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THE IDEA OF MACRO-COMMUNAL SPACE AND ITS APPLICABILITY TO THE ETHNO-COMPLEX SOCIETIES OF THE POST-SOVIET CAUCASUS AND CENTRAL ASIA

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Abstract: Rustow defined National Unity as the sole prerequisite to a transition towards democracy. Later, a second prerequisite was introduced: the Modern State. Despite the importance of these two prerequisites, there is a need to introduce a third prerequisite to encompass ethno-complex societies.

It is difficult to achieve National Unity in ethno-complex settings, because societies are highly fragmented and the several "fragments" do not perceive themselves as equal. In this regard, macro-communal spaces act as a harmonizing pre-chamber in which similarities are enhanced but differences are not forgotten.

In this paper we intend to explore the need to introduce a third prerequisite to the transitological analysis. Secondly, we propose an operational definition of macro-communal space, adapted to the specificities of the post-soviet societies. In the third part we attempt the application of the concept to ethno-complex societies in the Caucasus and Central Asia, to measure its utility.

Keywords: macro-communal space, Caucasus, Central Asia, transitology, ethno-nation.

THE NEED FOR A THIRD PRE-REQUISITE IN THE TRANSITOLOGICAL PARADIGM

The study of transitions as an autonomous field of research emerged in the end of the 1980s and beginning of 1990s. Transitions happening from 1974 to the first half of the 1980s across Southern Europe and Latin America provided substantial information for academicians, analysts and researchers to develop a scientific paradigm that could provide an understanding of the dynamics prior, during and after the transitological game.

The first work mentioning pre-conditions or prerequisites needed in the transitological game is the article of Dankwart Rustow, *Transitions to Democracy:*

Toward a Dynamic Model published in 1970. According to the “father of transitology” the transitological “model starts with a single background condition – national unity” (Rustow, 1970: 350). By national unity the author means a shared vision by the community regarding the need to trigger the transition. This national unity is forged through a macro-agreement between all forces belonging to a certain state. It is important to highlight that national unity does not mean homogenization of opinions and lack of diversity, regarding the possible outcomes of the transitological game.

More than a quarter of a century later, Alfred Stepan and Juan Linz are responsible for the identification of a second prerequisite needed to start transitions: a modern state. Although the authors assert that “democracy is a form of governance of a modern state” (Linz and Stepan, 1996: 17), it is important to clarify the terms of the correlation between a modern state and the beginning of the transitological moment.

On one side, we have to consider the fact that the “modernization [of the state] may be one reason [why] the incidence of democracy is related to economic development” (Przeworski and Limongi, 1997: 158); on the other hand the need for a modern state, as a prerequisite of the transitological game, does not mean a fully modernized and functional state. In fact, it means that the willingness of authoritarian regimes towards the modernization of the state opens the prospects for a more ample sociopolitical transition, due to the introduction of uncertainty in the system.

In this regard, it is important to acknowledge that “uncertainty reduction is a fundamental human motivation driving the near-universal tendency for humans to divide themselves into groups” (Hale, 2008: 35). In other words, uncertainty is the ground reason why humans develop social settings with a shared network of psychosocial needs and functions. In the last two decades, these two prerequisites (national unity and modern state) have guided most of the research works regarding the transitological phenomena happening on the several new countries that appeared (or re-appeared) after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Interestingly, after an initial phase of euphoria, transitology entered into the XXI century (apparently) doomed to an agonizing extinction. In the words of Jan Holzer (2006: 6) “the transitological paradigm [...] has been exhausted” in its ability to make understandable all the sociopolitical phenomena triggered after the Berlin Wall’s fall and the signature of the *Belavezh Accord*. Petsinis (2010: 312) reiterates that “it would not be an exaggeration to assert that [...] the first decade of the new millennium saw the gradual end of transitology” and the urgent need to political scientists to find a new research paradigm.

In a less apocalyptical vision, Carothers (2002: 6) argues that “it is increasingly clear that reality is no longer confirming to the model” that has been used and refined

since the beginning of the 1970s. Jordan Gans-Morse (2004: 333) asserts that some political scientists have shown “skepticism about the applicability of transitology to the study of post-communism” in a *momentum* where “the entire discipline of political science is being re-shaped” (Falk, 2003: 417) towards a more reliable research paradigm.

According to Wiarda (2002: 155) “the transitology/consolidology model [is] of limited use for comprehending East/Central Europe”, Caucasus and Central Asia transitions and therefore inadequate to produce any kind of reliable information on what is happening in the post-soviet realm. The diagnosis seems easy to deduce: there is “a certain failure of transitology in its search for universal lessons and general laws” (Heredia and Kirtchik, 2010: 6) and a pressing need to correct this theoretical flaw.

Curiously, with the dream to build a single/universal transitological paradigm being shattered by the multidimensionality of social facts, several experts and academicians started to realize that “the transitions in the latter region [the post-soviet space] substantially differ from earlier transitions in other parts of the world” (Jankauskas and Gudzinskas, 2008: 181) like Southern Europe, Latin America and even Southeast Asia. The specificities of the post-soviet space urged the scientists, analysts and researchers to look upon paths toward a reformulation and/or mutation of transitology, instead of just declaring the death of the research paradigm.

