. It has been both a regional and a global tide of contentious behavior, spilling over into adjacent regions of Eastern Europe but echoing to farther corners of the globe as well. In what follows, I use examples from the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe to illustrate how attention needs to be refocused on nationalism as a form of contentious politics. A contentious theory of nationalism helps us to understand the interrelationships between nationalisms, the connection between their 'quiet' and 'noisy' politics, the various forms which they assume, and the contingent nature of the substantiation of nations.

NATIONALISM AND INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE: AN ARMENIAN EXAMPLE

Scholars who study mobilizational politics have come to realize that contention is punctuated by broader cycles of mobilization – parabolas of protest which rise and fall largely as this collective action relates to what is happening inside political institutions (Tarrow 1989a, 1989b; McAdam 1982; Eisinger 1973). The same is true of nationalist contention as well. Not all contentious mass actions or even waves of mobilization ultimately build into cycles; some indeed are cut short through state repression or cooptation,¹² while in other cases mobilizational politics never materializes. Moreover, nationalist contention does occur outside of mobilizational cycles. But in times of 'normalized' politics, a given crystallization of state boundaries is backed by the effective authority of the state and is not subject to open challenge from within. In such conditions, there is a strong tendency for individuals to adjust their beliefs to the boundaries of the possible, accepting a given institutional arrangement as unalterable and even natural. In 1913, for instance, on the eve of the war which gave birth to the Czechoslovak state that he founded, Tomáš Masaryk stated that '[j]ust because I cannot indulge in dreams of its collapse and know that, whether good or bad, it will continue, I am most deeply concerned that we should make something of this Austria' (quoted in Skilling 1992: 228). State institutions seek to promote this kind of hardening of boundaries within mass consciousness and among potential challengers by establishing a frame of discourse aimed at molding attitudes to the 'reality' which these institutions project, turning boundaries into 'unquestioned features of . . . public life' and 'part of the natural order of things

for the overwhelming majority of the population' (Lustick 1993: 44). Essentially, when we talk about the spread of nationalism, we are talking not about processes of communication or contagion, but about the politics by which the hitherto impossible, implicit, and inconceivable come to be viewed by large numbers of people as thinkable, desirable, and even conventional.

There is considerable empirical evidence showing not only that 'people change their minds radically' during a cycle of contention, but also that 'these changes are remarkably stable' once a cycle of contention winds down (Klandermans 1992: 81–2) – that is, that cycles of contention are associated with the rise and institutionalization of new collective beliefs and identities. As we have come to realize, identities are situational, embedded, and overlapping – sometimes submerged, sometimes suppressed, and sometimes affirmed. But identities also need to be distinguished from the meanings attached to identities; usually identities contain a range of action-oriented collective beliefs which provide them with a sense of purpose and meaning. In phases of quiescence, the salience of specific identities and the collective meanings attached to them are formed through routine acts of discourse and behavior in formal or informal institutional settings. In phases of contention, social movements seek to disrupt these routines to bring about discursive transformations in society. Identities and/or certain ranges of collective beliefs associated with identities that previously remained submerged or suppressed are given substance through new forms of behavior which link individual beliefs into new patterns of social interaction. Mobilization provides the occasion for individuals to 'switch worlds,' in Berger and Luckmann's phrase, not only by expanding the boundaries of the possible, thereby making the unthinkable thinkable, but also by guiding individuals to a new social reality through a combination of personal networks and cathartic experiences emerging from specific events (Berger and Luckman 1966: pp. 144–5).

The USSR elevated the politics of controlling imaginations to an art, declaring that the nationalities question had been 'solved' forever and marginalizing nationalist dissent in support of this 'reality.' As Gorbachev has admitted, the regime itself came to believe its own rhetoric, blinding it to the latent potency of nationalist appeals and to the potentiality of the breakup of the country.¹³ While many of the accusations against Sovietologists for their defects of vision in predicting the collapse of the USSR are deserved (they also established a discursive frame that largely excluded the possibility of state collapse), these charges must be understood in context; even the vast majority of Soviet dissidents in 1987 (including most non-Russian dissidents) did not imagine the collapse of the USSR,¹⁴ and the discursive frame concocted by the Soviet state strongly colored the ways in which nationalists and populations formulated their aims. As one Western scholar has noted, to utter the words 'secession' or 'independence' in public in Lithuania in August 1988 seemed 'a daring act,' with most Sajudis activists believing that 'it was unrealistic . . . to think seriously about Lithuanian independence within the next ten to fifteen years'

(Senn 1990: 151–2). Rein Taagepera has similarly noted in Estonia that ‘for the majority independence seemed either a pipe dream in 1987, or something one could think about only after meaningful autonomy was attained,’ and it was only in fall 1989 that a majority of Estonians came to believe in the real possibility of attaining independence (1993: 127).

