BOOK REVIEWS

Darius Staliūnas. *Making Russians. Meaning and Practice of Russification in Lithuania and Belarus after 1863*. Rodopi: Amsterdam, New York, 2007. Pp. 480. ISBN 978-90-420-2267-6.

If a historian's research contributes to existing scholarship previously unknown facts, it is already valuable. If a scholar's work corrects the principles established in historical tradition, such work receives even greater attention. However, on those quite rare occasions when previously unexplored aspects of the past are revealed, we refer to such work as paradigmatic. There is no doubt that *Making Russians. Meaning and Practice of Russification in Lithuania and Belarus after 1863* by Darius Staliūnas may be attributed to the latter category, especially due to the fact that this historian managed to construct a new angle in a rather cultivated field, i.e. Russification and Imperial policy towards Lithuanians in the second half of the nineteenth century. The innovative nature of Staliūnas' book is by no means diminished by one or a few concepts proposed by Western historians (Yuri Slezkine, Theodore Weeks, Ronald Grigor Suny), which are similar to this work. On the one hand, a study of such nature is the first in Lithuanian historical scholarship. On the other hand, the book is not a mere application of Western methods to local material, since it presents a new perception in the historiography of nationalism. This contribution of the Lithuanian historian has been acknowledged by *Kritika*, one of the most prestigious international journals on history, and its associates.

The underlying conclusion of Staliūnas' book both generalizes his research, and presupposes a scholarly battle royal. According to Staliūnas, the nineteenth-century attempt of the Russian authorities to consolidate the empire by applying a certain national policy did not necessarily mean Russification and assimilation of non-Russians. In this case the author distinguishes assimilation and integration as the key directions of the Tsar's national policy towards Lithuanians and claims that the Western Provinces of the empire were integrated in political rather than ethno-cultural terms [p. 2]. Such conclusion to a great extent was suggested to the author by his selected methods. Unlike the usual approach of national historians (Vytautas Merkys, Antanas Tyla), Darius Staliūnas suggests viewing the Russification policy pursued by the Russians by not only assessing its results and consequences to Lithuania, but also emphasizing and disclosing intentions, ideas and wishes of those who implemented the policy. In other words, Staliūnas asks whether we may call such actions Russification if they were not affected by preconceived and deliberate aims to Russify.

Naturally, a reader who is used to the arguments of 'Russification' has a number of questions, yet to discuss the statements of the book by means of traditional counter-arguments would be unproductive. Staliūnas (as usual) has collected such abundance of historical facts and arguments that it would enable him to nip the discussion in the bud: the book reveals the thinking archaeology of Russian officials and provides a particularly exhaustive and detailed analysis of correspondence sent by bureaucrats. Therefore, to raise a discussion on the basis of two absolutely contrary historiographic principles would be erroneous in terms of methodology. It would become political science rather than history, where some people talk about intentions of the pursued policy, whereas others refer to consequences of such policy. On the other hand, a paradigmatic study is multi-faceted and open to questions posed by researchers from the same field, in this case nationalism, and from other fields of history or even other disciplines.

In order to demythologize Russification as a deliberate tsarist policy regarding Lithuanians Staliūnas consistently analyzes documents and decrees adopted by Russian officials. According to the author the restriction of 10 December 1865 issued by the Russian authorities 'for persons of Polish nationality' to buy land in the western gubernias of the empire was one of the most threatening manifestations of the Russification policy [pp. 83–84]. However, in the author's opinion, the ukaz did not apply to Lithuanians and they did not experience Russification of this kind. Yet the book does not mention that other restrictions on managing their own land were applied to Lithuanians. Former serfs who acquired land by a series of redemption payments after 1863 did not have the right to split or join land plots, to sell or mortgage them at their discretion. Free peasants did not even have any allocated land which they could have redeemed until 1882. Thus, the tsar's agrarian policy essentially applied Russian communal land management in Lithuania. In other words, it imposed a Russian lifestyle on Lithuanian villages. As a reaction to such policy of the authorities, a number of informal methods of disposing and splitting land plots emerged in Lithuania in the second half of the nineteenth century. Peasants would sell and split their land entering into illegal long-term lease agreements, and would mortgage the land by concluding notes of fictitious debts. Historians mention one more way of informal transfer of a farm or its part to a new owner, i.e. surrendering of land for the benefit of other family members, which was actually the division of land in the family by receiving a dowry or marrying offspring to a landed partner. According to the data provided by Leonas Mulevičius, in the Kovno Gubernia the division of land in the family affected 11,700 farm by 1883. This phenomenon as very popular in the Lithuanian community from the second half of the nineteenth century to the early twentieth century was described by contemporaries: an official of the Kovno gubernia Statistics Committee, Konstanty Gukowski, Jan Witort, legal historian Bernard Friedman. It was also mentioned by the authors

