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Answering the “National Question”: Marxist Theories and the Intellectual Origins of Soviet Nationality Policies

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Abstract

This article examines the writings of late 19th and early 20th-century Marxist theorists and political leaders from the Russian and Austro-Hungarian Empires and their influence on the chief Bolshevik theorist of Soviet nationality policies, Joseph Stalin. It argues that although many early Marxist theorists held divergent views on managing nationalism, they uniformly rejected biological or romantic spiritual conceptions of the nation and instead posited that nationalism and contemporary nations are relatively new, socially constructed phenomena arising from processes linked to economic and political modernization. These perspectives align with what contemporary academia labels as “modernist” theories of nationality and this analysis therefore challenges prevailing views on the genesis of these theories, tracing them back to early Marxist thinkers rather than late 20th-century Western European theorists such as Benedict Anderson and Ernest Gellner. This modernist understanding of nations as products of material forces and processes enabled socialists to envision steering nation formation. For the Bolsheviks and some of the later international revolutionaries they inspired, this meant that just as they believed they could accelerate the transition to a socialist future through active class management, so too they believed they could control and expedite the construction of national identities through carefully designed policies.

Keywords: Theories of Nationalism; Marxism; Soviet Nationality Policies; Vladimir Medem; Otto Bauer; Joseph Stalin

Introduction

The Soviet Union undertook large-scale social engineering to shape nations and nationalisms within its borders. It declared itself a multi-national state, marked each of its citizens with a state-sanctioned nationality, organized much of its territorial administration to create semi-autonomous national homelands, expanded native-language education for most citizens, provided state support for national cultural institutions and used nationality categories to reserve positions for minorities in education, industry, and government. The impact of these ambitious projects was not confined to the USSR, as variants of these policies would be implemented from China and Ethiopia to Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia. Historians have done a remarkable job of uncovering what policies the Soviet Union chose and how these were implemented (e.g. Edgar 2006, Goff 2021, Hirsch 2005, Khalid 2015, Martin 2001, and Suny 1993). However, the question of why Soviet leaders chose these strategies and where these ideas originated requires more examination.¹

This work explores the writings of Marxists in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and their influence on Joseph Stalin, who, as People’s Commissar for Nationalities and later General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, would greatly shape Soviet nationality

policies. It argues that although theorists including Karl Kautsky, Otto Bauer, Karl Renner, Rosa Luxemburg, Vladimir Medem, and Joseph Stalin differed substantially in their views on appropriate policies to manage nationalism, all rejected biological or romantic spiritual conceptions of the nation and instead posited that nationalism and contemporary nations are relatively new, socially constructed phenomena resulting from a range of processes tied to economic and political modernization. In contemporary academic terms, these would be labelled as “modernization” or “modernist” theories of nationality. This modernist understanding of nations as shaped by material forces and processes opened the possibility for socialists to steer nation formation. For the Bolsheviks, just as they believed that as a vanguard party they could accelerate the transition to a socialist future through active management of class, so too they believed they could control and accelerate the parallel construction of national identities through well-crafted policy.

In addition to its primary purpose as an intervention to better understand the theories that motivated Soviet policies, this argument is forced to confront the prevailing narrative about the origins of modernist theories of nations and nationalism. The most commonly accepted view attributes the initial wave of modernist theories to Western European theorists centered in the 1980s, notably Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* and Ernest Gellner’s *Nations and Nationalism*, both published in 1983. This work shows that modernist theories of nationalism can be traced at least eight decades earlier to socialists of the Second International, that Anderson and Gellner’s explicit criticism of these socialists was unfounded, and that key contributions of subsequent thinkers, from Anderson’s concept of print capitalism to Gellner’s ideas on the transition to industrial society, were prefigured in some form by these early socialists.