The “convention models of “transitions to democracy” [have] shown their incompleteness and insufficiency” (Gel’man, 2001: 3) to produce coherent results with practical application because they ignored the structural differences that encompass different territorialities across the post-soviet space. In this perspective, Kuzio (2001: 173) underlines that “post-colonial transition best fits the quadruple nature of transition in some former Yugoslav states and the former USSR” republics, because it ensures a more appropriate view to some specific problems that differ between post-soviet transitions and Latin American or Southern Europe transitions.

In other words, it was the disregard for the impact of the structural specificities of the post-soviet space that produced abnormal results due to an erroneous usage of the transitological paradigm. In a critical reading of several research works conducted in the last two decades, what we find is that after the collapse of the Soviet Union there were “those [...] who found in the transitions to democracy in Spain, Greece, Argentina, Brazil or the Philippines a readymade model for Hungary, Poland, or the Soviet Union, [but they] were looking for the symptoms of pneumonia [...] [and] did not diagnose the cancer” (Przeworski, 1991: 21).

It is a fact that the post-soviet transitions started temporarily closer to those happening (since 1974) in Southern Europe, Latin America and Southeast Asia but “the

decade or so separating these two [waves of] transitions made a significant difference in their [...] contexts” (Bunce, 1995: 118) and moreover in their results. In the words of the diplomat and political analyst Michael McFaul (2002: 221) “the causal pathways of the third wave [in Southern Europe and Latin America] did not produce the ‘right’ outcomes in the fourth wave transitions from communist rule” due to a series of structural specificities that need to be taken into consideration.

One of the structural differences when we compare the transitions happening in Southern Europe and Latin America and those happening across the post-soviet space is the heterogeneous composition of the inhabitants of the several sociopolitical spaces that gained independence with the collapse of the Soviet Union. According to the last census conducted by the *Soviet National Census*, in January 1989, prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union, the ethnic composition of the population of the Caucasus and Central Asia republics was the following:

TABLE I - Ethnic composition of the Caucasus and Central Asian republics prior to the dissolution of the Soviet Union

Country	Population (Total)	Ethnic Composition
Armenia	3,304,776	Armenians (93,3%); Azerbaijanis (2,6%); Yazidis (1,7%); Russians (1,6%); Others (0,8%)
Azerbaijan	7,021,178	Azerbaijanis (82,7%); Armenians (5,6%); Russians (5,6%); Lezgins (2,4%); Others (3,7%)
Chechnya (Russian Federation)	1,084,433	Chechens (66%); Russians (24,8%); Ingushes (2,3%); Armenians (1,4%); Ukrainians (1,1%); Others (4,4%)
Dagestan (Russian Federation)	1,802,579	Avars (27,5%); Dargins (15,6%); Kumyks (12,9%); Lezgins (11,3%); Russians (9,2%); Laks (5,1%); Tabasarans (4,6%); Azerbaijanis (4,2%); Chechens (3,2%); Nogais (1,6%); Others (4,8%)
Georgia	5,400,841	Georgians (70,7%); Armenians (8,1%); Russians (6,3%); Azerbaijanis (5,3%); Ossetians (3,0%); Greeks (1,9%); Abkhazians (1,8%); Ukrainians (1%); Others (1,9%)
Ingushetia (Russian Federation)	185,996	Ingushes (74,5%); Russians (13,2%); Chechens (10,3%); Others (2%)
Kabardino-Balkaria (Russian Federation)	759,586	Kabardians (48,2%); Russians (31,9%); Balkars (9,4%); Ukrainians (1,7%); Ossetians (1,3%); Others (7,5%)

Karachaevo-Cherkessia (Russian Federation)	417,560	Russians (42,4%); Karachays (31,2%); Cherkessk (9,7%); Abazians (6,6%); Nogais (3,1%); Ukrainians (1,5%); Others (5,5%)
Kazakhstan	16,464,464	Kazakhs (39,7%); Russians (37,8%); Germans (5,8%); Ukrainians (5,4%); Tatars (2,0%); Uzbeks (2,0%); Uyghurs (1,1%); Belarusians (1,1%); Others (5,1%)
Kyrgyzstan	4,257,755	Kyrgyzs (52,4%); Russians (21,4%); Uzbeks (12,9%); Ukrainians (2,5%); Germans (2,4%); Tatars (1,6%); Others (6,8%)
North Ossetia-Alania (Russian Federation)	634,009	Ossetians (53%); Russians (29,9%); Ingush (5,2%); Armenians (2,2%); Georgians (1,9%); Ukrainians (1,6%); Kumyks (1,5%); Others (4,7%)
Tajikistan	5,092,603	Tajiks (62,3%); Uzbeks (23,5%); Russians (7,6%); Tatars (1,6%); Kyrgyzs (1,3%); Others (3,7%)
Turkmenistan	3,522,717	Turkmens (72%); Russians (9,5%); Uzbeks (9,0%); Kazakhs (2,5%); Tatars (1,1%); Ukrainians (1%); Others (4,9%)
Uzbekistan	19,810,077	Uzbeks (71,4%); Russians (8,4%); Tajiks (4,7%); Kazakhs (4,1%); Tatars (2,4%); Karakalpaks (2,1%); Crimean Tatars (1%); Others (5,9%)

Source: *Demoscope Weekly.ru* (n.d.), "Всероссийская перепись населения 1989 года [Union Population Census of 1989]". Accessed on 14.06.2014, at http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/rus_nac_89_gs.php?reg=74.