Waves of mass mobilization are usually triggered by change within institutions: by significant divisions within political elites and shifts in the political opportunities facing activists and populations. They are characteristic of transitional polities, not stable or stagnant polities. This is precisely why nationalism remains very much a ‘disease of transition,’ as has often been noted by observers. In most circumstances, institutional change and the emergence of political opportunities are necessary to bring nationalist challenges into being, for otherwise groups seeking to challenge the boundaries of the polity, as well as the populations they seek to mobilize, are unlikely to believe even in the possibility, let alone the desirability, of such actions. But whether a wave of mobilization builds into a cycle of mobilization within a particular population depends very much on the degree to which mobilization can be sustained over time, presenting a consistent challenge to a regime or eventually becoming institutionalized within the state itself. It is here – at the intersection of opportunity and identity – that nationalism and national identities ultimately acquire substance or grow tenuous. Anyone can declare a nation into existence; there is no shortage of failed experiments in ‘nation-building,’ including several addressed in this article. A nation whose tangibility is never affirmed through unimpeded and inclusive public discourse, voluntary support for state action, or autonomous mass mobilization can hardly be said to exist other than in name only. Elites may believe such a nation exists, and may even act in its name. But unless the nation extends into the beliefs and behaviors of society, such a farce runs a great risk of eventually being punctured.

As we know, the French Revolution began neither as a national nor a class struggle but eventually became both (Mann 1993b: p. 167). Similarly, the mobilizational waves unleashed by *glasnost* did not begin as national struggles but gradually grew into them. *Glasnost* altered the boundaries of the possible, giving rise to iterative attempts by nationalist groupings to test the political waters through acts of mobilization. By altering public expectations of the possible, liberalization significantly changed the boundaries of the thinkable and created interstices into which nationalist mobilization flowed.

A short sketch of the onset of Armenian mobilization over the Karabakh issue – the first major wave of nationalist mobilization in the *glasnost* era – provides a glimpse into the ways in which political opportunity and the interaction of events structured nationalist politics in the early part of the cycle. While there is considerable evidence that Armenians never reconciled themselves to Azerbaidzhani control over Karabakh and the issue was raised regularly from the 1920s on through petitions, letter-writing campaigns, official appeals by party officials, and occasional demonstrations, these efforts were ignored by Moscow

and their initiators subjected to persecution by local Azerbaidzhani authorities (Chorbajian et al. 1994: 144–7; Birch 1987; Suny 1983: 80–1). Indeed, the Soviet press portrayed the issue as if it ‘had been settled once and for all’ (Suny 1993: 188–9). But the situation changed with the inauguration of *glasnost*. In July 1987, Karen Demirchian, longtime first secretary of the Armenian Communist Party, was harshly criticized at a republican party Central Committee plenum for tolerating corruption and favoritism. This was understood as signalling an effort to undermine Demirchian and to replace him with a reformist leader. Soon, articles appeared in the central press attacking Demirchian; one such piece, on the harmful pollutants emitted by chemical plants in Yerevan, described the local communist leadership as a mafia unconcerned with the health of the population. It was widely interpreted as ‘a maneuver by the central authorities to provoke a popular uprising against the local authorities, which would be the pretext for their removal’ (Verluse 1995: 84).¹⁵ On September 1st, several hundred Armenians demonstrated in front of a polluting synthetic rubber plant, with no attempt by the authorities to repress them. In mid-October another unsanctioned ecological demonstration attracting up to 5,000 participants took place in Yerevan, again with little reaction by the authorities (*Vesti iz SSSR*, no. 19/20–5, 1987, p. 6; *Glasnost*, no. 8, November 1987, pp. 46–7; *Glasnost*, no. 10, 1987, p. 8).¹⁶ The following day, a 1,000-strong demonstration displaying portraits of Gorbachev and calling for transfer of the territory to Armenia occurred in Yerevan in solidarity with the Armenians of Karabakh. This ‘slippage’ of demands – from ecology to nationalism – was a pattern that repeated itself throughout much of the former Soviet Union, as nationalist counter-elites probed the limits of the permissible. In this case the demonstration was brutally broken up by the police when demonstrators refused to heed calls to disperse (*Vesti iz SSSR*, 19/20–5, 1987, p. 6; *Radio Liberty Research Report*, no. 44/187, October 20, 1987, p. 2). However, already by this time the rudiments of nationalist social movement organization began to emerge.

