University of California, Berkeley

SOVIET AND POST-SOVIET AREA STUDIES

*Victoria Bonnell and George Breslauer**
University of California, Berkeley



Berkeley Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies
Working Paper Series

This PDF document preserves the page numbering of the printed version for accuracy of citation. When viewed with Acrobat Reader, the printed page numbers will not correspond with the electronic numbering.

The Berkeley Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies (BPS) is a leading center for graduate training on the Soviet Union and its successor states in the United States. Founded in 1983 as part of a nationwide effort to reinvigorate the field, BPS's mission has been to train a new cohort of scholars and professionals in both cross-disciplinary social science methodology and theory as well as the history, languages, and cultures of the former Soviet Union; to carry out an innovative program of scholarly research and publication on the Soviet Union and its successor states; and to undertake an active public outreach program for the local community, other national and international academic centers, and the U.S. and other governments.

Berkeley Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies
University of California, Berkeley
Institute of Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies
260 Stephens Hall #2304
Berkeley, California 94720-2304

Tel: (510) 643-6737
bsp@socrates.berkeley.edu
http://socrates.berkeley.edu/~bsp/

SOVIET AND POST-SOVIET AREA STUDIES

*Victoria Bonnell and George Breslauer**
University of California, Berkeley

Paper prepared for "Revitalizing Area Studies" Conference, April 24-26, 1998. Please do not quote without permission of the authors.

*Department of Sociology and Department of Political Science, respectively. We are grateful to David Engerman for his assistance in the preparation of this paper. Gregory Grossman and Reginald Zelnik provided valuable comments and suggestions.

INTRODUCTION

The remarkable feature of Soviet area studies is that, as a field of scholarly inquiry, it disappeared in December 1991, along with the Soviet Union as a national entity. Many geographical areas in the world have undergone significant geopolitical changes since the Second World War, but the dissolution of a major subject area – one of the largest in the world – is unprecedented. Beginning in 1992, specialists on the Soviet Union – "Sovietologists" – have been called upon to reorient themselves to the fifteen successor states that have been carved out of the former Soviet Union. Whereas one powerful nation-state was the unit for analysis before 1992, now specialists study such diverse countries as Lithuania, Ukraine, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Tadzhikistan, or in many cases, Russia.

The change in geographical boundaries coincides with a fundamental reconfiguration of the questions and topics addressed by specialists. As Edward W. Walker put it in 1993: "No longer challenged to explain order, stability, institutionalization, or the functioning of the 'Soviet system,' we find ourselves confronted by dysfunction, fundamental and disjunctive institutional change, rapid attitudinal and behavioral adjustments to an ever-changing structure of opportunities, anti-regime mass mobilization, ethnic violence, and the driving force of intense nationalism."[1] With the breakup of the Soviet Union, a new field emerged: post-Soviet studies or, to put it another way, FSU (former Soviet Union) studies.

This essay traces the origins and development of Soviet area studies from their inception in the early 1940s to the present. In the first part, we examine the institutional framework and the funding sources for Soviet and post-Soviet area studies. The second part concentrates on the connection between area studies and the disciplines. Next, we consider intellectual trends and map the major changes that have taken place in the conceptualization of Soviet area studies from the Second World War to the collapse of the USSR. In the final section, we provide an overview of the formation of post-Soviet area studies.

The focus of our inquiry is Soviet and post-Soviet area studies *in the United States*. A large Sovietological community developed in the United Kingdom; important, but smaller communities emerged in Canada, Australia, France, West Germany, Sweden, Italy, Israel, and elsewhere. For the sake of manageability, however, and given the purposes of the project of which this essay is a part, we will confine our attention to the United States which has produced a large proportion of the Western specialists and publications dealing with the Soviet Union.

---

[1] Edward W. Walker, "Sovietology and Perestroika: A Post-Mortem" in Susan Solomon, ed., *Beyond Sovietology: Essays in Politics and History* (Armonk, N.Y, 1993), p. 227.

Institutional Infrastructure and Funding

It is often said that Soviet area studies are an offspring of the Cold War, a circumstance that has indelibly marked the field institutionally and intellectually.[2] There can be no doubt that the Cold War provided an enormous stimulus for the expansion of American Sovietology and its elaboration as a field of research and teaching within the university. Nevertheless, it is well to remember that the phenomenon of area studies generally, and Soviet area studies in particular, actually originated during World War II, before arctic breezes separated the wartime allies.

In fact, much of what subsequently constituted "Soviet area studies" in American universities was originally conceived in 1943, prior to the Cold War era.[3] The USSR Division of the Office of Strategic Services, which in 1943 was directed by the historian Geroid Robinson and had sixty social scientists, "constituted a research agenda that would literally define the field of postwar Sovietology."[4] The wartime roots of the postwar Soviet area studies centers can be found in the general approach of key figures in the USSR Division who advocated "integrated, multidisciplinary coverage of one country" while maintaining a grounding in a traditional discipline.[5] This conception of area studies also gained early support from other influential sources. In 1943, the Committee of World Regions of the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) recommended a similar approach to the study of "foreign regions," as did the Committee on Area Studies at Columbia University.[6] A sixteen-week Russian area program organized at Cornell University in 1943 and 1944, with funding from the Rockefeller Foundation, put into practice the multidisciplinary conception of area studies.[7]

---

[2] An influential version of the argument can be found in Stephen F. Cohen, *Rethinking the Soviet Experience: Politics and History Since 1917* (New York and Oxford, 1985), pp. 8-19.

[3] The study of Russia and Eastern Europe was first undertaken at Oberlin College in 1945. Robert F. Byrnes, "USA: Work at the Universities," in Walter Z. Laqueur and Leopold Labedz, eds., *The State of Soviet Studies* (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), p. 25. For a discussion of early developments in U.S. Russian studies, see David Charles Engerman, "America, Russia, and the Romance of Economic Development," Ph.D. dissertation, UC Berkeley, 1998.

[4] Barry M. Katz, *Foreign Intelligence: Research and Analysis in the Office of Strategic Services 1942-1945* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989), p. 137.

[5] Ibid., p. 160. As Geroid T.Robinson put it in his application to the Rockefeller Foundation in 1945 on behalf of Columbia's Russian Institute: "war time experience in training Americans to meet the needs of government, the armed forces, and business has indicated the great value of the regional approach." Quoted in Robert F. Byrnes, *A History of Russian and East European Studies in the United States* (Lanham, New York, London, 1994), p. 207.

[6] Immanuel Wallerstein, "The Unintended Consequences of Cold War Area Studies," in *The Cold War and the University: Toward an Intellectual History of the Postwar Years* (New York, 1998), p. 195-197. Both these reports placed priority on the study of Latin America, China and Japan. By the end of 1945, priorities had shifted to the Soviet Union and China. Ibid., p. 201.

[7] Byrnes, *A History of Russian and East European Studies in the United States*, p. 213. The program was designated as "Intensive Study of Contemporary Russia Civilization" and

With the establishment of the Russian Institute at Columbia University in 1946, Soviet area studies moved permanently into a university setting. The Russian Institute was only the first of a series of multidisciplinary centers that provided broad "integrated" area training for scholars rooted in a particular discipline.[8] The centers, which usually issued either a certificate or an M.A. degree for graduate students, prepared specialists for teaching and scholarly research, government service and research, or the professions (journalism, business and law, and administration).[9]

The Columbia program, and others established soon afterward at Harvard University (1948), the University of California at Berkeley (1948)[10] , and elsewhere, typically had "few resources in teaching and scholarship, and almost no tradition, on which to build."[11] Over the next decade, however, area centers grew rapidly, with the addition of new faculty and substantial graduate student enrollments.[12] By the end of the 1950s, thirteen major American universities (University of California at Berkeley, Columbia University, Fordham University, Harvard University, Indiana University, University of Michigan, University of Minnesota, University of Notre Dame, Syracuse University, University of Washington, Wayne State University, University

---

participants wrote a series of articles on the USSR for the *Encyclopedia Americana*, reprinted together in a book, *USSR: A Concise Handbook*, ed. Ernest J. Simmons (Ithaca, NY, 1947). Contributors included: Frederick J. Schuman, Sir Bernard Pares, John Hazard, and Lazar Volin.

[8] In 1946, the World Areas Research Committee of the SSRC defined the criteria for a graduate program in area studies: "five disciplines or more, working closely together, intensive language training, substantial library resources, administrative recognition of the program within the system of instruction." Harold H. Fisher, *American Research on Russia* (Bloomington, 1959), p. 9.

[9] Clarence A. Manning, *A History of Slavic Studies in the United States* (Milwaukee, 1957), p.76. See Cyril E. Black and John M. Thompson, eds., *American Teaching About Russia* (Bloomington, 1959), p. 65, for data on the placement of Russian area students, 1946-1956. One third went into academia; nearly two-fifths went into government service and research. According to Robert F. Byrnes, "as early as October 1952, fifty-five alumni of the [Columbia] program were in government service, thirteen were engaged in government-sponsored research, and forty-six were teaching in colleges and universities." Byrnes, *A History of Russian and East European Studies*, p. 215.

[10] The UC Berkeley Institute for Slavic Studies established in 1948 under the direction of historian Robert J. Kerner was renamed and reconstituted in 1956 as the Center for Slavic Studies (subsequently renamed the Center for Slavic and East European Studies). Whereas the Institute granted degrees (B.A., M.A., Ph.D.), the Center was constituted as a research unit. Nicholas Riasanovsky, "University of California, Berkeley," Paper delivered to the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, Annual Meeting, November 14, 1996; Gregory Grossman, personal communication, April 21, 1998..

[11] Black and Thompson, eds., *American Teaching About Russia*, p 52; Fisher, *American Research in Russia*, pp. 24-25.