The first conclusion is that all the republics have a highly fractionalized population, divided between several different ethnic groups. If we exclude the case of Armenia, which can be considered as abnormal, none of the Caucasus and Central Asia republics has an ethnic group representing at least 85% of the population. In this regard if we consider that a homogenous ethnic state is only possible when an ethnic group represents at least 90% of the population (Connor, 1972), we can see that, besides Armenia, no Caucasus or Central Asian republic could have been considered as homogenous prior to the transition momentum.

Considering the blurriness that marked the first years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, in what regards psychosocial identity's shared features, and knowing that "social interaction is [...] likely to produce change when the centrality or salience of a given role conceptions is unclear" (Chafetz, 1996-1997: 665), we can assume that the nonexistence of homogeneity at the socio-cultural-identitarian levels, hindered the formation of national unity in most of the republics of the Caucasus and Central Asia.

In this manner, in order to better understand the structural impact in the transitological game caused by the existence of heterogeneous collective identities sharing the same territoriality, we need to consider the inclusion of a third prerequisite when analyzing transitions across the complex post-soviet Caucasus and Central Asia: the macro-communal space.

IMAGE 1 - The three prerequisites of the transitological game

OPERATIONALIZATION OF THE CONCEPT OF MACRO-COMMUNAL SPACE

MAPPING THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE THIRD AND FOURTH TRANSITOLOGICAL WAVES

The transformation of the transitological paradigm, from a paradigm that wanted to be universal, to a paradigm prone-to-be-universal but with a localized focus stems from the recognition of the “benefits of *local* area analysis for understanding global dynamics” (Slocum and Thomas, 2003: 553). In the case of this paper, the idea of adding a third prerequisite (macro-communal space) to understand transitions across the post-soviet Caucasus and Central Asia might result, on a posterior momentum, in a stimulus to re-think the applicability of the transitological paradigm to analyze the current events happening across the Maghreb and Middle East.

One of the most striking differences regarding the transitions happening in the post-soviet space (fourth wave) and the ones that happened in Southern Europe and Latin America (third wave) is the primordial importance of the identitarian agenda in the

post-soviet space. The third wave's basic *leitmotiv* was the overthrowing of inoperative authoritarian settlements; however, in the fourth wave, prior to the transformation of the political regime, we witnessed a call for the "right to be", to exert a certain psychosocial identity dissimilar of the *russskyi/homo sovieticus*¹ ideal.

What resulted from Soviet collapse was not the birth of fifteen fully formed nation-states but fledgling states that only in some cases coincided with relatively homogeneous, coherent, and nationally conscious nations within them. (Suny, 1999/2000: 153)

In this regard, we can pre-conclude that transitions across the post-soviet space did not start due to the idea of national unity. On the contrary, it was the triggering of the transition that allowed for the formation of a proto-national unity idea especially in the Caucasus and Central Asia. It was the modernization of the state, promoted with Gorbachev's *glasnost* (openness) and *perestroika* (restructuring/reform) policies that opened breaches across the Soviet Union institutions, allowing the local political elites to snatch a more preeminent political role.

In other words, the *glasnost* and "*perestroika* transformed [themselves] into little creatures free from the respective creator" (Maltez, 1993: 396) destroying the same institutions that they were supposed to reform and reshape. The quest for national unity only came in a posterior moment, most probably because of the ethno-complexity that characterizes the sociopolitical spaces in the Caucasus and Central Asia.

After the downfall of the USSR all the newly independent states had to embark on the road of nation building (defining 'who are we the people' and fostering the people's national identity, i.e. their sense of belonging to one distinct community) and state building (defining state boundaries which can be accepted by all major political players and creating new political institutions which can inspire the loyalty of the people). (Tolz, 1998: 993).

So far we have identified the importance of re-structuring the transitological paradigm, in order to adapt it to the specificities of the post-soviet space, given that transitology has failed in its quest to produce a universal explicative model mostly

¹ There are two different conceptions of *homo sovieticus*: 1.) Zhinoviev proposed the idea of *homo sovieticus* to explain that the Soviet Union was producing a new type of men, better than the average-men of the societies outside the Communist realm (Rogachevskii, 2002: 975); 2.) the concept of *homo sovieticus* became widely used by the scholars of the Western Academia with a pejorative intention of backwardness and lack of civilization (Blokker, 2005: 507).

because of the multidimensionality that characterizes all social facts. We have also reached an understanding that ethno-complexity and late-nation-building are the key specific structural factors that influenced the originality of the post-soviet transitions.

In this regard, we have acknowledged that there is a critical need to include a third prerequisite in the transitological paradigm: the macro-communal space. The next logical step is to define and conceptualize what we understand as macro-communal space and how can we relate ethno-complexity and late-nation-building with the path followed by the Caucasus and Central Asian republics during their transitions.

NATION, NATIONALISM, NATIONAL IDENTITY AND ETHNICITY

In order to be able to advance with a conceptualization of macro-communal space we need to take a step back, to understand the differences and the interrelation between three crucial concepts: Nation; Nationalism and National Identity. It is important to mention that it is not our intention to dive into the ongoing debate regarding the multiple visions that can be adopted by researchers and academicians, while analyzing this sort of psychosocial phenomena.

We understand the idea of nation as an autonomous entity, dissimilar from the state and whose definition “presents difficulties graver than those attending on the definition of state” (Gellner, 2006 [1983]: 5). In this sense, our vision of nation is close to what Charles Tilly (2002: 95-96) calls “cultural nation” in which Culture, Memory and History are at its core.