Demirchian hung to his post despite persistent attacks on him. But by January 1988, encouraged by the broadening limits of public debate, the attacks upon Stalinism at the October 1987 Central Committee Plenum, sympathetic statements by several Gorbachev advisors (some of them Armenian) over the Karabakh issue, the retirement of former Azerbaidzhani party boss Heydar Aliiev from the Politburo, the emergence of open conflict within the Politburo as a result of Yeltsin’s resignation, and widespread rumors that Moscow intended to look into the problem,¹⁷ the Karabakh Armenians pressed their claims. As Georgii Shakhnazarov, a Gorbachev advisor and himself an Armenian from Karabakh, later noted about those who organized the campaign for unification, ‘the freedom that loomed on the horizon was embodied in their consciousness primarily by the possibility of uniting with their homeland’ (Shakhnazarov 1993: 206). In August 1987, the Karabakh Armenians had sent a petition to the Central Committee in Moscow signed by 75 thousand people in favor of

transferring Karabakh to Armenia. The petition was ignored until an official delegation from Karabakh arrived in Moscow in January to press the issue; they were promised that their appeal would be reviewed. But in early February a negative answer was crudely relayed from the Central Committee apparatus (Ryzhkov 1992: 203; *Vesti iz SSSR*, no. 4, 1988, p. 1).¹⁸ This in turn unleashed a coordinated campaign of civil disobedience by Armenians throughout Nagorno-Karabakh, with calls for the regional Soviet to convene to recognize the territory as part of Armenia. The campaign appears to have been organized in part by forces within the local party organization itself.¹⁹ In the meantime, in Yerevan a series of ecological demonstrations were taking place over construction of a new chemical plant on the outskirts of the city. When news that the regional Soviet in Stepanakert had approved an appeal for unification with Armenia reached Yerevan, as well as a second rejection from Moscow, the ecological demonstrations quickly grew into manifestations of support for the Karabakh Armenians, attracting up to thirty thousand people (*Vesti iz SSSR*, no. 4, 1988, p. 2; Verluise 1995: 86). On the night of February 21st anti-Armenian pogroms broke out in the town of Gadрут in Nagorno-Karabakh, injuring 16 and killing 2. This in turn led to enormous demonstrations in Yerevan of up to a million people calling for transfer of the territory to Armenia and physical protection of Armenians living in Karabakh. Demonstrators carried portraits of Gorbachev with the inscription 'We believe in you' (*Vesti iz SSSR*, no. 4-1, 1988). Even Demirchian came to support the Karabakh cause, pressing the issue before the Politburo (Gorbachev 1995: 502); indeed, there is some suspicion that Demirchian, facing pressure for his resignation from Moscow, tolerated the demonstrations in Yerevan as a way of building popular support (*Ekspress khronika*, no. 52, Dec. 17-24, 1991, p. 6). On February 24th, the Organizational Committee for the Issue of the Reunification of Karabakh with Armenia sprang into existence. The following day Gorbachev met with two of its representatives, agreeing on February 26th to a program of measures proposed by them to strengthen the cultural and economic autonomy of the Karabakh Armenians in exchange for taking the territorial issue off the agenda and calling a halt to demonstrations (Shakhnazarov 1993: 205-10). By February 27th participation in nationalist demonstrations in Yerevan dropped sharply, ceasing entirely on February 28th. Ironically, it was precisely as the Armenian mobilization in Yerevan wound down that rallies organized by Azerbaidzhani refugees from Armenia began to gather on the central square of the industrial town of Sumgait in Azerbaidzhan, leading ultimately to an orgy of anti-Armenian violence. As one study notes, 1988 became known among Armenians as 'the year when everything was possible' (Chorbajian et al. 1994: 149).