Modernist Theories of Nations and Nationalism

In their book on theories of nationalism, Ichijo and Uzelac (2005) identify modernism as the dominant analytical approach to the academic study of nations and nationalism. For them, the core shared content of this school of thinking is “that nations and nationalism have appeared as consequences of processes that mark the modern period of social development” (Ichijo and Uzelac 2005, 9). These modernists differed on which processes of modernization or industrialization they emphasized on the formation of nations and nationalisms, but often included analyses of the expansion of literacy, standardization of vernacular languages and associated expansion of printed works, the expansion of state-sponsored education, the transition away from feudal or agrarian social formations, the impact of economic transitions to capitalism or industrialism, technological advances in communication and transport technologies, and the erosion of the legitimacy of institutions of power such as divinely sanctioned monarchy, to name a few. Crucially, modernists reject primordialist ideas of the nation. These primordialist concepts are frequently traced as far back as the 18th century to writers such as Johann Gottfried von Herder and gained significant popular adherence in the 19th and 20th centuries. They may include a combination of factors such as the eternal or at least ancient nature of the nation, a genetic or racialized understanding of the nation being held through shared blood ties, or general romantic notions of the nation as the natural form of human collectivity. Indeed, it is precisely to understand or even combat hegemonic notions of the primordial character of nations and the often violent or intolerant regimes associated with them that modernist thinkers often framed their works.² The emergence of developed modernization theories of nationalism is most commonly traced to the early 1980s and associated with writers such as Benedict Anderson, John Breuilly, and Ernest Gellner.³ It is hard to overstate the impact of these works and their associated modernization theories of nationalism on academia, evidenced by the fact that four decades after its publication, *Imagined Communities* is still one of the most cited social science works of all time (Green 2016).

What might be called “pure” modernist theories of nationalism are often juxtaposed with a small body of writings from the same period that are labeled as “ethno-symbolist” understandings of nationalism and nation formation, epitomized by thinkers like Anthony D Smith and John

A. Armstrong. These thinkers agree with pure modernists that nationalism and contemporary forms of nations are distinctly modern and tied to modernization processes but argue that most modern nations developed out of pre-existing ethnicities and that it therefore often requires a longue durée examination of processes of socio-cultural development to understand the particular form that nations take in the modern era. Smith explicitly states that he accepts the modernization theories of thinkers such as Anderson and Gellner (his academic mentor) and adds that “it is not that I find this account wrong, only that it tells half the story” (Gellner and Smith “Warwick Debates” 1995). Adding to the core theories of the pure modernists, Smith argues that “nations and nationalisms are also the products of preexisting traditions and heritages which have coalesced over the generations” (ibid.). Furthermore, he explicitly defines his analysis of nations and nationalism not as a rival theory to modernism but simply as an analytical approach stressing a longer-term historical socio-cultural view. Despite the current tendency in academia to treat these modernists and ethno-symbolist thinkers as separate schools of thought (Ichijo and Uzelac 2005, 89), ethno-symbolists fit within the larger modernist criteria outlined in this work (rejection of primordialism and acceptance of modernization processes as key to the emergence of nationalism and the modern shape of national groupings). Therefore, for the purposes of this examination, they will be considered a part of the modernization theories of nations and nationalism and thus the intellectual wave of modernist theories and analyses in the 1980s can be addressed collectively.

Perhaps it was inevitable that works on modernization theories of nationalism would spend energy to criticize romantic or racist primordialist ideas of the nation which stand fundamentally in conflict with their theories. It is more surprising that the most influential works from this period – Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* and Gellner’s *Nations and Nationalism* – also go out of their way to severely criticize Marxist thinkers for their supposed intellectual poverty on the issue of nations and nationalism.⁴ Anderson quotes Tom Nairn’s earlier criticism that “The theory of nationalism represents Marxism’s great historical failing,” and refines it by writing that “It would be more exact to say that nationalism has proved an uncomfortable *anomaly* for Marxist theory and, precisely for that reason, has been largely elided, rather than confronted” (2006, 3). Gellner even more consistently and often forcefully criticizes Marxism, pointing out how Marxists are supposedly incorrect at least ten separate times in his very brief work.⁵ He characterizes Marxists’ alleged misunderstanding or general oversight of the phenomenon of nationalism as “The Wrong Address Theory,” writing that “Just as extreme Shi’ite Muslims hold that Archangel Gabriel made a mistake, delivering the Message to Mohamed when it was intended for Ali, so Marxists basically like to think that the spirit of history or human consciousness made a terrible boob. The awakening message was intended for classes but by some terrible postal error was delivered to nations” (1983, 129).