In our perspective, a nation is “a community of people, whose members are bound together by a sense of solidarity, a common culture, a national consciousness” (Seton-Watson, 1977: 1). Nations have a complex nature that merges artificial features, what Anderson (2006 [1991]: 48) calls “a new form of imagined community”, with psychosocial dynamics given that “a nation exists when a range of its representatives believe in it” (Hastings, 2007: 26). Nations are intangible realities that can be studied through an analysis of its language (Nationalism) and its core features (National Identity) but not by an examination of the Nation *per se*.

Nationalism, in a broader perspective, can be categorized as the language of the nation. To use a simple image, nationalism is the speaker of the nation. In this sense, nationalism can be defined as a “system of thought in which the nation occupies a predominant position” (Laruëlle, 2009: 2); predominant, but not exclusive, because nations have a relation of interdependence with states. Nationalism can sometimes *speak* for both national and state communities, giving the erroneous impression that both are the same thing even if they are not.

After the implosion of the Soviet Union and with the subsequent emergence of several new states across the Caucasus and Central Asia “nationalism reflected a need to establish an effective state to achieve a group’s economic and security goals” (Snyder, 1993: 5) in a moment of great uncertainty and collective peril. In this sense, we can argue that in the post-soviet space nationalism acts not only as the language of the nation but also as the promoter of the sovereign state.

Nationalism becomes at the same time a tangible component of the nation (its language) and a political movement that reifies the “ethnic or national communities desire [to have] their own independent state” (Barrington, 2006: 10). Without any surprise both the Caucasus and Central Asian post-soviet republics seem to be deeply influenced by this precedence of the nation over the state. We will explain further why the nation seems to have a dominant position over the state, but we can advance already that this is a result of the *korenizatsia* (nativization) policies, implemented in 1920-1930 decades by the Soviet Union.

We already defined nation as an intangible psychosocial space shared by a group of people who believe in the existence of that same common space. We also said that nationalism is the language of the nation, but also the promoter of the state that will allow the endurance of the nation in a long-term. To conclude this part, we only need to define what we mean by national identity.

In our understanding, if nationalism is the language of the nation, national identity is the content of that same nation. National identity, in this perspective, is composed of cultural-symbolic and politico-territorial dimensions and that is the reason why the “discourses of national identity seek not only to define the nation’s character but also to delineate its homeland” (Schwartz, 2006: 3).

The cultural-symbolic dimension of the national identity is expressed through the creation of myths, symbols, rituals and shared memories. The politico-territorial dimension is related with the fact that most nations have a connection with a certain territoriality. The relation between the national community and a certain territoriality is usually expressed by symbolic usage of words like “homeland”, “motherland” or “promised land”.

National identity is, in our understanding, the most tangible part of the nation; the only way to understand and study the national phenomena. National identity, additionally, provides the content that nationalism, understood as the language of the nation, will codify, use, and interpret. Besides these two functions, national identity is also useful to reduce uncertainty through an inclusion-exclusion mechanism. If we concede that “a sense of national identity provides a powerful means of defining and locating individual selves in the world” (Smith, 1991: 17), we understand that through

the expression of its national identity the individual is included in one community (inclusion), different from all the other communities in which he is not integrated (exclusion). In other words, in what regards “the identity question the dichotomy We–Them occupies a central place” (Mendes, 2005: 89) that must not be disregarded.

In order to fully understand the nation-building dynamics that, as we saw, were essential to the beginning of the transitological game across the Caucasus and Central Asia, and before explaining the conception of macro-communal space we still need to briefly mention a fourth element: ethnicity. According to Barth (1969: 13-14), individuals “use ethnic identities to categorize themselves and others for purpose of interaction” minimizing all risks (resulting in a reduction of uncertainty) since interaction will happen between *equals*. Ethnicity, in this sense, is regarded as a form of safe interactional identity.

Ethnicity, similarly to the national identity, also contains an inclusion-exclusion logic since it “defines the most relevant characteristics of a group that sees itself [...] as different from the others” (Pignatelli, 2010: 69). However, unlike national identity, “the language of ethnicity is the language of kinship” (Horowitz, 2000: 57) relying on familial connections and close genetic ties. It is important to stress out that ethnicity and familiarity, although highly interrelated, are not synonyms of the same phenomena bearing in mind that “ethnicity differs from familiarity precisely by being a presumed identity” (Connor, 1994: 102) while familiarity is an assumed/inherent identity.

Some experts and academicians see ethnicity as a pre-chamber of the national phenomena. In this regard, ethnicity becomes nationality when the ethnic group is able to secure and maintain collective rights through political actions and mobilization (Brass, 1991: 23). In our perspective, however, the politicization of the ethnic group does not result in a passage from ethnic to national community but instead from ethnic to ethnonational community.

The concept of ethnonational community is fundamental to understand the transitological dynamics across the Caucasus and Central Asia. Ethno-nations are the dominant form of social organization across the soviet and post-soviet Caucasus and Central Asia, resulting from the politicization of the collective agenda of ethnic groups and not from a politicization of the ethnic group in itself.

The ethno-nation benefits from the “fact that ethnic groups are often characterized by relatively dense social networks and low-cost access to information” (Fearon and Laitin, 1996: 719) and additionally national communities are more opened to individuals sharing the same ideal of collective identity but with less identifiable and/or prominent familiar-kinship ties. The structuring of ethnonational communities does not neglect the propensity of ethnonational identities to be disassembled, re-shaped, re-conceptualized

and re-organized in order to produce a more inclusive ideal of collective identity (Nagle and Clancy, 2012: 81).