The rest, as they say, is history. But there are several features of the origins of the Armenian wave of mobilization that deserve careful attention, for they repeat themselves in most cases of successful mobilization throughout the cycle. Most striking, of course, is how shifts in authority within the state led to an

explosion of public expectations, a slippage of protest activity from within-system demands to those directly challenging the parameters of the official boundary regime, and ultimately to a shift in the frame of public discourse over boundary issues. Shifting a discursive frame was neither a matter of communication nor of contagion, but rather an iterative process of groping and probing on the part of nationalist counter-elites in response to the openings that specific acts of government provided. The most effective force for mobilizing populations, however, remained violence – through the sense of victimization and activization of ethnic boundaries which it produced. Here, we should note as well the contingency of nationalist mobilization and its dialectical relationship with other nationalisms and with state actions. Had Gorbachev, for instance, acceded to the petition of Karabakh Armenians for the transfer of the territory to Armenia, one might well imagine how this would have transformed the entire politics of the issue. But as we now know from the memoir literature, the Soviet leadership took seriously the problem of analogy; it viewed the entire affair through the prism of a ‘domino theory,’ fearing the encouragement which one boundary change might give to other groups seeking to challenge boundaries. Actually, there had been regular border adjustments among republics in the Stalin and Khrushchev periods; simply between 1930 and 1970 thirty border changes were effected among the federal units of the USSR, including the transfer of Crimea from the Russian Federation to Ukraine. But during the Brezhnev period a discursive frame that essentially froze internal boundaries became ensconced. The Gorbachev leadership unanimously defended this policy, even after it was evident, in the words of former Prime Minister Nikolai Ryzhkov, that ‘the fire of the conflict would not die down’ (1992: 203–4) and that the old frame had already been transcended by developments on the ground. As Gorbachev told the Politburo at its July 4th, 1988 meeting, ‘Reviewing boundaries is unrealistic; that would mean going down a disastrous path, and not only in these regions’ (*Soiuz mozhno* . . . 1995: 30). But the gap between the Soviet leadership’s discourse over boundaries and its inability to enforce it ultimately turned the Karabakh events into, as former Politburo member Vadim Medvedev put it, ‘a detonator for sharpening other national problems and conflicts’ (1994:63).

FROM STATE TO EMPIRE: THE FORMATION AND SPREAD OF A NATIONALIST MASTER FRAME

A single wave hardly makes a cycle of contention. Had nationalist mobilization in the former Soviet Union stopped over the issue of Karabakh and other internal boundary changes, the Soviet flag would probably still be hoisted over the Kremlin. But nationalisms have a profound effect on one another. They are in this sense transnational and interrelated phenomena, not merely a collection of individual and isolated stories.

In his study of the Italian cycle of contention, Sidney Tarrow noted that contention diffuses largely as a response to the successes achieved by others in

their efforts to contest the state. As he observed, protest cycles emerge 'through imitation, comparison, the transfer of forms and themes of protest from one sector to another, and direct reaction on the part of those whose interests had been affected by earlier protests' (Tarrow 1989a: 223). Serbian success in confronting the Turks in the early nineteenth century encouraged Greek efforts to do the same. The success of Mussolini's march on Rome in 1922 brought about a rash of right-wing nationalist challenges throughout Europe.

In the former Soviet Union, the events surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh and the activities of other 'early risers' within the *glasnost* mobilizational cycle not only made clear the growing political space that had been made available to contest the state, but also indicated the regime's vulnerability to a particular form of mobilization – the mass demonstration. The reimagining of nations throughout the former Soviet Union coincided with the rise of the demonstration as a form of political action and contestation, both constituting parts of the resonant 'master frame' (Snow and Benford 1992) that characterized the mobilizational cycle. The association of the demonstration with the rise of nationalism is hardly accidental. In his memoirs Gavriil Popov notes the liberating sensations that he felt from the first major demonstrations in Moscow in May 1989: 'For the first time in my life I saw tens of thousands of free people' (Popov 1994: 65). In addition to its disruptive effects upon the government, the demonstration became the occasion for reconstituting the boundaries of the nation, flaunting the lack of support for the regime through the power of numbers and puncturing longstanding legitimating myths propagated by the regime that it had 'solved' the nationalities problem or represented the interests of 'the people.' Through the demonstration, the Soviet population was guided to a new consciousness. 'Every day here in the square,' a Tadjik newspaper editor wrote about the wave of mass protest which overtook that republic at the end of 1991, 'was like ten days in school for the people' (quoted in *The New York Times*, June 9, 1992, p. A1).