Background to Marxist Theories on the National Question

Was nationalism “largely elided, rather than confronted” by Marxist thinkers as Anderson and Gellner suggest? A similar criticism was leveled by the Marxist writer Vladimir Medem in the opening paragraphs of his article “Social Democracy and the National Question.” Medem states that “In the field of the national question, Social Democracy has undoubtedly given less than in any other major political issue.” (1906, 3). He continues that Marxists have created “only a very limited number of works that thoroughly and seriously try to understand it; these few works are far from exhausting the complex and difficult task” (ibid.). For Medem, elements of “bourgeois nationalist” thinking – meaning romantic or biological primordialist ideas of the nation – had contaminated some Marxists, while many others “were inclined to see in the national question exclusively a question of different tribal groups of the bourgeoisie squabbling among themselves, a question of a duel in which the proletariat, as a third, independent party, is not interested in the slightest, and should not take any part” (ibid., 4). Although these comments by a prominent Marxist thinker and political leader echo the arguments made by Anderson and Gellner, there is a major catch: Medem

wrote this 79 years before Anderson and Gellner, and he proceeded to attempt to correct these short-comings.

During Medem's time, a substantial body of works on nations and nationalism – usually under the title of “the national question” – were written by high profile Marxist thinkers. In the decade leading up to World War One alone these included, but were not limited to, Medem's 1904 *Social Democracy and the National Question*, Otto Bauer's similarly titled 1907 book, *Social Democracy and the Nationalities Question*, Karl Kautsky's 1907/1908 *Nationality and Internationality*, Rosa Luxemburg's 1909 *The Nationalities Question*, Lenin's 1913 *Theses on the National Question*, and Stalin's 1913 *The National Question and the Social Democracy* (later reprinted under its more commonly known title: *Marxism and the National Question*). And this is to say nothing of the post-WWI theoretical debates on nations and nationalism within policy circles of Soviet leaders, worldwide members of the Communist International (Comintern), Yugoslav communist theorists such as Kardelj and Tito, Chinese Communist Party policy makers, or Marxists of the Ethiopian student movements (all of whose writing is largely outside the scope of this work) just to name a few post-WWI Marxist theoretical engagements with nationalism. Although the accusation that Marxist thinkers avoided comprehensively confronting questions of nations and nationalism may be true when applied to early theorists such as Marx and Engels, it was far out of date by the time Anderson and Gellner made these points.⁶ Although the existence and sheer volume of Marxist works on nations and nationalism from the early 20th century strongly suggests that some major Marxist figures engaged theoretically with these issues, this alone does not give us an indication of the content, quality, or originality of these ideas.

Before diving into the works of Marxist thinkers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it is important to understand some of the differences between these writings and those of the 1980s theorists. The world before WWI in which these thinkers were based was in many significant ways very different than that of the 1980s. Anderson and Gellner wrote at a time when nations, national sovereignty, and nationalism more generally had achieved a hegemonic status in the geo-political world order. As Anderson puts it “in the modern world everyone can, should, will ‘have’ a nationality” (Anderson 2006, 5). They were writing against highly entrenched popular romantic notions of nations. By contrast, the writers of the Second International lived in a world where large, multi-ethnic empires still covered the vast majority of the earth's land mass and contained most of its people. Most of these large states had not yet fragmented along “national” lines and the mass nationalist violence that would kill tens of millions and displace tens of millions more from 1914-1945 had not yet occurred. Although the 19th century is often viewed as the period of the growing ascendancy of nationalism, the actual reach of this can easily be over-exaggerated. Although concepts of nation and associated nationalism are evident in varying degrees in the revolutionary movements in the Americas and Europe in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, it is important to acknowledge that revolutions, reforms, or governance strategies are never purely “national.” They contend or sometimes coincide with other socioeconomic and political motivations. For example, new scholarship on what is usually considered one of the first “nationalist” revolts in Europe – the Greek revolution of 1821 – tends to see it as more anti-Ottoman (such as opposition to predatory tax farming, incompetent governance, and rule by what were viewed as increasingly chauvinist Muslim elites) than pro-nationalist (Mazower 2022). Yes, some nationalists existed, especially among the tiny Greek bourgeoisie, but regionalism and religious identities (it is likely that a majority of “Greeks” at this time considered Greek to mean Greek Orthodox, not some ethno-national category in the modern sense) motivated most participants. In this way, many movements (especially early ones) and the subsequent governments they created should often be viewed as *national-ish*, rather than *national-ist*. In this light, most “national” opposition movements of the mid and late 19th century, especially the 1848-1849 revolts of the “springtime of nations,” should be seen as a marker of the continued expansion of national consciousness among some segments of society in Europe, not proof of its full diffusion to most members of society or its uncontested hegemony vis-à-vis other identities (e.g. region, empire, or religion) or socio-political groupings (e.g. class, status, or