The ethno-nation, understood in this dynamic and adaptive perspective, rejects the biologic determinism and the cultural-ultra-exclusivism that tends to lead to the emergence of authoritarian regimes. This vision of the ethno-nations as spaces in which the collective identity is formed not through the imposition of a homogenized standard but through the reduction of heterogeneity is the basis for the construction of our idea of a macro-communal space.

We already said that the transitions across the post-soviet space (fourth wave) are different from those happening in Southern Europe and Latin America (third wave) due to the focus on the identitarian agenda. We should add that the impact of the ethnonational movements was felt more intensely in the multinational societies of the post-soviet Russia, Ukraine, Caucasus and Central Asia (Taras, 1997: 701). The formulation of the question “*Who we are?*” (reification of the ethnonational identity) triggered the transitions in the Caucasus and Central Asia, instead of the question “*Where we want to go?*” (national unity) like it happened in the previous transitions.

Arguably, it is during or even after the transitological game that the ethnonational collective transits from one question to the other. The idea of macro-communal space serves as a mediator of this transition from an identitarian agenda to a sociopolitical agenda and, cumulatively, acts as a pre-chamber of the idea of national unity. The macro-communal space represents a mezzo perspective, in between the ethnonational projects (micro) and the idea of national unity (macro). It is important to remember that the Caucasus and Central Asian republics have a highly fractionalized population, which results in an ethno-complex and poly-dominial² landscape.

DEFINING MACRO-COMMUNAL SPACE

When defining the notion of national identity we argued that usually national identities are structured under a dialectic (most of the times Manichean) relation of *We vs. Them*. Curiously, a close examination of the sociopolitical dynamics in ethno-complex and poly-dominial environments like those in the Caucasus and Central Asia reveals a different type of interaction. Instead of the simple *inclusion-exclusion* mechanism we witness a triptych of interaction that can be summarized as:

² Poly-dominial space refers to territorialities in which several different ethnic groups fight for political and social dominium without any group being able to achieve its goals. In poly-dominial spaces the positioning of ethnic groups tends to be highly volatile (Horowitz, 2000).

IMAGE 2 – Model of triptych interaction of ethnonational projects

The *inclusion-exclusion* mechanism is replaced by an *inclusion-approximation-exclusion* mechanism. The interaction between the ethnonational groups that perceive themselves as less unequal (*approximation*) operates, in our perspective, inside the macro-communal space. It is important to underline that the collectivities that see themselves in a **[Us ≈ Other]** perspective do not ignore the differences between each other; they just tend to focus on the similarities.

For instance in Turkmenistan the Turkmens and the Tatars, in principle, relate themselves in a **[Us ≈ Other]** perspective since both share historic-linguistic relations with the Turkic Oghuz tribes. The Turkmens and the Tatars would axiomatically relate with the Slavic Russians in a **[Us ≈ Other] ≠ Them** manner, by exclusion of the different ethnonational group. Curiously, what we notice is that while the Turkmens indeed developed an interactional scheme of **[Turkmens ≈ Tatars] ≠ Russians**; the Tatars have developed a **[Tatars ≈ Turkmens & Russians] ≠ Ukrainians**.

The emphasis on similarities produces new layers of positional complexity, since each ethnonational collectivity has a different set of interactions with the other ethnonational collectivities sharing the same space. The fact that the Russians have entrusted to the Tatars, in the end of the XVIII century, the commercial routes coming from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan forged a liaison that makes possible the process of *approximation* between Russians and Tatars: **[Tatars ≈ Russians]** (Annanepesov, 2003: 127-140).

The case of the Ossetians demonstrates how complex the interaction between ethnic groups can be. In this case we can see that **[North Ossetians ≈ Russians & Armenians] ≠ Ingush & Kumyks & South Ossetians**. North Ossetians are one of the few ethnic groups of the Caucasus that is majorly Christian Orthodox, easing the process of *approximation* towards the Russians and the Armenians. The South Ossetians, majorly Sunni Muslims, are paired with the Ingush and the Kumyks as the different other: **≠ Ingush & Kumyks & South Ossetians**.

We would expect that South Ossetians would present a reverse scheme of interactions but, in fact, what we see is that **[South Ossetians $\approx$ Russians & North Ossetians] $\neq$ Ingush & Kumyks**. South Ossetians look to North Ossetians as similar because they want to exert their right to a more autonomous, or even independent, sociopolitical space. For the same reason South Ossetians perceive the Russians as less unequal, because the inclusion in the Russian Federation is considered the best feasible outcome for several South Ossetians. Despite sharing similar religious beliefs with the Ingush (Sunni Islam), the South Ossetians do not forget the North Ossetian-Ingush conflict of 1992 over the Prigorodnyy district (Coene, 2010: 156-159).

An analysis from these two examples shows us a glimpse of how complex can be the interaction between ethnonational groups in poly-dominial spaces like the ones existing in the Caucasus and Central Asia. Relying on historical, linguistic, cultural and religious factors to ease the *inclusion-approximation-exclusion* mechanism becomes almost impossible. That is the reason why we believe that the concept of macro-communal space has a big potential, because it circumvents the impact of ethno-complex interaction in poly-dominial spaces: **[Us $\approx$ Other] $\neq$ Them**.