Nationalism in this sense is a modular form of political behavior; a specific module of contentious action or discursive frame can easily be transferred from one context to another, although whether these modules resonate within specific populations is as much a factor of context as it is a product of the features of the modules themselves.²⁰ The specific master frame that became the subject of imitation throughout the former Soviet Union by groups seeking to contend the state during this period, however, was not developed in Armenia but rather in the Baltic. Baltic nationalisms operated parallel and in interaction with one another, due largely to the similar relationship these three peoples had with the Soviet state and their geographic proximity. The association, symmetry, and coordination among Baltic nationalisms is further evidence of how analogy constitutes a critical process in the spread of nationalism. Here the pattern at first developed much as in Armenia: a series of environmental demonstrations over industrial pollution and development in Latvia and Estonia became the occasions for the expression of anti-Muscovite sentiments over

the central government's 'colonial' style of management, while dissident groups previously marginalized and seeking to raise broader boundary issues utilized the opportunity afforded by the political opening to mobilize and put forth their own national agendas. The difference in the Baltic was that the boundary issue was one of secession from the USSR rather than the redefinition of interrepublican boundaries. From April 1987 through May 1988, well before the rise of mass secessionist movements, more than 21 demonstrations occurred throughout the Baltic that raised secessionist demands, most of them attracting anywhere from a few hundred participants to ten thousand. But these minor disturbances were little more than a nuisance to the authorities. Even as late as February 1988, on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of Lithuanian independence, Western journalists noted that the dominant mood in Lithuania was one of 'public nonchalance, . . . not a feeling of hostility' (quoted in Senn 1990: 34). By spring 1988 the issue of Stalin's victims, now openly debated in Moscow in the aftermath of Gorbachev's denunciation of Stalinism at the October 1987 plenum, gave rise to a ferment across the Baltic, raising the thorny issues of Stalinist deportations and repressions, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, and by implication Baltic membership in the Soviet Union. From the beginning Baltic nationalism had a strong anti-central, anti-bureaucratic temper which paralleled closely Gorbachev's attacks upon the Soviet central bureaucracy in 1987 and 1988. The popular fronts which sprang into existence in spring 1988 all defined themselves initially as movements for *perestroika*, not for independence, and Gorbachev and other reformers largely interpreted them through the lens of their struggle against bureaucratic domination throughout Soviet life (Cherniaev 1993: 143–4). But bureaucratic and imperial domination were difficult to separate within the Soviet context,²¹ and ultimately the opportunity to express anti-center sentiment allowed the possibility of slippage into an anti-imperial discourse.

The Soviet Union always straddled the divide between empire and state, and it was the inability of Soviet reformers to make clear this distinction which prevented them from averting Soviet collapse.²² Ian Lustick has pointed to the powerful effects which images of state and empire have upon those to whom they are addressed; as he notes, 'in the modern world, empires are expected to break apart,' and secession and decolonization have been turned into categories used by politicians 'to label what they do to prevent or achieve changes in the shape of a state' (Lustick 1993: 22–3). In the late twentieth century, empires have come to represent the antithesis of the norms of the modern state system. They have become one of the several alter-egos for polities claiming the status of states, embodying an essential rejection of the norms and practices of dominant groups within these states and constituting a term of opprobrium and reproof by those claiming the status of nation and seeking a major alteration in state boundaries. The master frame of nationalism which spread throughout much of the Soviet Union was essentially an anti-colonial frame. What once was routinely referred to as a state suddenly came to be universally condemned

as an empire. The dominant view of the collapse of the Soviet Union today is that the Soviet Union was an empire and therefore its dissolution was inevitable. However, it is now routinely referred to as an empire precisely because it did break up. The real question raised by the disintegration of the Soviet Union is not whether the break-up of the Soviet empire was inevitable, but rather how the Soviet Union, once universally regarded as a state, came to be seen by large numbers of people as an empire, and therefore its collapse as inevitable.²³

And it is here that we can appreciate the significance of what Aristide Zolberg and Sidney Tarrow have called 'moments of madness' (Zolberg 1972; Tarrow 1989a: 79–80) for the study of nationalism. It is these moments, when the social world seemingly is turned upside-down and the authority of the existing order grows bare, that a revolution in collective imagination, or 'cognitive liberation,' as McAdam calls it (1982: 36–59), occurs, as official frames of discourse come loose and are transcended. Three patterns of consciousness change as they related to patterns of mobilization marked the Soviet experience – exemplified by the rise of secessionist sentiment in Lithuania, Armenia, and Ukraine respectively.