[12] Columbia's Russian Institute alone educated about 235 graduate students; Harvard's Russian Research Center prepared about 100 students with M.A. degrees in regional studies. Ibid., p. 53.

of Wisconsin, Yale University[13]) operated centers, institutes, committees, programs or boards with a focus on Russia, Slavic Studies, the Soviet Union, Soviet Policy, and in some cases, Eastern Europe as well. Notwithstanding the many variations in title, virtually all of them focussed primarily on Russia and were dominated by Russianists. The multi-ethnic composition of the Soviet Union was noted but seldom studied in depth. [14]

Although area centers continued to expand throughout the 1950s, they remained subject to a variety of circumstances and pressures – domestic and foreign – that both encouraged and inhibited their progress.[15] The need to "know your enemy" was counterbalanced by a suspicion of everything connected to the Soviet Union, sometimes extending to individuals and institutions devoted to research on that country. In retrospect, it is clear that the large and flourishing centers and institutes of the 1950s would not have been possible without cooperation among three important groups: university administrations, philanthropic foundations, and the US government. In some public universities, the state legislature was also a factor.[16]

University administrations varied greatly in their reception of Soviet area studies, but without their support and the allocation of resources, no program could succeed.[17] Major foundations provided considerable incentives to cooperate. In 1946 Columbia's Russian Institute drew much of its initial funding from the Rockefeller Foundation, as did UC Berkeley's Institute of Slavic Studies two years later.[18] Foundations sometimes took the initiative in identifying universities that provided suitable sites for future area studies centers. For example, in 1947 Carnegie Corporation Vice President, John W. Gardner, considered Harvard, Columbia and

---

[13] Black and Thompson, eds., *American Teaching about Russia*, p. 56.

[14]A 1991 report by the Review Committee on Soviet Studies of the American Council of Learned Societies and the Social Science Research Council noted: "Traditional Soviet studies in the West has failed to capture the regional and ethnic wealth of the country…." Reasons included the focus of political scientists on "where the power is, i.e., at the center" and the obstacles to field research. "Beyond Soviet Studies," The Review Committee on Soviet Studies [Blair Ruble, Carol Avins, Nina Garsoian, Abbott Gleason, Robert Huber, David Szanton, and Myron Weiner], November 1991, p. 5.

[15] These included the House Un-American Activities Committee, the Korean War, Khrushchev's secret speech in 1956, the launching of Sputnik.

[16] At the Indiana University, for example, the state legislature was induced to support a Soviet/East Europe program after it was revealed that the state had a substantial ethnic population with roots in the region. Bonnell's interview with Professor Charles Jelavich at UC Berkeley, February 2, 1998.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Manning, *A History of Slavic Studies*, p. 76; Byrnes, *A History of Russian and East European Studies in the United States*, p. 206; Nicholas Riasanovsky notes that the Berkeley Institute was established with the aid of a $100,000 Rockefeller Foundation grant in addition to state support. Riasanovsky, "University of California, Berkeley," p. 5.

Stanford as possible sites for a Russian studies center. The Carnegie Corporation subsequently decided to fund the Harvard Russian Research Center, which opened formally in February 1948.[19]

Foundations supported Soviet area studies in other ways as well. In 1952, the Ford Foundation launched the Foreign Area Fellowship Training Program designed to fund graduate training, research, and travel in all "non-Western areas."[20] This program, which continued until 1972, provided substantial support for students and scholars in the Russian field.[21] The overall commitment of the Ford Foundation to area studies can be gauged from its expenditure of $270 million between 1951 and 1966 for the International Training and Research Program, designed to promote "multidisciplinary research and training in the humanities and social sciences focused on particular regions of the world."[22]

Foundations also supported important scholarly organizations, such as the Joint Committee on Slavic Studies, established in 1947.[23] Appointed by the American Council of Learned Societies (it was an enlargement of the ACLS Committee on Slavic Studies) and the SSRC, the Joint Committee provided general guidelines and fellowships for Soviet area studies.[24] The Joint Committee was also a prime mover in setting up a scholarly exchange with the Soviet Union. This effort, designed to alleviate some of the problems faced by scholars operating in a data-poor environment, came to fruition in 1958 with the signing of the first US-Soviet exchange agreement, to be administered by the Inter-University Committee on Travel Grants (in 1968 renamed the International Research Exchanges Board).[25] The IUCTG and IREX exemplify the cooperative relationship that developed among scholarly associations, foundations and the U.S. government in the field of Soviet area studies. IREX, for example, was established by the ACLS and SSRC; one half of its funds came from foundations, while the other half came from the

---

[19] Charles Thomas O'Connell, "Social Structure and Sciences: Soviet Studies at Harvard," UCLA (Department of Sociology) Doctoral Dissertation, 1990, especially, pp. 141,170-171.
[20] Byrnes, *A History of Russian and East European Studies*, p. 205.
[21] Black and Thompson, eds., *American Teaching about Russia*, p. 67. See below for further discussion of this program.
[22] "Crossing Borders: Revitalizing Area Studies," Ford Foundation, 1997, p. 1.
[23] The Ford Foundation made grants to the SSRC totaling $87.7 million between 1950 and 1996, primarily to support area studies. Ibid., p. 2
[24] Fisher, *American Research on Russia*, p. 9. The Joint Committee on Slavic Studies was replaced in 1968 by the Joint Committee on Slavic and East European Studies. In 1971 a Joint Committee on East European Studies was formed that operated separately from the Joint Committee on Soviet Studies.
[25] Ibid., p. 10. Gregory Grossman observes that "IREX was not just a 'renaming' of IUCTG but a transformation, in terms of both formal structure and procedures." Personal communicaton, April 21, 1998.

government-sponsored National Endowment for the Humanities and the U.S. International Communication Agency.[26]

In the 1940s and 1950s, the U.S. government played an active and critical role in supporting and encouraging the development of Soviet area studies. Many specialists of the immediate post-World War II era had served in government during the war[27] and were well disposed to cooperate with government agencies, both before and after the onset of the Cold War. Although the full story of federal government involvement has yet to be told, the newly established Soviet area studies institutes and centers often had ties of one sort or another with government agencies and branches of the military services, a situation that was facilitated by the onset of the Cold War. The best known example is the collaboration between the US Air Force and Harvard's Russian Research Center to carry out the Refugee Interview Project. Beginning in 1948, the Air Force contracted with the Russian Research Center to fund a large-scale project involving Soviet refugees. It aimed at constructing a "working model" of Soviet society and delineating a social-psychological profile of its citizens in the event of atom bomb operations against the USSR. The project, which continued until 1954, generated four books and thirty-five articles.[28]

Cooperation between area centers and the U.S. government took other forms as well. Between 1946 and 1951, for example, Columbia's Russian Institute invited twenty members of the Department of State's Foreign Service to participate in the Institute in order "to improve their

---

[26] "Federally-Financed Research and Communication on Soviet Affairs: Capabilities and Needs," U.S. General Accounting Office, July 2, 1980, pp. 23-24.

[27] For example, Abram Bergson, Geroid T. Robinson, Alex Inkeles, Sidney Harcave, and Barrington Moore, Jr. had worked in the OSS; Alexander Dallin worked in Army Intelligence; Clyde Kluckhohn was involved in the U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey; John Hazard was in the U.S.S.R. Division of the Foreign Economic Administration; Robert F. Byrnes joined the Foreign Economic Administration and then the special Branch of Military Intelligence; Robert Tucker worked at the American Embassy in Moscow. Byrnes, *A History of Russian and East European Studies*, pp. 210; 247; O'Connell, "Social Structure and Sciences," p. 407. In addition, some future specialists obtained Russian language and area training in the Foreign Area and Language Curricula of the Army Specialized Training Program (for enlisted personnel) and the Civil Affairs Training Schools (for officers). Wallerstein, "The Unintended Consequences of Cold War Area Studies," p. 199.

[28] O'Connell, "Social Structure and Sciences," p. 332, 353, 385, 429-430. The project subsequently employed six dozen people in data collection and was headed by Raymond Bauer (field director) and Eugenia Hanfman (deputy director). Interviews were completed in 1951; data processing took place between 1951 and 1954. According to O'Connell, the Air Force reviewed the manuscript version of *How the Soviet System Works*: *Cultural, Psychological and Social Themes* (Cambridge, 1959) by Raymond A. Bauer, Alex Inkeles, and Clyde Kluckhohn, and removed reference to the Air Force as a source or partner in the project. Ibid., pp. 444-446. O'Connell's count of four books generated by the project may be wrong, depending on the definition of "generation." We can think of at least five such books.

knowledge and understanding and at the same time add another dimension to the student body by attending the Institute."[29] With the onset of the Cold War, the Soviet Union acquired new and urgent importance for national security. A 1991 SSRC report described the situation[30]:

> The ideological conflicts of the Cold War became an important motive force driving American Soviet studies. Government agencies became an important employer for Soviet studies specialists. At the same time, many of the specialists on the Soviet Union initially available to American universities were refugees from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Not surprisingly, the combination of these forces rapidly enlarged the field but heavily skewed the intellectual agenda toward policy studies. Because on-the-ground access was limited, close links developed between many American scholars of the region and the American intelligence agencies that were in a position to generate useful information on the Soviet Union.