The macro-communal space operates on the logic of compromise between several collective identities sharing a common sociopolitical territoriality, highlighting the similarities without disregarding the differences. However, instead of relying on the traditional collective identity features like History, language, culture and religion, it uses a different layer of collective identity: citizenship. First of all, we need to understand that “citizenship can be defined as an identity constituted through membership in the political community” (Açikel and Ateş, 2011: 714) in which the weight of historic-cultural events is less prone to hinder the establishment of understandings and agreements.

In the moment when citizenship becomes a collective identity, “the basis of inclusion or exclusion [in a common sociopolitical space] is civic: it is [defined] by birth or on the basis of legally established criteria” (Breton: 1988: 86) diminishing the importance of socio-cultural and symbolic features more prone to discrimination and consequently exclusion. Citizenship, understood as a layer of collective identity, is more able to open the different social groups towards an approximation. In this sense, we underline that “the more open and democratic a society, the more likely it is that [ethno-]nationalism is a forward-looking political project” (Kaldor, 2004: 164).

The macro-communal space cannot be imposed by institutions and/or actors. The adherence to this chamber that harmonizes similarities, without disregarding differences of ethnonational groups in ethno-complex and poly-dominial spaces has to be voluntary to work properly. This notion of voluntary association is essential to the functioning of the macro-communal space. Inside the macro-communal space, the

ethnonational collectivities are able to craft agreements towards the building-up of a common agenda, in a space that although focusing on citizenship equality does not disregard the historic-socio-cultural differences, allowing in the medium/long-term the emergence of national unity.

THE APPLICABILITY OF THE MACRO-COMMUNAL SPACE IN THE CAUCASUS AND CENTRAL ASIA

In the previous chapters we have identified that the transitological model is unable to produce global understanding regarding the transitions phenomena. We have argued that instead of declaring the failure of the transitological paradigm, we should do an effort to perceive its merits and to modify the model in order to render it stronger. In this spirit, we proposed the inclusion of a third prerequisite: the macro-communal space.

In our understanding, the inclusion of the macro-communal space is a necessary step to curb the deficiencies of the transitological model, to understand the events ongoing in the post-soviet ethno-complex and poly-dominial Caucasus and Central Asia. The macro-communal space uses citizenship, understood as a different layer of collective identity, as a space for “dialogue” in which the ethnonational groups can focus on the similarities, without needing to forget or dismiss the differences.

The macro-communal space forges a common agenda between different ethnonational groups, allowing the emergence of national unity in the medium-term. Only after this moment, the transitional cycle should have started in the Caucasus and Central Asia. Reality, however, proved to be different. In this section we intend to explore the applicability of the macro-communal space mechanism in the post-soviet ethno-complex and poly-dominial Caucasus and Central Asia.

Transitions across the post-soviet space and especially those in the Caucasus and Central Asia were, first and foremost, a call for independence of the ethnonational collectivities. The “big question that underlies the debate [ongoing during the transitional cycle] is where the post-soviet countries belong and what their ‘true’ identity is” (Molchanov, 2005: 3). Consequently, to understand the events of the 1990s and the applicability of the macro-communal space mechanism in the Caucasus and Central Asia at that time, we need to realize the impact of the soviet policies in what regards collective identity and its politicization.

After the October Revolution of 1917 and after winning the Civil War in October 1922, the task of organizing an enormous sociopolitical space inhabited by several different collective identities fell on the People’s Commissariat for Nationalities (*Narkomnats*) presided by the young Georgian, Joseph Stalin. In the 1920s-1930s the *Narkomnats* began the implementation of a series of nativization policies (*korenizatsia*).

According to the historian Slezkine (1994: 414) “the ‘Great Transformation’ of 1928-1932 turned into the most extravagant celebration of ethnic diversity that any state had ever financed”. To be more precise, the promotion and defense of culture was the only concern of the nativization policies given that “the soviets did not intend to create nations and ‘their’ corresponding states as entities capable of independent autonomous existence” (Szporluk, 1994: 5).

The ethnonational cultural euphoria was never met with any kind of programs of political empowerment, because the ethno-federalization of the Soviet Union was designed as an intermediary stage (Lynn, 1997: 63) that would lead to the merger of nations (*sliyanie*). The merger of (ethno-)nations would produce one single a-national state populated by the defender of the revolution: the *homo sovieticus*.

The soviet system of ethnoterritorial federalism divided the territory of the state into a complex four-tiered set of national territories, endowed with varying degrees of autonomy and correspondingly more or less elaborate political and administrative institutions. (Brubaker, 2009: 30)

The administrative division of the Soviet Union encompassed four levels of ethnoterritorial constituencies: 1.) Soviet Socialist Republics (SSR); 2.) Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics (ASSR); 3.) Autonomous Oblasts (AO) and Autonomous Okrugs (AO); 4.) National Districts (ND) and Autonomous Villages. Each of these different territorialities was assigned to a titular nationality (usually giving its name to the territory under its jurisdiction). All the ethnic groups without any territory assigned under its jurisdiction were considered non-titular nationalities.

The new soviet territorial administrative system was designed to discriminate, promoting competition and deterring interethnic solidarity between ethnonational groups sharing a common territory. The resulting competition between the titular and non-titular ethnonational groups, mostly in the symbolic and institutional spheres, would benefit the Kremlin, considered the *natural judge* of all interethnic disputes.