of memoirs and autobiographies who themselves or their parents lived in Lithuanian villages of that period. Cases of informal land divisions were also registered in the records of the curia and consistory of the Žemaitija Diocese referring to the matrimonial relations of peasants.

In his book Staliūnas also claims that Russian officials did not apply a deliberate Russification policy regarding the Lithuanian language [p. 9]. He notes that under the rule of Nicholas I the Lithuanian language did not receive any greater attention. However, from the very beginning of prohibition of Lithuanian press until 1904 Lithuanian mothers would not send their daughters to primary schools since according to the Lithuanian writer Vaižgantas after such learning ‘they would only be fit marry Russians’. Consequently, both the national educated elite of that time and ordinary peasants of Lithuania perceived Russification as a threat. Furthermore, Staliūnas refers to the fact that the Russian bureaucracy intended to teach at schools in Lithuanian and to establish as many such schools as possible; the Russian officials even thought of teaching the Lithuanian ‘dialect’ in universities. Is it certain that we cannot interpret attempts of the Russian bureaucracy in the nineteenth century as its intention to impose its doctrine on the nation by means of their own language and printed texts? The same is noticed by the author who claims that actually the aim of the authorities was to implement ‘Russification’ naturally and without coercive measures, or extensive efforts [p. 69]. Thus, Russification in the native language could have corresponded with the plans of the bureaucracy.

The author substantiates his claims by some ideas of Theodore Weeks. Like Staliūnas, this American historian believes that Russification was not implemented regarding Lithuanians. As one of arguments Weeks notes that Russification was imposed on the entire region and not on separate national groups [p. 14], accordingly, not necessarily on Lithuanians. However, the ideas and visions of the Russian officials are more significant for research into the bureaucracy rather than for defining the policy it pursued. Apparently there is no difference how to plan killing animals in a forest – by capturing them by species or all populations at once. The result will be the same – no animals in the forest.

In his article ‘The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism’ Yuri Slezkine analyzes Soviet nationality policy. Similarly to Staliūnas, he also reconstructs the intentions of Lenin and Stalin not to eliminate national differences, but to develop and promote as many nations, national minorities and their territorial administrative units as nations and national minorities wish. Due to such policy pursued by Bolsheviks, Russian-speaking Odessa was encouraged to become Ukrainian. The newspaper *Izvestia*, by that time published in Russian, in 1929 was renamed into *Chornomorska komuna* and was published in Ukrainian. In 1932 in Ukraine the authorities instituted Russian, German, Polish, Jewish, Moldavian, Chechen, Greek, Belarusian and Albanian village councils, whe-

reas in Kazakhstan the formation of Russian, Ukrainian, Russian-Kazakh, Uzbek, Ugrian, German, Tadjik, Tatar, Chuvash, Bulgarian, Moldavian and Mordvin village councils were formed. According to Slezkine, it was a fiesta of nationalities and a festival of nationalism funded by the Party. Between 1928 and 1938 the number of newspapers with non-Russian titles in the USSR increased from 205 titles in 47 languages to 2,188 titles in 66 languages. It was an outrageous scandal if North Caucasian residents of Ukrainian origin did not have their own newspaper, theatre, libraries or literature institutions. However, in his article Slezkine does not reach the conclusion that such policy regarding nationalities was non-Russification. In fact, he claims that Sovietization amounted to Russification since the authorities made both identities equal.

In my present review I have raised a few questions, the answers to which we thought we had found. Now Staliūnas' book provides a new paradigm of the tsar's national policy regarding Lithuanians in the second half of the nineteenth century. Therefore, we all, including the author of the book, should rethink known truths and answer emerging questions.

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