Access to information about the Soviet Union was indeed one of the major problems facing American specialists. To improve this situation, the U.S. government negotiated the first US-Soviet scholarly exchange in 1958, and subsequently helped to fund the program in conjunction with private foundations. After the launching of the first Sputnik in October 1957, the Eisenhower administration persuaded Congress to pass the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) in 1958. In accordance with Title VI of NDEA, substantial support was channeled to area studies centers and individuals willing to study languages and areas considered critical to national security.[31] The scope and impact of this funding was considerable. Although the initial appropriation to Title VI was less than $500,000, it had expanded to $14 million in 1966.[32]

By the end of the 1950s, the basic institutional infrastructure for Soviet area studies had become established in the United States and has remained essentially intact ever since. The major pillars of this large and expanding edifice consisted of university-based area studies centers, the Joint Committee on Slavic Studies, and the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies (AAASS, established in 1948). They were supported financially by university administrations, large foundations, and the U.S. government. They were bolstered intellectually

---

[29] Byrnes, *A History of Russian and East European Studies*, p. 209. Byrnes notes that Geroid T.Robinson, the first director of the Russian Institute between 1946 and 1951, was "resolutely dispassionate" and "avoided government service and political programs" after 1945. Ibid., 215.
[30] "Beyond Soviet Studies," p. 7
[31] Wallerstein, "The Unintended Consequences of Cold War Area Studies," p. 209; John Richards, "In Defense of Area Studies," Occasional Paper no. 95-01. Global Forum Series, Center for International Studies, Duke University, January 1995, pp. 3-4. Under the Title VI program, the U.S. Office of Education has funded university centers "for the study of critical areas and their languages." Ten to twelve National Resource Centers have been funded for each world region.
[32] "Crossing Borders: Revitalizing Area Studies," p. 2. In 1961, the Fulbright Hays Fellowship was established and eventually came to include the countries of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

by specialized journals such as *Slavic Review* (a quarterly journal, with various titles, published by the AAASS from 1945 on), *The Russian Review* (a quarterly journal dating from 1941), *Problems of Communism* (a USIA publication dating from 1952), *Soviet Studies* and *Survey* (quarterlies published in Great Britain). They were assisted in their knowledge-production by research and daily reports of the Munich-based Radio Liberty, and aided by important translation services: *Current Digest of the Soviet Press* (founded in 1948 at Ohio State University); *Foreign Broadcast Information Service – Daily Report, Soviet Union*; and the *Joint Publications Research Service* (both produced by the US Government).

The 1960s marked a transitional decade for Soviet area studies, when turbulent domestic events (including the rise of popular movements among African-Americans, students, and women) combined with the Vietnam War to shift national priorities and intellectual agendas. As a consequence of these developments, foundations and government agencies began to turn "from international and foreign area studies to domestic problems."[33] In the course of the 1970s, funding for area studies generally and Soviet area studies in particular underwent a sharp decline. One telling indicator is the Ford Foundation, which had been a major source of funding. Its allocation for Soviet area studies dropped from $47 million in 1966 to slightly more than $2 million in 1979.[34]

There were, however, some countervailing forces in the 1970s. In 1975, the Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies, a division of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, was established with support from both the US Government and grants and gifts from foundations, corporations, and individuals. The Institute was intended to "bring scholars…into closer contact with interested persons from government, industry, and the press."[35] Three years later, a new funding agency was created by the US government: the National Council for Soviet and East European Research. Initially supported by the Department of Defense and the Department of State and subsequently assisted by the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency as well, but administered by an independent Board of Trustees composed entirely of academics from leading US universities, the National Council was designed to bring "the independent research efforts of qualified academic specialists to bear in broad areas of interest identified by the participating Government agencies."[36]

Spurred by the collapse of détente in the late-1970s, and by the renewed militancy in U.S.-Soviet relations during the first Reagan administration, large foundations turned their attention once again to Soviet studies. The Rockefeller Foundation gave million-dollar awards each to Columbia, Berkeley-Stanford, and UCLA-Rand to build innovative programs of research, training, and public education in Soviet foreign policy. The Carnegie Corporation and the MacArthur Foundation awarded large institutional grants to scholars and graduate students within leading Soviet area centers, and more

---

[33] Stephen F. Cohen, *Rethinking the Soviet Experience: Politics and History Since 1917* (New York and Oxford, 1985), pp. 3-4.
[34] Ibid., p. 4.
[35] "Federally-Financed Research," p. 24.
[36] Ibid., pp. 10, 25.

broadly within leading universities, to generate area and non-area knowledge pertinent to our understanding of the requisites of international security. As most of these grants went to the social sciences, the Mellon Foundation decided to right the imbalance by issuing large block grants to a number of leading Soviet area centers for funding of history and the humanities.

But by the early 1990s, a series of trends converged from several directions to place great stress once again on the fiscal solvency of post-Soviet (FSU) studies. Many of the foundation grants were nonrenewable, or went through limited numbers of renewals. More consequentially, the major foundations began to redirect a significant proportion of funds previously allocated to US institutions of higher education into the regions themselves, helping scholars and institutions within the FSU to develop expertise, organization, and community. At the same time, the trend in the social sciences toward cross-regional research and globalization themes led to a further redirection of foundation funds away from post-Soviet area studies *per se*, with the exception of US scholars working in collaboration with FSU counterparts.

Organizational changes with financial consequences accompanied these trends. The Social Science Research Council and the American Council of Learned Societies eliminated their "Joint Committees" on the Soviet Union and on East Europe, though SSRC continues to support area studies in other ways. A major exception to these generalizations has been the truly huge sums expended by the National Science Foundation and The Carnegie Corporation of New York on scholarly surveys of mass and elite opinion in the FSU, which has developed into a veritable cottage industry within post-Soviet studies.

In 1997 the Ford Foundation allocated four million dollars for the World Wide Fund for Area Studies, in an effort to encourage US institutions of higher education to develop new conceptions of area studies that could withstand the assaults on area studies implicit in the cross-regional and globalization tendencies within the social sciences. In addition, Ford allocated another four million dollars to "strengthen key organizations and scholarly associations working in area studies." Of this, two million has been awarded to the SSRC for international programs administered jointly with the ACLS.[37]

Meanwhile, the federal government began to reexamine the affordability of continuing contributions to Soviet/post-Soviet studies, given the disappearance of the "enemy" that needed to be "known," and given the fiscal crisis of U.S. government inherited from the Reagan years. This posed an imminent and major threat to both Title VI (Department of Education) and Title VIII ("The Soviet and East European Research and Training Act of 1983"). Title VI funding has declined in real dollars, but has thus far survived the ax, continuing to provide the base institutional funding of more than a

---

[37] "The Shifting Emphasis at Ford: A Sampling of $50-million in New Grants," *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*, May 1, 1997, p. 12. Apart from funds for SSRC and ACLS international programs, Ford allocated $95,000 for a project at the University of California at Berkeley for a workshop, conference, and volume on "Rethinking Area Studies."

dozen centers.[38] Title VIII has not yet been eliminated, but the many organizations it funds (IREX, the Kennan Institute, the National Council for Eurasian and East European Research,[39] and many others) may well be on the brink of losing that source. However, a new source of government funding was made available in 1991 through the National Security Education Act. Supported by the Department of Defense and the Central Intelligence Agency, the National Security Education Program (NSEP) is designed to "support graduate training of area studies specialists and study abroad for undergraduate students."[40]

All these sources of financial stringency were compounded by the fiscal crisis experienced by U.S. universities in the 1990s. Fewer positions are being refilled after retirement, death, and separation than had been the case in previous decades. More temporary academic staffing is taking place. In the post-Soviet field, job descriptions in political science increasingly seek the best "comparativist," regardless of geographic specialization. Few history departments are able to allocate three positions to cover Medieval Russian, Imperial Russian, and Soviet history; most will be able to fill only one or two of the three. Economics departments tend to be disinterested in area expertise when the opportunity cost is a theory or methodology position (which, in the present fiscal climate, it usually is). Slavic languages and literatures departments, in the face of declining student enrollments, can no longer justify their previous size to university administrators, and are contracting their faculties. Sociology and anthropology departments, which had few Soviet specialists to begin with, may hire FSU specialists in coming years, but these will sometimes be hires in other subfields of the discipline for which FSU interviewees just happened to produce the most innovative new scholarship.[41]

In the face of these converging fiscal pressures, the leading centers of research and training in post-Soviet studies have turned to private-sector fundraising as insurance against losses of their base funding. The goal – at Harvard, Columbia, Michigan, Stanford, Berkeley, and others – has been to build an endowment large enough to ensure that the center continues to flourish in perpetuity. To be sure, scholars at these centers continue to raise funds from foundations and other sources in support of their individual and collaborative research projects. But the basic infrastructural needs of the centers, precariously still funded by Title VI, and the need to support graduate students at the public

---

[38] It is worth noting that according to a recent study by the Ford Foundation, the Fulbright-Hays programs have declined 58% in purchasing power from the mid-1960s to 1995. By 1996, they had declined by 70%. Miriam A. Kazanjian, "Funding Trends for Selected Federal Programs Supporting Study and Research on World Wars Other Than the U.S.", 1996, cited in "Crossing Borders," p. 6 n. 2.

[39] The National Council for Soviet and East European Research was renamed after the collapse of communism.

[40] Richards, "In Defense of Area Studies," p. 14. The NSEP program is administered by the Department of Defense and supervised by a Presidential Board which includes the Secretary of Defense and the Director of the CIA. The program has drawn criticism from some area studies scholars seeking to avoid any linkage between scholars and the CIA.

[41] The unprecedented transformations taking place in the FSU and Eastern Europe hold promise of generating some genuine innovations in social and cultural theory, which may explain why specialists on this region will rise to the top of shortlists in sociology and anthropology departments.

universities, will increasingly be held hostage to the success of efforts to raise endowments. In some cases, it is safe to predict, incremental faculty positions will have to be justified, not just intellectually, but also with reference to the endowment promising to pay for the position.

The formal organization of Soviet studies in the United States has not changed dramatically since the collapse of communism; certainly, it has not changed as much as the intellectual agenda. As before, post-Soviet studies is marked by about fifteen major centers in leading universities, funded by the Department of Education. Among these, the most prominent centers, as before, are (in alphabetical order) Berkeley, Columbia, Harvard, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Stanford, UCLA, and the University of Washington. The bulk of published area research in most disciplines continues to be written by scholars associated with these centers.