The discrimination subjacent to the scheme of ethnoterritorial federalism and the incompleteness of the nativization policies justify why in the Caucasus and Central Asia “the national revolutions realigned borders so that states corresponded more closely to national boundaries” (Roeder, 1999: 858). The incapacity to any type of compromise by the elites of the titular nationalities completely hindered the prospects for the emergence of any sort of chamber like the macro-communal space.

The absence of a compromise arena like the macro-communal space in the ethno-complex and poly-dominial Caucasus and Central Asia resulted in several outbursts of

interethnic conflict. In the Caucasus, a civil war erupted in Georgia (1989-1992) opposing the Georgians and the Abkhazian and South Ossetian populations. In 1994, the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria claimed the right for independence from the Russian Federation, resulting in two brutal wars in 1994-1996 and 1999-2000. The conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia over the control of Nagorno-Karabakh (1988-1994) can also be seen as a consequence of the incapacity of local political elites to achieve some level of diplomatic compromise.

In Central Asia the worst case of interethnic violence came from Tajikistan that faced a brutal civil war from 1992 to 1997, in which “the forces were divided by untidy permutations of clan, region and ideology” (Sherr, 1994: 57). Smaller episodes of interethnic tension were registered across Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan mostly because “Central Asian states can be characterized as nationalizing regimes, aspiring to become the states of and for a particular core nation” (Bohr, 2004: 495) with a complete disregard for other ethnic collectivities inhabiting the same territory.

In addition to the structural impact of the nativization policies and of the ethnoterritorial federalism, we need also to consider the impact of the deportations conducted during the *Great Terror* of the 1930s and after the Great Patriotic War (1945-1956). According to the historian Otto Pohl (1999: 2), “the Stalin regime presided over a system of national repression that dispossessed millions of people of their ancestral homelands on the basis of their ethnicity”. The deportation of Caucasian ethnonational groups to Central Asia, because of Stalin’s paranoid mood that made him saw enemies everywhere, deepened the exclusivist tendencies not only of the titular nationalities but also of the non-titular nationalities.

The deportation of Caucasian ethnonational groups to Central Asia created a new level of uncertainty due to resource scarcity. The massive deportation of almost 3,300,000 people did not take into account that “local authorities were not prepared for such a refugee influx of people. There were already too many evacuees in Central Asia [...] newcomers found themselves in dreadful conditions” (Nekrich, 1978: 121-122), fighting for housing and for decent meals. Newcomers were additionally imposed with circulation rules and access to jobs was also limited.

The deportations deepened the degree of ethno-complexity in Central Asia, negatively transforming the sentiments of the local titular nations towards the local non-titular nations and ethnic minorities. The intensification of the distrustful feelings between the ethnonational collectivities reduced the ethno-complex and poly-dominial Central Asia almost to a truly Manichean dynamic of **Us ≠ Them**.

In the Caucasus, the deportation and the posterior Nikita Khrushchev’s pardon also increased the predisposition for animosity between ethnonational groups, mainly

because although “the survivors returned after 1956, their national existence was further weakened. Most have become national minorities in their ancestral lands” (Hunczak, 2000: 263) that were under control of other ethnonational groups. Current disagreements between Laks and Chechens, or North Ossetians and Ingushes, or Kabardians and Balkars are a direct consequence of the Stalinist deportations.

The structural impact of these three elements – nativization policies, ethnoterritorial federalism, deportations – helps us to understand not only the tendency for exclusivist almost xenophobic ethnonationalism across the Caucasus and Central Asia, but also the ongoing tension between different ethno-nationalities and the obvious failure of the transition from an authoritarian regime to a more democratic regime. At this point we should conclude that the applicability of the macro-communal space perquisite in the Caucasus and Central is, at best, a fantasy.

We have, nonetheless, a different perspective. A careful reading of historical events reveals that in the past, both the Caucasus and the Central Asian territories have experienced phenomena close to our idea of macro-communal space. In fact, the implementation of the ethnoterritorial federalism, the design of the nativization policies and even the deportations were made to reduce or even eliminate the prospects for new events (fashioned inside proto-macro-communal spaces), like those of the past, from happening again in the Caucasus and in Central Asia.

Let us start with the Caucasus. In 1834, Shamyl is elected as third Imam of the Caucasian Imamate, a loose military-religious alliance in the Northeastern Caucasus that was fighting against the Russian Empire since 1828. During Shamyl’s leadership the Caucasian Imamate acts as a proto-macro-communal space in which Chechens, Ingush, Avars, Dargins, Lezgins, Laks and Azeris fight side by side against a common enemy: the Russian Empire. Interestingly, all the ethnonational groups inside the Caucasian Imamate never abandoned the specificities of their collective identity (**Us**); instead, they just focused on the similarities of the others (**Other**), using religion as a harmonizing device, given that the enemy was even more different (**Them**).

It was Shamyl’s extreme religious zeal that hindered the chances of this first proto-macro-communal space of producing more meaningful results. The imposition of a restrict doctrine like Muridism³ over a largely animist population reduced the capacity to achieve a stronger degree of interethnic cooperation (Griffin, 2004: 67) and led to internal tensions. Religion, we must remember, tends to be less prone to compromises since it structures itself in the dynamic of belief-and-feel and not in pure rational terms.