profession). Marxists writing before WWI were writing at a time when national consciousness and nationalism were rising but had not yet completely reshaped the geo-political order and still had to contend with existing imperial and rising class based political formations and conceptions.

Given the very different contexts of these two periods of writing, as well as the very different occupations of these two groups of theorists (Marxist political activists vs academic theorists), their works unsurprisingly have different characters and purposes. Earlier Marxist thinkers were mostly concerned with what to do – or what concrete policy steps should be taken – about a rising and potentially opposing political consciousness whose future success was still very far from certain.⁷ From the point of view of political agitation, explaining the processes by which nations formed and what brought about national consciousness may have seemed unnecessary or peripheral to their immediate political goals. As a result, most of the works of socialists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries skip theorization of the nation and nationalism to focus on specifically what to do about ethno-linguistic minorities in large states. For example, in Rosa Luxemburg's numerous writings on "the national question" written from 1896 to 1918⁸ – including "The Polish Question at the International Congress in London" (1896), "The Polish Question and the Socialist Movement" (1905), the five articles of "The National Question and Autonomy" (1908-1909), and "The Nationalities Question" from her larger work on the Russian Revolution (1918) – she is strongly focused on specific governance questions. These include what should be done with the Polish-speaking territories divided between the German, Austro-Hungarian and Russian Empires, what kind of representation should minorities of these empires receive and on what basis (i.e. national, territorial, or class criteria), and whether or not nations had the right of self-determination. Out of hundreds of pages of writing, larger theories of nations and nationalism receive only occasional, scattered, and almost incidental – though quite powerful – discussion. Even the much more theoretical works, such as Otto Bauer's *The Question of Nationalities and Social Democracy*, are explicitly interested in how governments should manage nations and nationalism and devote considerable time to policy recommendations. By contrast, the modernists of the 1980s were all institutional academics whose work is purely theoretical and explanatory and eschews questions of how to respond to the phenomena of nations and nationalisms.

Another complication is that while later theorists are more consistent in their use of terms, many Marxists of the period of the second international tend to use the terms "nation" and "national" in a fairly broad sense, occasionally making it difficult to understand their specific meaning without context. This is compounded by the fact that these terms often had further differences in connotation across the authors' different languages. Although most of the writers identified here clearly differentiate between "modern" nations or nationalisms and earlier pre-capitalist forms of ethnic communities, use of the terms is not consistent between authors. For example, Kautsky differentiates between modern nations and earlier forms of the nation while Bauer refuses to call ethnic groups in the feudal era "nations" given their extreme spatial and hierarchical divisions. Bauer does, however, label earlier tribal groupings as nations due to the greater social connectivity of these groups while simultaneously stressing that these units have very little in common with modern national communities. These are often more semantic issues rather than conceptual ones and therefore this work focuses on the conceptual arguments more than the specific vocabulary used.

A final note on context concerns the geo-political realities that shaped early socialist writers of the period. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the most prominent socialists writing about the national question came from highly multi-ethnic contiguous land empires where rising nationalism posed the biggest threat to the continued existence of a united state, chiefly the Austro-Hungarian and Russian Empires. Three of the writers whose works are analyzed here (Kautsky, Renner, and Bauer) were born in Austro-Hungary, while the other three (Medem, Luxemburg, and Stalin) were born in the Russian Empire. As such, their examples and analyses tend to draw frequently from these empires.