The Lithuanians illustrate a pattern of consciousness change typical of early risers, in which the task of counter-elites was one of emboldening publics to express openly that which they traditionally feared to express – a situation Timur Kuran refers to as 'preference falsification' (Kuran 1989). In Lithuania secessionist demands lay implicit in most early demonstrations but were usually not forthrightly voiced. As nationalist protest gathered speed, the Politburo sent a mission led by Aleksandr Yakovlev to Vilnius in early August 1988 to investigate the situation. Yakovlev shocked his Lithuanian hosts by publicly supporting the Sajudis movement against the local party bureaucracy. Kazimera Prunskiene later noted that '[i]n 1988 Sajudis divided time into "pre-Yakovlev" and "post-Yakovlev"' (quoted in Senn 1995: 25). As one eyewitness described the changes in consciousness which subsequently ripened at a mass meeting on August 23rd, the anniversary of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact: 'the public behavior of Lithuanians changed radically . . . The public now spoke more freely of its concerns; it raised new demands' (Senn 1990: 132, 136). When local party officials tried to make a stand against growing secessionist sentiment at the end of September by suppressing unsanctioned nationalist rallies, the move backfired, leading Sajudis to call for the resignation of party boss Ringaudas Songaila. His resignation in October and replacement by Algirdas Brazauskas demonstrated the power of the movement, but an ambiguity still remained in Sajudis' public stances over whether it stood for sovereignty within a reformed Soviet Union or for independence. It was not really until February 1989, when Brazauskas sanctioned Lithuanian Independence Day as a public holiday, that Sajudis leaders, at a rally numbering in the hundreds of thousands, unabashedly proclaimed independence as a goal (*Vesti iz SSSR*, no. 4–7, 1989, p. 7). Still, Brazauskas continued his delicate balancing act with the Kremlin for at least a half-year more, all the while gradually positioning his own party for separation from Moscow.

By contrast, the Armenian and Ukrainian cases represent less instances of preference falsification than cases of preference change – that is, the emergence and spread of new ranges of collective beliefs about nationhood that were largely absent in mass consciousness on the eve of mobilization. Secessionist demands among Armenians were first voiced largely as a bargaining chip with central and local authorities in the Armenian struggle over Karabakh. They subsequently took on larger meaning as social movements grew frustrated with Moscow's policies – and specifically its refusal to change internal boundaries. Only in the fall of 1989, in response to a new wave of violence over Karabakh and continued disappointment with Moscow's policies, did sustained secessionist mobilization emerge for the first time in Armenia. As Lev Ter-Petrosian indicated the rationale behind his republic's drive for independence on the eve of the break-up of the USSR, Armenia had been forced to take steps in the direction of secession, since the Soviet government had been 'backing away from Armenia, leaving it one on one with its problems' (*Moscow News*, no. 23, 1991, p. 8).

The Ukrainians represented yet a third pattern typical of late risers within the mobilizational cycle. Over the course of 1990 and 1991, Ukraine witnessed a major transformation in public attitudes toward secession. Through January 1990 nearly all secessionist mobilization in Ukraine was concentrated in the West, and the handful of secessionist demonstrations that took place elsewhere never succeeded in gaining more than 10 thousand participants at most at any single event. But the East European revolutions of late 1989, the republican elections of early 1990, and the parade of sovereignties that broke out throughout the former Soviet Union in the summer of 1990 led to an explosion of efforts to spread secessionist sentiment throughout Ukraine. This campaign culminated in the clear 'moment of madness' in Ukrainian politics – October 1990, when massive student strikes and a wave of protest forced the communist-dominated parliament to seek the resignation of the prime minister, to vote that military service outside of Ukraine for inhabitants of Ukraine would be on a voluntary basis only, and to declare that Ukraine's participation in a new union treaty would have to wait until a new Ukrainian constitution had been drawn up. This transformative set of events partially institutionalized secessionist sentiment by bringing to power a new government that spoke ambiguously about Ukraine's relationship with the center and about ensuring Ukrainian sovereignty and independence.