Some minor changes have occurred in the names attached to these centers. Those named after ethnicities or geography (e.g. Slavic and East European studies; Russian studies) have not had to change their names in response to the political revolutions in those locales. Those named after political entities (e.g. Soviet studies) have renamed themselves in one way or another: usually "post-Soviet," "Eurasian," or some combination of the two. Frequently, the nominal changes have mirrored, not informed, both the changes in research agendas within the field and the preference of foundation and governmental funders to avoid nominal anachronisms.

But some more significant changes have occurred, with still more changes in the offing. One type of change has been organizational: a reconsideration of the earlier practice of incorporating under one center the entirety of both the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. This format had earlier been a product of the Soviet Union's and the Soviet bloc's existence in the context of the Cold War. Not surprisingly, these factors, coupled with the geographical propinquity and political interconnectedness of the countries of the region, suggested a political-organizational, rather than a cultural or historical, definition of the "area."

With the disintegration of the Soviet bloc and the USSR, and the end of the Cold War, pressures immediately arose for a redefinition of "area" and a reshuffling of academic jurisdictions. In some universities, this has resulted in pressures for a formal separation of East European studies from FSU studies, and the inclusion of the former within centers or institutes devoted to the study of "Europe." In some universities, FSU studies and centers have been incorporated into European studies institutes. Similarly, Middle Eastern studies centers have looked to expand their purview into former Soviet Central Asia, though we are not aware of major universities at which such acts of formal transfer have taken place. Most frequently, we have seen the emergence of new programs, free-standing or within Europe or FSU centers, for research and instruction on Central Asia, the Caucasus, or the Baltic states. But the human capital to staff such programs is currently spread very thin; few scholars working on the FSU possess the language skills now required for on-site research in FSU states other than Russia.

Area Studies and the Disciplines

From its inception in the second half of the 1940s, Soviet studies as a field of inquiry encompassed many disciplines, subject areas, and varieties of scholarship. Many of the scholars who led the way in creating Soviet area studies centers specialized in history, anthropology, sociology, economics, and psychology.[42] Over time, however, political scientists became more and more central to Soviet area studies and the other social sciences – especially sociology and anthropology – receded in importance.

In 1959, there were about thirty sociologists with professional training in Russian studies.[43] Ten or twenty years later, the number had dwindled to far fewer. If we look at the disciplinary distribution of the Ford Foundation's Foreign Area Fellowships between 1952 and 1972, we will see why. Ford made a total of 469 awards to graduate students in the Soviet and East European fields during these two decades. Historians received by far the largest number of awards (178 or 38% of the total); political scientists received the second largest number (112 or 24%) followed by language and literature (49 or 8%) and economics (48 or 8%). History and literature – disciplines relatively remote from the Cold War – together received 46% of the funding from this important source. Throughout this entire period, only six sociologists and two anthropologists were awarded fellowships.[44]

The trends in disciplinary specialization coincided with intellectual and practical developments in the field. A combination of circumstances – including the obstacles to primary research and an aversion to Soviet cultural products – drew historians and specialists in Russian literature to the period before 1917. Since field research in the Soviet Union was extremely limited for American scholars (even after the creation of an exchange program with the Soviet Union in 1958), anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists – who had played such a leading role in Harvard's Refugee Interview Project – turned their attention elsewhere once that unique source of data had been exhausted. By the 1960s, research on the Soviet Union was mainly carried on by three groups: literary scholars studying "the thaw" in Russian culture after Stalin's death, and political scientists and economists attempting to make sense of the post-Stalin era. The latter groups of "Sovietologists" faced formidable research obstacles and were prone, for either ideological or practical reasons, to place "heavy emphasis…on events and personalities in Moscow, on 'Kremlinology' – psyching-out the conflicts and motivations of the top political and

---

[42] Geroid T. Robinson, founder and first director of Columbia's Russian Institute, was an historian; Harvard's Russian Research Center's first executive committee included the sociologists Talcott Parsons and Alex Inkeles, and anthropologist Clyde Klukhohn (also Director of the Russian Research Center); the "Field Director" of the Harvard Refugee Interview Project, Raymond Bauer, was a psychology professor. Berkeley's Slavic Institute was founded by historian Robert J. Kerner.

[43] Fisher, *American Research in Russia*, p. 77.

[44] Table 1: Distribution of Fellowships by Disciplines and Geographic Area of Interest – 1952-1972, *Directory: Foreign Areas Fellows 1952-1972* (Joint Committee on the Foreign Area Fellowship Program of the ACLS and SSRC, 1973).

military leadership."[45] Largely political scientists undertook research on Soviet history as well as contemporary developments.[46]

In the 1970s, a new source of data became available with the emigration to the West of hundreds of thousands of Soviet Jews (and some Soviet Germans). Several major projects were created to take advantage of this new research opportunity. The United States Government allocated about ten million dollars to interdisciplinary teams of scholars to conduct mass surveys, with a sample of 3000 respondents and intensive interviews with scores of specialists among the emigres. The Soviet Interview Project drew in political scientists, economists, and a few sociologists, and made important contributions to understanding how Soviet society had changed between the 1930s and the 1970s. It resulted in dozens of articles published in area and disciplinary journals, as well as several book-length volumes.[47] The Berkeley-Duke Project on the Second Economy of the USSR was created in 1977 by Gregory Grossman and Vladimir Treml. The questionaire sample and intensive interview sample were of a magnitude comparable to the Soviet Interview Project and the project yielded numerous occasional papers, chapters and articles. Among other accomplishments, the Berkeley-Duke Project highlighted the important role of the Soviet "second economy."

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, significant changes have taken place in the disciplinary distribution of area specialists generally and within particular disciplines. For the first time since the 1940s and 1950s, sociologists and anthropologists – at both the faculty and graduate student levels – have embarked on research in the field of Russian, Soviet, and post-Soviet studies. Some are established scholars who have been drawn to the region by the remarkable changes taking place there; others are young scholars and graduate students who have recently entered the field. These disciplines are likely to witness a small but significant influx of students eager to take advantage of the new opportunities for ethnographic, field, survey, and other types of research in these newly independent states of the FSU.

The demise of the Soviet Union has also led, paradoxically, to the legitimation of Soviet history as a subfield within history departments. Before that time, highly restricted access to archival sources kept historians focused mainly on the Civil War period and the 1920s. While Russian archives are not completely open even today, enough has changed to allow for meaningful archival research on virtually the entirety of Soviet social, economic, and political history. New works of scholarship are appearing that draw upon Soviet sources formerly unavailable to scholars.

Even post-World War II diplomatic history has enjoyed an informational bonanza. The Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars, in Washington, DC houses the "Cold War International History

---

[45] "Beyond Soviet Studies," p. 8.
[46] Cohen, *Rethinking the Soviet Experience*, makes this point, p. 5.
[47] See, in particular, James Millar, ed., *Politics, Work, and Daily life in the USSR: A Survey of Former Soviet Citizens* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), and Donna Bahry, "Society Transformed?: Rethinking the Social Roots of Perestroika," *Slavic Review* 52, 3, Fall 1993, pp. 512-554.

Project," which has helped to induce further declassification of Soviet diplomatic documents from the first decades of the Cold War.[48] Brown and Harvard Universities have organized conferences of former Soviet and US high officials, which have greatly deepened our understanding of the Cuban Missile Crisis, the rise and decline of détente in the 1970s, and the winding down of the Cold War during the Gorbachev era.[49] The National Security Archive in Washington, DC, has accomplished a great deal in declassifying both Soviet and US documents from recent decades of Cold War history.[50] These and other projects have fostered major advances in our understanding of the factors that led the Cold War to last as long as it did. As a result of informational *glasnost'* now enjoyed by those conducting research on all aspects of Soviet history, history departments are slowly but steadily seeking to hire historians of the Soviet period.

The locus of research on post-Soviet economics has shifted as a result of the collapse of the USSR and the efforts to build market economies where once command economies were the rule. The World Bank, OECD, EBRD, and other international organizations have hired, full-time or part-time, numerous academic specialists (or economics PhDs) on Soviet and East European economies, who conduct research on the transformations of these economies and publish the results in outlets of those organizations. Some of the best work on these economic transitions, therefore, appears not in area or disciplinary journals, but rather in periodicals, ephemera, and working papers of the international organizations themselves. Moreover, the resistance of economics departments to hiring area specialists, in light of their preference for hiring individuals noted principally for their contributions to econometrics, game theory, and formal modeling, has led a good number of area economists to work for international organizations and the United States Government by default.

A decline in undergraduate student enrollments in courses on Russian language, politics, and history has taken place on many campuses during the 1990s. The reasons for this decline are mysterious, but we can speculate. Historically, enrollments have surged during crucial turning points: at the height of the Cold War in the late 1950s and early 1960s; after the invasion of Afghanistan and the collapse of the limited detente of the 1970s; and during the excitement of the Gorbachev era. But since then, Russia's loss of status as the "other superpower," and her lack of luster as a place in which to invest one's scholarly dreams and personal fortunes, have led student interests to drift more toward enrollment in courses on other areas, such as East Asia.[51] This could change at some point, though it does not seem likely that we will shortly see a resurgence of enrollments. In the meantime, one of the

---

[48] See the Project's irregularly published *Bulletin* and *Working Papers Series*, which compile translations of recently declassified documents on specific episodes in the history of the Cold War, and analyses of the value-added of those documents; they are distributed free of charge.

[49] Several volumes on the Cuban Missile Crisis, based on these conferences, have been published under the editorship of James Blight (e.g. James G. Blight and David A. Welch, *On the Brink: Americans and Soviets Reexamine the Cuban Missile Crisis,* 2nd ed., New York, 1990).

[50] For an overview of what they have accomplished on this score, consult their website at <http://www.seas.gwu.edu/nsarchive>.