³ Muridism is a mystic philosophical doctrine of Sufism in which the world is divided in a dialectic Manichean way with the *murid* (the committed one) following the path or Allah and the *munafiq* (hypocrite) performing the rituals of Islam but doubting of its meaningfulness. Muridism is composed of three different parts: *Sharia* (the Law), *Tariqa* (the Path) and *Hakikat* (the Truth) (Baddeley, 1908: 230).

This reinforces our understanding that macro-communal spaces in ethno-complex and poly-dominial territories like the Caucasus will have to emerge inside the sphere of citizenship because “religion is not considered to be a sufficient cause of or reason for [ethno-]national consciousness” (Krejčí and Velímský, 1981: 45).

In July 1916, Central Asia was challenged due to a series of measures by the Russian Empire to conscript Central Asian Muslims to serve in the World War I. In 1917 the *Fourth Extraordinary All-Turkistan Congress of Muslims*, reunited in Tashkent, attempts a coup d'état. By the end of April 1918, the soviet leadership was under heavy pressure to proclaim the establishment of the Turkistan Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic inside the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic. Yet, the proclamation did not meet the goals of the Turkic populations. Mounting on the growing dissatisfaction of the local ethnonational groups, the *Basmachi* movement⁴ crystallized.

Launched with the slogans ‘Turkistan for the Turkistanis’ and ‘Freedom for Turkistan’, as the movement developed, it drew to its ranks not only fervent advocates of independence for Turkistan, but also the broad masses of the population who were unhappy with the unpopular ‘socialist’ policies. (Radjapova, 2005: 173)

During the 1920s the Kazakh, the Turkmen, the Uzbek and the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republics were established weakening the claims for a Turkistan. We have to take into consideration that “the notion of ‘Turkistan’ had too many Pan-Turkic associations” (Golden, 2011: 132) that were feared by the soviet authorities. The newly formed republics were allowed to develop their Turkic identity, under the nativization policies in a semi-isolated, fractioned, and soviet-oriented manner.

The *Basmachi* movement was active until the end of the 1930s. The deportation of non-Central Asian ethnonational groups lead the native collectivities to a more protectionist and exclusivist attitude centered on these smaller identities (Tajik, Turkmen, Uzbek and later Kyrgyz) and not on the Pan-Turkic project of a united Turkistan. The failure of Turkistan to “survive” as a political entity does not diminish the fact that several dissimilar ethnonational collectivities were able to work together during several years (1916-1924). There was, in this regard, a proto-macro-communal space in the ethno-complex and poly-dominial Central Asia.

⁴ The pan-Turkic movement was named “Basmachi” by the Soviets with a pejorative intention, since “Basmach” is a Turkic word that can be translated as “bandit”.

There are two reasons that can explain the failure of the proto-macro-communal space in Central Asia. On one side, the surmounting pressure (at both political and military levels) from the soviet authorities and on the other side the focus on identity. The focus on something as complex, multidimensional, and volatile as a pan-identity resulted in internal tensions that weakened the resolve of the *Basmachi* movement.

FINAL REMARKS

We can safely conclude that the macro-communal space prerequisite is not only useful but (more importantly) applicable to the ethno-complex and poly-dominial post-soviet Caucasus and Central Asia. In our understanding, the events happening across the post-soviet Caucasus and Central Asia by the end of the 20th century were not transitions *de facto* but solely power-mutations that led to the simple replacement of political actors and superficial redrawing of institutions.

In Central Asia, the power-mutation that followed the implosion of the Soviet Union led to a return to more primeval forms of collective identity with “clan identity being [now] more salient than ethnonationality and religion” (Collins, 2003: 171). The supremacy of clan identity makes it easier to understand why each of the five provinces (*vilayet*) in Turkmenistan is under the control of one specific clan, with the same thing happening in the four provinces of Tajikistan. Clan identity predominance also justifies the constant tension between Osh and Bishkek in Kyrgyzstan and the competition between Samarkand and Tashkent in Uzbekistan.

The macro-communal space offers the only prospect for a meaningful transition in the post-soviet Central Asia. The transformation of these authoritarian, if not sultanistic societies, into more open and democratic societies depends on an enlarged agreement emphasizing the common characteristics shared between these different collectivities. The macro-communal space provides that space, which in time might result in a meaningful national unity agenda.

In the Caucasus the power-mutation resulted mostly in an attempt to re-align state and nation borders. The Armenian political elite displays several soviet-styled features and is currently in a process of divorce with the civil society; the transition is at best stalled. In Azerbaijan, president Elçibəy marked a moment of nationalistic-xenophobia being replaced by the Aliyev-clan. Azerbaijanis, Lezgins, Tallish, Armenians, Russians, and others never achieved a state of minimal mutual understanding within the Azerbaijani state.

In Georgia, the process of democratization can be described as a roller-cost, but the incapacity of Georgians to dialogue with Abkhazians, South Ossetians and Adjarians might explain the constant failure of the democratizing outbursts. The case of

the North Caucasus is even worst, with local and federal policies enhancing divisions and interethnic tensions.

The absence of macro-communal spaces in the Caucasus and Central Asia explains, in our perspective, the absence of meaningful transitions. The failure of the post-soviet Caucasus and Central Asia transitional momentum is linked directly to the absence and unwillingness of ethnonational collectivities to reach agreements at the citizenship level (making it almost impossible the appearance of national unity), using the advantages of the macro-communal space in which the differences will be preserved and respected while the similarities will be enhanced.

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