One of the hallmarks of politics in the Soviet Union in its final years was the mercurial character of identities, a massive reimagining of political communities, not simply an assertion of old identities. Popular fronts along the Baltic model sprang up throughout most of the former Soviet Union by the summer and fall of 1988. They borrowed their tactics of contestation directly from the Balts, relying primarily on the demonstration as a means for mobilizing opinion and disrupting normalized politics. They also drew heavily on the program-

matic documents of the Baltic fronts, incorporating the anti-imperial paradigm along with specific demands and goals.²⁴ Indicative of its power, even the Russians came in large numbers to embrace this master frame. 'Communists are internal occupiers!' a slogan at a Leningrad election rally in March 1990 put it (*Yezhednevnaia glasnost* March 3, 1990). Boris Yeltsin, in his speech in May 1990 calling for the passage of a Russian declaration of sovereignty vis-à-vis the Soviet government, referred to 'the longstanding imperial policy of the center' toward Russia (*Izvestiia*, May 25, 1990). Eventually, empire-consciousness among Russians reached the point where even the director of the Institute of Ethnography of the USSR Academy of Sciences, on the eve of the break-up of the Soviet Union, was referring instinctively to the very government he was advising as an 'empire' (Tishkov 1991). Indeed, if he is to be believed, already by summer 1989 at least one of Gorbachev's chief advisors had come to the conclusion that 'the collapse of the empire was inevitable' (Cherniaev 1993: 296).²⁵

The spread of the anti-imperial master frame was not merely a matter of shifting authority, analogy, alienation from state policy, and bandwagoning. Nationalist movements also consciously attempted to reproduce themselves throughout the former Soviet Union, both out of philosophical and strategic considerations. The leaders of the Baltic fronts 'insisted that their own interpretation of self-determination had applicability throughout the Soviet Union' and 'called not only for their own self-determination but also for that of all the titular nationalities of Soviet republics' (Muiznieks 1995: 4). 'There cannot be a sovereign Estonia,' Edgar Savisaar noted in October 1988, 'if Lithuania, Latvia, and other republics are not sovereign' (Radio Vilnius, in *Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Daily Report: Soviet Union*, October 31, 1988, p. 50). In the Italian mobilizational cycle, diffusion of contention was in part a purposive process that had 'a powerful organizational component from the start' (Tarrow 1989a: 225). Similarly, Baltic fronts vigorously organized to extend their influence throughout the former Soviet Union by aiding the spread of the master frame which they themselves had pioneered. This they did through numerous means: the production of Russian-language newspapers intended for consumption outside the Baltic; dispatching emissaries to engage in agitation or to provide advice about the organization of social movements; hosting 'foreign delegations' from other republics and providing nascent social movements with a safe haven from which to operate; and printing newspapers and other materials for social movements from other republics that lacked printing facilities (Muiznieks 1995: pp. 5–11). The mechanics of organizing contentious acts were overtly taught and propagated between groups, including the spread of manuals on how to organize demonstrations. In short, the spread of nationalism in the former Soviet Union was both a process of push and pull, as nationalist movements struggled to institutionalize themselves through their own reproduction.