[51] It is noteworthy that the decline in Russian studies coincides with a more general decline in the enrollments in Western European studies in some disciplines, such as history.

most visible consequences has been the diminution in size of many departments of Slavic languages and literatures.

At the graduate level, interest in pursuing PhDs on postcommunist affairs remains as high as before. Whereas once the great majority of graduate students specialized in the study of Russia and/or the Soviet Union, today many are focusing on Eastern Europe or on non-Russian states of the FSU. At the same time, the job market seems to be constricting to the point that PhDs from the leading centers, particularly in disciplines such as political science and history, will have increasing difficulty finding tenure-track positions in academia.[52] In part, this is a function of the fiscal crisis of US universities. Future opportunities for area studies specialists within certain disciplines may depend, in large measure, on the intellectual potential of new and unprecedented approaches to research in the field of post-communism.

Intellectual Trends

Soviet area studies have, over the decades, made significant contributions to our understanding and conceptualization of Soviet-type societies. The most well-known and most controversial concept generated during the early years of Soviet area studies was that of "totalitarianism." The concept was put forward in the 1950s to illuminate the common, essential coordinates of the Stalinist and fascist systems.[53] With the defeat of Nazi Germany and fascist Italy, the term continued to be applied to communist systems more generally. With the changes in state-society relations following "de-Stalinization" of these systems, Western scholars began to debate the usefulness of the term and its continued applicability to the Soviet-type system.[54]

The totalitarian model was both influential and widely applied in the U.S., particularly by political scientists writing in the 1950s and early 1960s. But the model was not applied with either consistency or uniformity, in part because of definitional confusion. Some scholars used the term to mean "the total state," one that monopolizes the polity, society, and economy. Others used the term to mean a total state marked by terroristic despotism a la Hitler and Stalin. The result of this confusion was that a good deal of scholarly energy was wasted in terminological disputes and

---

[52] It has been the case for at least a decade that students pursuing PhDs in economics are advised against defining themselves as area specialists.

[53] The seminal volumes were Carl J. Friedrich, ed., *Totalitarianism* (Cambridge, 1954) and Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (Cambridge, 1956).

[54] For two notable examples, see Cohen, *Rethinking the Soviet Experience* and Martin Malia ("Z"), "To the Stalin Mausoleum," *Daedalus*, 119, 2:95-344, Spring, 1990. A review of these controversies and an alternative approach is put forth in George Breslauer, "In Defense of Sovietology," *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 1992, 8, 3:197-238. See also the recent book on the subject by Abbott Gleason, *Totalitarianism: The Inner History of the Cold War* (New York, 1995). The concept of totalitarianism has come to occupy a central place in the discourse of Russian scholars and publicists in Russia and Eastern Europe in the 1980s and 1990s.

evasions when post-Stalin changes maintained the total state but eliminated the terroristic despotism.

But already in the first half of the 1950s, some scholars avoided these debates by thinking of the Soviet experience more broadly. They conceptualized Soviet rule as a distinct form of dictatorship that coincided with a particular stage in the process of modernization. Several versions of this "developmental" approach entered into the general discourse of Soviet area studies. Proponents of this approach proceeded from contrasting theoretical positions but reached the general conclusion that the Soviet system would eventually be subject to change as modernization proceeded.[55]

Following the de-Stalinization campaign of the late 1950s and early 1960s, debates between totalitarian and developmental approaches centered on analyses of the extent to which the system was adapting to changing societal and environmental conditions. The focus tended to be on changes in elite composition and regime policies, and only secondarily on broader social groups. The research obstacles facing Sovietologists partly account for the focus on elites; at least information was available concerning official pronouncements, the public conduct of elites, policy changes, and the backgrounds of elites. By contrast, almost nothing was known about non-elite groups in society, especially life outside the capital cities (Moscow and St. Petersburg) where research by American scholars was generally obstructed or forbidden by the Soviet authorities. Given this situation, Harvard's Refugee Interview Project provided a unique and valuable source of information on the lives and perceptions of ordinary people.[56]

Research agendas and orientations began to shift during the 1960s and early 1970s. Among political scientists, two major points of view emerged concerning the trajectory of the Soviet system: rationalization and degeneration.[57] Both approaches moved beyond the totalitarian model, often drawing upon Max Weber for inspiration. There was renewed interest in theories that drew upon the developmental approach, with an emphasis now on the transformative impact of technocratic rationalization. The degeneration argument took several forms but one of the most influential versions applied the concept of "neo-traditionalism" to Soviet-type regimes and political culture.[58]

Soviet foreign policy studies were also marked by debates over the sources and evolution of Soviet international behavior. Numerous volumes of revisionist literature on the origins of the Cold War argued that Stalinist foreign policy was driven largely by defensive concerns, which was a minority position in the Sovietological literature of the 1950s and 1960s. Post-Stalin changes in

---

[55] For a Marxist variant of this kind of argument, see Isaac Deutscher, *Russia: What Next?* (New York, 1953). A Weberian approach can be found in Barrington Moore, Jr., *Terror and Progress – USSR* (Cambridge, 1954).

[56] See, especially, Alex Inkeles, *The Soviet Citizen* (Cambridge, MA, 1959).

[57] For a discussion of these issues, see Breslauer, "In Defense of Sovietology," pp. 222-227.

[58] Ken Jowitt's influential articles (beginning in 1974) on this theme appear in *New World Disorder: The Leninist Extinction* (Berkeley, 1992).

Soviet foreign policy yielded heightened ambiguity and consequent debate about the interpretation of Soviet actions on the international scene. At least three paradigms emerged (some would say five) that ran the gamut from viewing Soviet foreign policy as a product, at one extreme, of a systemic need for expansion that could only be countered through credible, military deterrence to a view of the phenomenon, at the other extreme, as defensive, driven by fear, and capable of being altered through reassurance.[59]

Novel approaches and subject matter can also be discerned in historical research during this period, dealing with intellectual history, the history of state institutions and government policies, and particularly, labor and society. Inspired by Leopold Haimson's 1964-1965 articles on urban Russia between 1905 and 1917[60] and Edward Thompson's monumental study, *The Making of the English Working Class* (1966), historians of Russia began to turn their attention for the first time to empirical research on lower class groups and popular movements that brought the Bolsheviks to power. This research, which drew on Soviet archival and other primary sources and was strongly influenced by Western European studies in the fields of labor and social history, aimed at providing an account of the Russian revolutions "from below." The trend toward history "from below" also stimulated research on related topics, such as peasants and women. Such studies became possible because scholars could take advantage of the IUCTG and IREX programs and spend up to nine months conducting research in Soviet libraries and archives, in a few cases including those in provincial cities.

By the 1980s, social historians of Russia gathered momentum in their efforts to construct documented social histories of the early-Soviet period, most notably, the Civil War, the New Economic Policy, and the First Five-Year Plans.[61] Following the examples set by Moshe Lewin, Sheila Fitzpatrick, and a few others in the 1960s and 1970s, social historians found ingenious means of gaining access to selected primary sources in order to shed new light on some of the most compelling and complex issues in Soviet history. The overriding question in historical studies – why did the Soviet experiment lead to the Gulag? – was hotly debated by historians, who focused on a variety of different explanations, variously emphasizing ideology and culture,

---

[59] For an overview and categorization of diverse perspectives in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, see William Welch, *American Images of Soviet Foreign Policy: An Inquiry into Recent Appraisals from the Academic Community* (New Haven, 1970).

[60] Leopold Haimson, "The Problem of Social Stability in Urban Russia, 1905-1917," *Slavic Review*, part 1, vol. 23, no. 4 (December 1964), pp. 619-642; part 2, vol. 24, no. 1 (March 1965), pp. 1-22.

[61] A major stimulus for these effort came from the Seminar in Twentieth-Century Russian and Soviet Social History, organized by Moshe Lewin and Alfred Rieber of the University of Pennsylvania. The seminar met for the first time in 1980. Subsequent meetings focussed on the Russian and Soviet peasantry (1982), the Imperial and Soviet bureaucracy (1983), the social history of Soviet Russia during the Civil War (1984), the New Economic Policy (1986). Work presented at these seminars was subsequently published in several edited volumes.

leadership, national character, and according to a new "revisionist" approach, pressure from lower levels of Soviet society.[62]

The initiation of Gorbachev's reforms allowed scholars to observe a real-world test of the reformability of the Soviet system, behavioral dispositions of the Soviet population, and the transformability of Soviet foreign policies. Much debate, among members of the policy community and academics alike, concerned the extent to which Gorbachev's unfolding policies and rhetoric indicated his sincerity about overhauling the Soviet system ("is he for real?") and his capacity to do so ("if he is for real, can he get away with it?"). As Gorbachev's reforms, and foreign policy changes, became increasingly far-reaching, scholarship concentrated more on the causes and consequences of the changes: the implications of each for our thinking about the nature of the prior system ("where did Gorbachev come from?"), its reformability ("can there be a 'third way' between statist socialism and market democracy"?), and the potential assertiveness of the Soviet population. Not surprisingly, those most skeptical about the reformability of the system tended to be those who embraced some variant of totalitarian imagery of the old system, while those most optimistic tended to embrace some variant of a modernization paradigm. As the Soviet Union approached collapse in 1991, totalitarian theorists appeared to have the better of the argument about the reformability of the system, while modernization theorists had the better of the argument about the diversity of perspectives within the old regime, and the diversity of interests within society, that allowed a Gorbachev to emerge and implement his reforms.[63]

The substantive intellectual agenda of Soviet studies did not deepen very greatly during the Gorbachev era. To be sure, the excitement generated by Gorbachev's increasingly radical changes enriched the field with a multiplicity of novel observations of policy changes and societal reactions; students of the Brezhnev era were being rewarded for their patience with levels of excitement equaled

---

[62] Cohen observed in 1985 that "some of the younger social and institutional historians of the Stalinist 1930s…tend to emphasize what they consider to have been modernizing or otherwise progressive developments, such as industrialization, urbanization, social mobility, mass culture, and administrative rationalism, while minimizing or obscuring the colossal human tragedies and material losses caused by Stalin's brutal collectivization of the peasantry, mass terror, and system of forced labor camps." *Rethinking the Soviet Experience*, p. 33.

[63] It is worth recording here that *Marxist analyses* encompassed a wide band of theorists about the USSR. Trotskyist analyses treated the system as bureaucratic-statist; their perspectives most closely resembled those of the non-Marxist totalitarian theorists. "Democratic socialists" among Marxists, at the other extreme, held out hope for the evolution of the system toward a socialist (not "social") democracy. These analysts more closely resembled the non-Marxist "modernization" theorists. What is most striking about American Sovietology was how little attention it paid to Marxist literature on the USSR, except to dismiss it in passing (e.g., "in contrast to Marxism, the economic base did not determine the political superstructure"). The best Marxist analyses of the USSR tended to be concentrated in non-mainstream or sectarian journals (e.g. *Telos*, *The Socialist Review*). Only very occasionally, they would appear in the mainstream British journal, *Soviet Studies*.

only by the tedium of the previous twenty years. But debates still concerned the implications of current events for our thinking about totalitarian versus modernization images of the old political-social-economic system, and for our thinking about the viability of a democratic socialism. Comparative referents employed to think about the nature and prospects of the system did not extend much beyond that. There was some effort to import concepts and propositions from the literature on "transitions from authoritarianism," but these had not developed very far before the Soviet system collapsed and a new intellectual agenda emerged.

What most changed in Soviet studies during the Gorbachev era was the methodological repertoire of the field. *Glasnost'* increasingly diminished the level of data poverty that had hobbled the field since its inception. From a trickle in 1986, *glasnost'* opened a floodgate by 1989-90; censorship declined dramatically; increasingly sensitive archives were opened both to Soviet and non-Soviet scholars; revelations about the past and the present gushed forth; both scholarly and cultural creativity were allowed increasingly to express themselves. This had profound implications for Soviet specialists in all disciplines. Political scientists could reevaluate Soviet political history based on memoirs, archives, and revelations. Political sociologists in all disciplines could suddenly go beyond these sources to study Soviet society itself through direct, ethnographic observation, participant observation, mass and elite surveys, and related tools of scholarly investigation in "open" societies. Economists were now able more systematically to compare their previous statistical aggregations with a much-widened base of statistics and anecdotes about Soviet economic realities.

Anthropologists, like sociologists, were no longer treated largely as *personae non gratae* by Soviet officials. Students of Soviet nationalities suddenly were able to examine ethnicity in Soviet society and to do so in the republics of the USSR; previously, this had been one of the most heavily censored, off-limits realms of inquiry. Students of Russian and Soviet history more generally were now able to reevaluate all the major issues that had animated debates among historians of the tsarist and Soviet eras, based on exciting new flows of information from previously closed or restricted archives. Students of Soviet literature enjoyed benefits similar to those of the historians, including newly opened archives, published memoirs, and oral histories. Moreover, taking advantage of the "new historicism" in literary studies, with its emphasis on historical and especially cultural contextualization of literary texts, some specialists in Soviet (and Russian) literature began to focus on hitherto neglected topics in Soviet culture.

In addition to new sources of information, scholarship in all disciplines benefited from new-found opportunities for collaboration with Soviet colleagues. After an initial period of caution and disorientation, Soviet scholars became increasingly emboldened to speak their minds (and to disagree both with each other and with official policy) at international conferences, to use their contacts to wedge open new archives, to expand the limits of permissible inquiry, and to arrange for genuinely collaborative research projects with foreign colleagues. Increasingly, Western scholarly journals published articles authored or co-authored by Soviet scholars, though the decimation of Soviet social

science by the old regime, and the heavy politicization of Soviet life, encouraged a polemical or publicistic style that frustrated many a Western co-author and journal editor.[64]

While the Gorbachev era opened huge vistas for overcoming the data poverty of the field, scholarship was still confined by its single-country focus (which limited inter-country comparisons that might have tested causal propositions) and by large uncertainty about the appropriate comparative referents for thinking about the type of transition under way in the USSR. These confining conditions were to change profoundly as a result of the collapse of the USSR.

Post-Soviet Area Studies

With the demise of the communist system came the discrediting of conventional narratives (both Western and Soviet) about the fate of Russia and the Soviet Union in the twentieth century. The era of communist domination had concluded, abruptly and unexpectedly, and now the "story" of Soviet rule had not just a beginning and a middle but also, miraculously, an end! The end of the Soviet era required not just an explanation for the concluding years and months of the regime that had once seemed so stable to so many. It also required a reconceptualization of the entire seventy-four years of Soviet power. As Allan Wildman put in 1996: "The abrupt collapse of the Soviet Union has deflated our shopworn scenarios that turned on 1917 and Stalinism, and the present challenge is to devise new ways of representing the past, discovering new trajectories around which to weave a story."[65]

Western scholars since 1991 have gradually but steadily begun to register this need to reconceptualize the entire project of comprehending the Soviet era. This has taken a variety of forms, including the study of hitherto neglected cultural dimensions; identities, traditions and collective behavior of national and ethnic minorities and political and other outcasts in the Soviet Union; themes such as space, time, trust, folklore, and collectivism; and practices such as funerals, shamanism, black markets, sexuality, and civic activism.[66] Much of this new and original research draws upon the theories and methods associated with the "cultural turn" that has been so influential in historical studies more generally since the late 1970s. Practitioners of these approaches can be found in a wide range of disciplines, encompassing both the social sciences and the humanities.

After 1991, fifteen independent countries had come into existence where before only one had stood. All of them shared cultural and other legacies of having been a part of the USSR; all of them suffered the severe disorganization and disorientation attendant upon the collapse of the old system; and all of them were seeking to find their way in an era of "postcommunism." But what their separate existences made possible was the emergence within political science, economics, and sociology of a genuine subfield of inquiry that might be called "comparative postcommunism."

---

[64] Few Soviet social scientists shared the methodological standards of data-collection, analysis, and reportage of results that were dominant within US social sciences.
[65] "Who Writes Our Scripts?" *The Russian Review*, vol. 55, no. 2 (April 1996), p. v.
[66] Most of these topics were among those funded by SSRC Fellowships and Grants 1991-1996.

Given the similarities of their recent legacies and current circumstances, but given the numerous differences among them in precommunist heritage, ethnic composition, resource endowments, location, and mode of transition from communism,[67] these fifteen states provided the ideal laboratory for structured, focused comparisons of their trajectories of postcommunist development.[68] Moreover, regional and ethnic differentiation *within* many of these newly independent states led to a burst of inter*regional* comparisons, within and across these states, that enrich the comparative exercise by allowing for still greater variations along both dependent and independent variables.[69] More broadly, but not within the purview of this essay, the field of postcommunism cast its comparative net even more widely, encompassing the countries of the former Soviet bloc in Eastern Europe, as well as the former Yugoslavia and Albania, which had similar legacies of communism and faced similar challenges of postcommunism.[70]

Collapse of the USSR has led to a proliferation of analogues with which to conceptualize the nature of postcommunism. The totalitarianism versus modernization debate about the nature of the old system finds echoes in debates over how to conceptualize the "Leninist legacy" that constrains or shapes the scope and nature of the transition.[71] But beyond that, scholars have been struck by the diverse challenges facing these countries, and the implications of those challenges for how we think about the nature of this transition. The challenges include: (1) how to build a viable state on the ruins of the previous state; (2) how to construct a viable "nation" (a sense of "we-feeling" and common identification) among the peoples of these new states; (3) how to deal with forces pushing for democratization of the state; (4) how to stabilize, marketize, privatize, and demilitarize the economy; (5) how to integrate the economy into the global capitalist economy; and (6) how to define one's identity, interests, and role in the international political order.

---

[67]The Central Asian states, Moldova, and Belarus had not experienced the rise of large national liberation movements" in the late-1980s.

[68] For a most recent example, see Joel S. Hellman, "Winners Take All: The Politics of Partial Reform in Postcommunist Transitions," *World Politics*, 50, 2, January 1998, pp. 203-234; for an earlier, book-length study, see Jane I. Dawson, *Eco-Nationalism: Anti-Nuclear Activism and National Identity in Russia, Lithuania, and Ukraine* (Durham, NC, 1996). For looser comparisons of trajectories among FSU countries, see the ten-volume series, *The International Politics of Eurasia*, edited by Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrott (Armonk, NY, 1994-1998); also, Ian Bremmer and Ray Taras, *New States, New Politics: Building the Post-Soviet Nations* (New York, 1997), and Timothy J. Colton and Robert C. Tucker, *Patterns in Post-Soviet Leadership* (Boulder, CO, 1995).

[69] For example, M. Steven Fish, *Democracy from Scratch* (Princeton,, 1995); Kathryn Stoner-Weiss, *Local Heroes* (Princeton, 1997); Mary McAuley, *Russia's Politics of Uncertainty* (New York, 1997).

[70] An effort to integrate the lessons of such comparison is Leslie Holmes, *Post-Communism: An Introduction* (Durham, NC, 1997).

[71] Ken Jowitt, *New World Disorder: The Leninist Extinction* (Berkeley, CA, 1992); Beverly Crawford and Arend Lijphart, eds., *Liberalization and Leninist Legacies* (Berkeley, CA, 1997).