NOTES

1. Research on protest mobilization in the former Soviet Union was carried out under the auspices of grants from the National Council for Soviet and East European Research, the National Science Foundation, the International Research and Exchanges Board, and the Graduate School of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, as well as a fellowship from the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. The author gratefully acknowledges their support.
2. As Ernest Gellner caricatured this position, nationalism is an ideological invention which 'might not have happened, if only those damned busy-body interfering European thinkers, not content to leave well enough alone, had not concocted it and fatefully injected it into the bloodstream of otherwise viable political communities' (1983: 56).
3. 'What has given great vogue to nationalism in modern times? We really do not know. As it is, we have to content ourselves with hypotheses and suggestions. Of these the most plausible would appear to be the underlying tendency in modern times to regard the national state as the medium through which civilization is best assured and advanced' (Hayes 1931: 302).
4. On the connection between early theories of nationalism and Le Bon's social psychology, see Smith 1986: 7, 227. For a recent view that treats nationalism as an 'intrinsically absurd' phenomenon, see Pfaff 1993.
5. Greenfeld goes on to argue that 'the character of every national identity was defined in the early phase' of the formation of national identity, when *ressentiment* took hold within elite segments of society. 'Its effect, in the political, social, and cultural constitution of the respective nations, as well as their historical record, are attributable to this original definition which set the goals for mobilization, not to the nationalization of the masses.'
6. For a critique of the excess focus in the study of mobilizational politics on social movements rather than the way in which they interact with and resonate in society, see Oliver 1989.
7. As Gellner noted in a subsequent publication, his theory sought to explain 'why nationalism, relatively inconspicuous in the past, is so very salient in our age.' But '[i]t does not explain why, for instance, German nationalism should have become quite so virulent during the Nazi period. Or again, it fails to explain the firm commitment of anglophone Canadians to the existing Canadian political unit, notwithstanding the fact that anglophone Canadians at any rate have not the slightest difficulty operating within the polity of the USA' (Gellner 1994: 44-5).
8. On the notion of the crystallization of state institutions, see Mann 1993b: 75-81.
9. See, for instance, Brubaker 1992: 21-34; Mann 1993b: 57, 83; Gellner 1983.
10. Nationalism is often thought of in terms of tides but is rarely analyzed in the context of tides. For one use of the term in reference to the transitional spread of contention over issues of cultural pluralism, see Young 1993. On the notion of contentious collective action, see the work of Charles Tilly, in particular Tilly 1978, 1986, 1995. The difference between a tide of contention and a cycle of contention largely inheres in the transnationality of the former. In recent years, specialists on protest cycles have increasingly pointed to the transnationality of these phenomena. See, in particular, Tarrow 1994.
11. See, for instance, Tarrow 1994: 48-78.
12. See, for instance, Brockett 1991: 267.
13. Gorbachev notes the significant loss of time that transpired in dealing with nationality issues while his own thinking traversed the path from a 'traditional position' to one aimed at transforming the union to a looser 'federation of sovereign states' (Gorbachev 1995: 496). See also Medvedev 1994: 237.

14. Writing in 1969, Andrei Amalrik was one of the few who clearly foresaw the break-up of the USSR along national lines, although he believed it would be precipitated by a war with China, not by internal reform. See Amalrik 1970: 62–5.
15. Indeed, in 1987 Gorbachev viewed *glasnost* and the demonstrations that it provoked as means for fostering change within republican and provincial elites who were resisting his efforts at reform and defended those initiating demonstrations against his colleagues in the Politburo. See Gorbachev 1995: 318; Cherniaev 1993: 149–50.
16. Organizers were merely called into the KGB for ‘a conversation.’
17. See the report at the emergency meeting of the Politburo on February 21st, as recounted in Vorotnikov 1995: 193–4; Suny 1993: 197.
18. The Central Committee apparatus had received 500 letters over the previous three years complaining about the situation in Karabakh. The letters were largely ignored. See *Soiuz mozno* [. . .] 1995: 22.
19. While the leadership of the local party apparatus in Karabakh generally opposed the campaign, one of the main organizers was an *instruktor* of the Nagorno-Karabakh *obkom*. The local party apparatus apparently did not attempt to block the demonstrations, and efforts by Baku to bully the local party *aktiv* into opposing the campaign failed. Gorbachev 1995: 502; Vorotnikov 1995: 194–5.
20. A similar point is made by Anderson in his discussion of ‘official nationalism’ in the nineteenth century. See Anderson 1991: 86–7. For the notion of collective action as modular, see Tarrow 1994: 31–47.
21. Givi Gumbaridze, first secretary of the Georgian Communist Party, reflected the inability to dissociate the two when he warned his fellow Georgians in spring 1989 against the then widespread tendency ‘to confuse anger against bureaucratic fiat with anti-Russian sentiment’ (*Zaria vostoka*, June 9, 1989, p. 1).
22. Some, such as Gavriil Popov, argued that it was possible to exorcise the imperial persona of the USSR and arrive at a legitimate state. But once the imperial persona of the Soviet state came to be widely recognized as such, even by Russians, how one might go about doing this became a nearly impossible task to conceive. See Popov 1994: 364–5.
23. For an elaboration of this issue and its key role in the ‘master frame’ of nationalism that spread through much of the former Soviet Union, see Beissinger 1993, 1995.
24. This was particularly true of Ukrainian, Moldavian, Georgian, and Belorussian movements, but the Baltic example had a strong influence elsewhere as well. See Muiznieks 1995.
25. While Cherniaev had responsibility for foreign relations, the particular passage cited here deals with the Soviet ‘empire’ in its internal configuration.