In terms of the sheer volume of scholarship, a glance at the tables of contents and titles of "books received" in area and disciplinary journals would show that most published works have focused on the ways these countries are dealing with the challenges of democratizing their polities, marketizing their economies, and integrating into the international economic and political orders. Moreover, the bulk of primary-source scholarship deals with Russia, a reflection of the fact that most Soviet specialists needed only to know the Russian language to conduct research on the questions that Soviet authorities allowed them to study. To be sure, significant work is being published on matters of state-building and nation-building, demilitarization, and the transformation of foreign relations. But the concern with constructing a marketized, liberal democracy that is integrated into global capitalism seems to gain the large majority of scholarly attention.

One indicator of the new directions in scholarship is the proliferation of periodicals, journals, and information sources. Some preexisting journals simply changed their names and broadened their focus.[72] Others are newly created and devoted in whole or in part to tracking the transition experience in the FSU and Eastern Europe: *Demokratizatsiya*; *East European Constitutional Review*; *Transitions* (Open Media Research Institute); *Transition* (The World Bank), *Communist Economies and Economic Transformation*; *Russian Economic Trends*; to mention but a few. A major cross-regional journal appeared in 1990, *Journal of Democracy*, which regularly devotes a portion of its coverage to democratization processes in Eastern Europe and the FSU. Internet sources of information have also proliferated, with daily compilations of information and interpretation reaching our computer screens, in some cases free-of-charge, with such frequency and volume that no scholar could possibly keep up with the flood.[73] New newspapers, magazines, journals, and internet-based information outlets have also proliferated *within* the FSU. Western libraries can barely afford to maintain subscriptions to all the important new sources, forcing scholars to make hard choices about recommended subscriptions.

The proliferation of new topics has also led to a much-broader integration of post-Soviet, Western scholarship into the dominant theoretical concerns of the social science disciplines. A significantly larger proportion of articles in *disciplinary* journals is now devoted to analysis and conceptualization of changes in the postcommunist area. Similarly, in area journals, the theoretical repertoire of publications has vastly expanded. Footnotes now proliferate that cite theories of state-building, nation-building, democratization, marketization, and the transformation of international systems. While the dominant analogies used initially to capture these processes was that of "transitions to democracy" and "early capitalism," those comparative referents were rapidly supplemented by analogies with: early-European state-building and nation-building projects; "transition to feudalism"; Third World stagnation or "dependency"; the transformation of earlier international systems; and the

---

[72] Thus, *Soviet Studies* became *Europe-Asia Studies*; *Problems of Communism* became *Problems of Post-Communism*; *Studies in Comparative Communism* became *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*; *Soviet Economy* became *Post-Soviet Affairs*; *Soviet Geography* became *Post-Soviet Geography and Economics*.

[73] For example, *Johnson's Russia List*, *Jamestown Prism*, *Jamestown Monitor*, *Radio Liberty (RL) Daily Reports,* to note but a few.

collapse of earlier imperial systems.[74] With respect to all these theoretical concerns, scholars have sought either to use theory to help illuminate postcommunist processes of change or to enrich theory by demonstrating how distinctive features of postcommunism create unprecedented "solutions" to familiar challenges.

Collaboration with post-Soviet scholars in the study of these phenomena has expanded significantly beyond the levels achieved in the Gorbachev era, as has the frequency of publication in Western journals by scholars from the FSU. Post-Soviet scholars have advantages that few Western scholars can match: native linguistic skills; a "feel" for the situation on the ground; and privileged access to sources. Their Western collaborators have the education in social science theories and methodologies, as well as experience in writing to Western journals' epistemological, ontological, and discursive standards, that most post-Soviet scholars sorely lack. We are currently witnessing a growing trend that combines the best of each of these: scholarship produced by talented Soviet colleagues who have been educated in, and received PhDs from, Western universities.

The proliferation of theoretical interests has also led a considerable number of Western theorists, who had not previously worked on the region, to devote themselves to the study of the postcommunist world. Some of them lack the linguistic skills and collaborate with post-Soviet scholars to compensate for that drawback.[75] Others have gone so far as to learn new languages.[76] In either case, their inquiries are informed by their in-depth familiarity with analogous phenomena elsewhere. The purposes of their studies are varied. Some are driven by prescriptive concerns: to suggest strategies by which post-Soviet decisionmakers might attain positive goals (economic stability and growth; marketization and privatization; democratization; stable federalism; etc.) or avoid negative ones (ethnic conflict; political and social instability; poverty, ill health, and environmental disaster, etc.). Others are driven by predictive concerns: to foretell the prospect that post-Soviet countries will attain these goods or avoid these negative outcomes. Still others are most concerned with theory-development: use of the postcommunist laboratory as a means of identifying novel solutions to familiar problems (e.g. new approaches to nation-building, constitutionalism, multilateral organization) or of enriching our understanding of the explanatory power of varied causal factors (culture, ethnicity, class, gender, region, institutions, economics, leadership, etc.) at the micro, meso, or macro levels.

Much of the research on the Soviet system before *perestroika* had focused on "regime studies" (among political scientists and political sociologists), on aggregate economic trends (among

---

[74] From the latter perspective, Russia was the "core" of an "empire" that included an "inner" and an "outer" periphery: the fourteen other republics of the USSR, and the Eastern European members of the Warsaw Pact, respectively. For excellent work in this genre, see Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrott, *The End of Empire? The Transformation of the USSR in Comparative Perspective* (Armonk, NY, 1997). On the "transition to feudalism," see Katherine Verdery, *What was Socialism and What Comes Next?* (Princeton, 1996).

[75] For example, Mikhail Myagkov, Peter Ordeshook, and Alexander Sobyanin, "The Russian Electorate, 1991-1996," *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 13, 2, April-June 1997, pp. 134-166.

[76] For example, David Laitin, *Identity in Formation: The Russian-Speaking Populations in the Near Abroad* (Ithaca, NY, 1998).

economists), and on social stratification (among the few sociologists). These narrow agendas, and their focus largely on "macro-level" phenomena, were necessitated by Soviet censorship. A good number of political scientists had worked on Soviet local government, but their studies did not benefit from candid interviews or access to information about the most important issues (such as the size and sources of local-governmental budgets). This too has changed in the post-Soviet era. Research is now taking place on the full range of micro-level phenomena, under constraints that mirror only those found in the study of any region.[77] The bulk of research falls under the analytical categories delineated above (democratization, marketization, nation-building, etc.). But what is noteworthy about those categories is that they are amenable to study at any level of analysis (micro, meso, and macro), depending on the formulation of the research question. This facilitates comparisons between phenomena and trends in the postcommunist area and those in other regions of the world, an intellectual trend that has also burgeoned during the past decade.[78]

There was always a cross-area component to the study of the Soviet Union. The totalitarian model grew out of observation of the similarities between Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia, and the dissimilarities between either of these and traditional, "authoritarian" dictatorships. The developmental approach to Stalinism treated the Soviet regime as a type of modernizing dictatorship that sought to break out of the constraints on economic and political transformations found in most Third World countries.[79] In accordance with this general type of approach, the *post-Stalinist* USSR was viewed as a product of the Stalinist developmental experience: a society that had achieved certain features of "modernity" and "industrialism" analogous to those in Western Europe and North America, which raised pressures on the regime to adapt its political-organizational and administrative formats accordingly.

Proponents of these ways of thinking about the USSR sometimes sought to test convergence theory, which was popular in the 1950s, and which posited that economic development leads inexorably to pressures for pluralism and liberal democracy.[80] Totalitarian theorists emphasized the unique features of the Soviet political system, and its inability to tolerate, much less sponsor, such convergence. Those who embraced some variants of the developmental model tended, by contrast, to

---

[77] For example, repressive dictatorships, including those in the postcommunist world (Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Belarus), tend to exclude scholars investigating regime-compromising subjects.

[78] For example, in March 1999, the University of Wisconsin will host a major conference, organized by (Africanist) Crawford Young and (FSU specialist) Mark Beissinger, that will compare post-Soviet states with post-colonial states in Africa.

[79] See, for example, Charles Wilber, *The Soviet Model and Underdeveloped Countries* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1969); Chalmers Johnson, ed., *Change in Communist Systems* (Stanford, 1970); Kenneth T. Jowitt, *Revolutionary Breakthroughs and National Development: The Case of Rumania* (Berkeley, 1971).

[80] Another variant of convergence theory was more Marxist in inspiration, and received much less play in the United States than in Western Europe: the image of a "socialist democracy" toward which both statist socialism and Western capitalism would converge.

emphasize growing societal and economic pressures for adaptation to the alleged "imperatives" of legitimacy and efficiency in the post-totalitarian phase of Soviet history.

Convergence theory lost its luster as it became evident during the 1970s that, whatever the adaptations the Soviet regime was willing to countenance, these did not include liberal democracy or a privatized economy. But the postcommunist era has revived interest in convergence theory. Advocacy of market democracy, and the faith that it can be made to succeed in the post-communist world, represents a revival of that variant of convergence theory that was most popular in mainstream US scholarship in the 1950s: that "they" will converge in "our" direction. But whereas in the 1950s the scholarship on the theory was not driven by prescriptive concerns, that is no longer the case, as the former Soviet Union is now much more open to specific Western pressures or demands ("conditionality") for the adoption and implementation of certain types of policies.

The current prescriptive trend in scholarship ("as long as they listen to us, they will become more like us") has been reinforced by trends within the theoretical development of the social sciences. Area studies have come under attack by social scientists who argue that intellectual progress can best be achieved either through cross-regional comparisons or through the application to specific areas of theories based on universal assumptions about human nature ("rational choice theory") or about the homogenizing impact of the international system ("globalization theory"). Cross-regional comparisons are said to foster intellectual progress by de-ghettoizing area studies. The effect has been the production of some very good scholarship comparing analogous processes in Latin America, Africa, West Europe, East Asia, etc. But too little attention has been paid to determining the relative payoff of such a research strategy, compared to the payoffs from exploiting more fully the new-found opportunities for intra-regional comparison.[81]

Other trends are still more threatening to area studies, as they posit its growing irrelevance. Prevailing theories of "globalization" predict the homogenization of most socio-economic orders and the standardization of policy options in the face of imperatives dictated by the capitalist international economy and the global revolution in information-processing. Those that fail to adapt to these pressures will simply lose their capacity to provide for their populations, and will become the losers in the international system. Hence, over time, they or their political successors will learn the Darwinian lesson and accommodate to reality. To embrace this theory is to relegate scholarship on specific areas to the study of whether or not given countries' elites have as yet learned the appropriate lesson.

---

[81] See the running debate over appropriate comparative referents in the pages of *Slavic Review*: Philippe C. Schmitter and Terry Lynn Karl, "The Conceptual Travails of Transitologists and Consolidologists: How Far to the East Should They Attempt to Go?" *Slavic Review*, 53, 1, Spring 1994, pp. 173-185; Valerie Bunce, "Should Transitologists Be Grounded?" *Slavic Review*, 54, 1, Spring 1995, pp. 111-127; Terry Lynn Karl and Philippe C. Schmitter, "From an Iron Curtain to a Paper Curtain: Grounding Transitologists or Students of Postcommunism?" *Slavic Review*, 54, 4, Winter 1995, pp. 965-978; Valerie Bunce, "Paper Curtains and Paper Tigers," *Ibid.,* pp. 979-988. The tenor of this debate (and others going on in the field over methodological, epistemological, and theoretical issues) reveals that one does not need Cold War passions to generate emotional defenses of intellectual positions on this area.

Similarly, rational choice theory, in one or the other of its numerous variants, is making a bid for hegemony within political science, just as it has long since dominated the discipline of economics. What the theory assumes is that, in crucial respects, all people are alike; once we specify that commonality, it argues, we gain considerable power to predict political behavior regardless of cultural, ethnic, class, or gender differences.

A variant of rational choice theory that has made the greatest inroads in post-Soviet studies is the "new economic institutionalism."[82] This variant, which shares common assumptions about human rationality with the larger genre, has been at the basis of "shock therapy" prescriptions for stabilization and marketization of the postcommunist economies. According to this theory, if institutions are designed properly, human beings will ultimately adapt their behaviors to the patterns being rewarded by the incentive structure built into those institutions, even if attitudinal and cultural change lags behind behavioral change. The Darwinian process of natural selection, as in the case of globalization theory, treats these transformations as lengthy processes, not "single-play games"; but the assumption is that people will eventually adapt to the new incentive structure or suffer the obvious consequences. Hence, area specialists need only document this process of adaptation or deselection.

One attraction of both globalization and rational choice theories is that the outcome of current processes is treated as both knowable and desirable, if institutions are designed properly. Hence, predictive and prescriptive concerns are merged. Moreover, no near-term time-frame is offered for testing whether the assumptions underlying the theories proved to be untenable. Hence, the faith that the theory is tenable is difficult to undermine; in the case of entirely open-ended time-frames for prediction, it is, in fact, impossible to falsify either the predictive or the explanatory claims.

The recent hegemony within comparative politics and international relations theory of the subfield of political economy has reinforced the attractions of globalization, rational choice theory, and the new economic institutionalism. Political economy examines the interaction between governments and economies. Its analyses are more amenable to "systematic" analysis because of the ease with which economic flows can be quantified. As in economics, so increasingly within political economy, non-quantifiable studies are dismissed as "soft." Formal modeling of expected relationships, while not required in order to make one's point, is increasingly valued as a sign of rigorous, systematic, and cumulative scholarship.

These tendencies will probably never come to achieve the dominance within political science and sociology that they have achieved in economics. Since the "currencies" of politics and social life – power and prestige – are not as easily quantified as money, quantification will reach natural limits. Since most of comparative analysis in international studies focuses on fluid, often turbulent, situations in which people have great difficulty knowing precisely where their interests lie, the assumptions underlying rational choice theory, and the formal modeling that often accompanies it, will be so at odds with the facts of situations as to lose credibility as a universal explanatory device. Since comparative analysis is interested primarily in documenting and explaining *differences* among states, nations,

---

[82] Douglass C. North, *Structure and Change in Economic History* (New York, 1981); James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, *Rediscovering Institutions* (New York, 1989).

societies, cultures, regions, and classes, the field is not likely to succumb to the hegemony of theories based on simplistic assumptions about human rationality. But given the disciplines' pretensions to being social "sciences," and given the large numbers of students being trained in the economics of social and political exchange relationships, the challenge to area studies within the social sciences will be a continuing one.

That challenge is often expressed in bogus terms as a choice between descriptive work (by area specialists) and theoretical insights (of the theorists).[83] While there was something to this distinction in the divisions within scholarship of the 1930s through the 1950s, there has been no substance to the distinction for at least 25-30 years. Whether they were political scientists, sociologists, or economists, Soviet area specialists came to be trained in theories, and comparative referents, thought to be relevant to their interests within the area. Modernization theory (at the macro level) and interest group theory (at the micro or meso levels), for example, were at the basis of the challenge to the exceptionalism of totalitarian theory. Today, the vast majority of those who produce serious scholarship on the postcommunist world relate their studies to relevant bodies of theory: of democratization, marketization, nation-building, state-building, cultural change, and post-imperial transformations. Often, they seek to revise the received theoretical wisdom.

Intellectually, what is at stake in the misguided debate over theory versus area studies is the types of theories we seek to construct. Does intellectual progress result from a search for grand theories that apply across regions and cultures? Or does it result from a search for contextually-specific theories that apply across a specifiable domain of cases? As the reader will have guessed, we favor the second approach, although we believe that the level of contextual specificity will vary, depending on the issues and contexts in question. Hence, we endorse the tendency that is currently dominant within postcommunist studies: to study middle-range processes in postcommunist systems, informed by an understanding of the existing literature on analogous processes outside the postcommunist area.[84]

---

[83] See the tendentious caricatures of area studies, and the self-serving definitions of "theory," in debates published in selected issues of *APSA-CP: Newsletter of the APSA Organized Section in Comparative Politics*, volumes 5-7, 1993-1996; see the same tendency among some scholars quoted in Christopher Shea, "New Faces and New Methodologies Invigorate Russian Studies," *The Chronicle of Higher Education,* February 20, 1998, pp. A16-A18.

[84] This is not a blanket rejection of rational-choice theory, only a call for putting its utility into perspective. For example, the widespread tendency toward "nomenklatura privatization" in the FSU is explicable without reference to ideology, identity, or culture: a ruling elite saw clearly that its political and economic survival were at stake, and saw equally clearly that a path existed through which it could exploit its political position to gain material security and riches in the emerging system. Many other situations in the fluid, post-communist environment, however, do not so uniformly threaten physical, political, and material security, and do not so clearly present "outs" for those so threatened. To explain choices under those circumstances requires a more subtle intellectual apparatus.

The push for overgeneralization in the self-proclaimed social *sciences* is counterbalanced to some extent by the opposite tendency within anthropology, portions of sociology, and much of the humanities. Here, largely inspired by the works of Geertz, Foucault, and Bourdieu, the trend has been toward close study and appreciation of the particularities of situations at the micro level. The postcommunist context is fertile ground for such studies, both because of scholars' new-found access to the grassroots and because the institutional turbulence and the popular search for new meanings taking place in those countries invites non-structural analyses that seek to explore the emerging shape of things in their own terms. Hence, whereas middle-range theory-building in the social *sciences* looks at processes of institution-building, state-building, nation-building, the construction of a market economy, and the like, this particularizing trend resists such a degree of aggregation or teleology. Instead, in ways that echo Weber's concern for "meanings," but without Weber's commitment to building a science of politics, practitioners of the new cultural history seeks to deconstruct the ways in which individuals and collectivities within postcommunist countries understand themselves and their contexts.

At present, contextually-specific structural theory remains dominant within post-Soviet studies in political science and sociology, universal deductive theory is dominant within post-Soviet studies in economics, and post-modernist particularizing approaches are dominant within post-Soviet studies in anthropology and much of the humanities. In all disciplines, though to varying degrees, these are contested hegemonies. As noted, globalization and rational choice theory challenge the prevailing hegemony within political science. To a much lesser extent, "evolutionary" economics challenges the rational-choice "shock therapists" in economics, though hobbled by an apparent inability to point to postcommunist cases in which economies improved substantially without shock therapy. Traditional ethnographic work, with an explanatory focus and a commitment to replicability and falsifiability, challenges post-modernist approaches within anthropological studies of postcommunism. And, in the humanities, textual analysis and deconstruction are challenged by those who prefer to treat literature as a body of evidence about real-world conditions in society (as a "window on society and culture"). The latter approach qualifies its practitioners more as empirical sociologists or arms-length ethnographers than as literary theorists.

We believe that the uniqueness and complexity of postcommunist phenomena cannot adequately be analyzed through a single intellectual framework or disciplinary perspective. The distinctive features of the political, social, economic, cultural, and international landscape of the former Soviet Union require the creative application of diverse theories and methodologies drawn from several disciplines and traditions, including some (such as sociology and anthropology) that have hitherto received relatively little attention from Western specialists on the region. Scholarship will be impoverished by the imposition of orthodoxies within the individual disciplines or by rigid adherence to disciplinary boundaries. When studying world-historical changes of such magnitude, novelty, and diversity, we must beware of premature intellectual closure, be it theoretical or methodological. A healthy eclecticism should reign.

In sum, the dramatic changes in the Soviet Union and the world during the past decade have vastly broadened and transformed the intellectual enterprise of post-Soviet studies. New issues dominate the agenda, and new methods of inquiry have become available. What has changed most has been the end of censorship and the flood of new archival and other evidence, which have allowed for

exciting new studies that bear on continuing efforts to weigh the relative strengths of arguments on each side of age-old questions.