Marxists and the National Question: 1898 – 1913

As early as 1898 in Karl Kautsky's "The Struggle of Nationalities and Constitutional Law in Austria" one can find a clear modernist explanation for the rise of nationalism. In commenting on the dramatic disruption of the Austrian Reichsrat⁹ that emerged over issues of national language use by government officials in Bohemia, Kautsky – perhaps the most prominent mainstream Marxist at that time – cited three primary factors at work in the recent rise of nationalism across Europe in the development of "the modern national idea." The first is the growing power of the bourgeoisie with the development of capitalism, who find that their pursuit of market interests coincides with the consolidation of nations as political forces (Kautsky 1898, 517).¹⁰ The second is "the striving for political freedom, for democracy... [which] means the striving for complete sovereignty of the people, who want to freely determine their destinies and resist any external coercion, whether exerted by a person, a class or another nation" (ibid.). Kautsky identifies the third factor as "the spread of literary national education among the masses... essentially a phenomenon peculiar to the nineteenth century" (ibid.). Although his brief examination lacks detailed explanations and fails to broach many issues addressed by later thinkers, we see a clear theoretical formulation for the rise of nationalism rooted in processes of modernization.

In the year following Kautsky's article, Karl Renner, one of the most prominent socialist politicians of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and future Chancellor and President of Austria, published an article outlining a plan to confront and govern nations through a social-democratic framework. In this 1899 article titled "State and Nation" (Renner 2010, published under the pen name Synopticus), he astutely identifies the dangers of the rise of what we might call ethno-national states for national minorities. Given that almost no territory is ethnically homogeneous, he explains the dynamic of oppression that develops in these situations between national minorities and majorities and how this intersects with issues of class. His prescription is an abandonment of "the territorial principle" (trying to create territories for each nation) in favor of a "national personal autonomy." This was to be a non-territorial autonomy whereby nations would be legal corporate groupings within the state and members of a national group would have a say in issues specific to their nation (such as on schooling, language, or cultural issues) regardless of their physical location in a multi-national state. Although this is the only work in this examination that does not attempt to present a theoretical explanation for nations or nationalism, it is included because its prescription of policy to address the issue of nations and nationalism shows clear engagement with the issue of nations by a prominent Marxist and this work would have a significant impact on key theorists such as Medem and Bauer and provide a framework for the Bolsheviks to attack.

Vladimir Medem's 1904 work "Social Democracy and the National Question" in some ways represents a blending of Kautsky's basic modernization theory and Renner's policy prescriptions and is one of the earliest works to engage on a comprehensive theoretical level with nations and nationalism. Medem was a member of the Jewish Labor Bund, a prominent socialist organization in the Russian Empire that contributed to the founding of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP) and eventually followed the Mensheviks after their 1912 split with the Bolsheviks. Although Medem was never a formal leader of the Bund, he had significant weight in the organization and was one of its most prominent theorists. Medem viewed industrial modernization during the capitalist era as creating multiple currents of identity. In tearing down the social structures and institutional barriers of feudal society (including legal inequities between groups) and promoting democratization in order to atomize people into individualized economic units, capitalism opened the possibility for "the abstract 'citizen and man'... [to be] the main cell of the social organism" (Medem 1906, 6). This could lead to openings (or pressures) to leave behind one's socio-cultural particularisms and assimilate into an expanded society (whether that be a larger "national" group or into a broader humanist cosmopolitanism). However, as he puts it:

"The same capitalist evolution that created assimilationism also gave rise to the opposite (in a certain sense) direction: nationalism. The developing relations of the capitalist economy gave

rise to new social organisms. Social life, politics, culture were democratized; A close connection was established between all the individual cells of modern society, which, losing their independence, emerging from a state of isolation, grew together into a single, organic whole. Nationality in the modern sense of the word was born” (ibid., 8-9).

While increasing connectivity within groups that shared social, cultural, and linguistic traits forms the basis for modern national groupings and provides a modernist interpretation of the creation of modern nations, for Medem this alone did not explain the phenomenon of nationalism.

Although Medem hints that nationalism takes a variety of forms, he, in a line of reasoning similar to Kautsky, viewed its primary variant arising from the desire of the bourgeoisie to monopolize markets. Medem believed that cultural and linguistic borders of nations could act as impediments to commerce with impacts similar to those of customs duties. This could cut both ways: frustrating the ambitions of a national bourgeoisie to access “foreign” markets, but also acting as a potential defensive bulwark against foreign commerce. This, combined with the chauvinist “us versus them” psychology of petty bourgeois nationalism created incentives for the powerful bourgeoisie to attempt to both expand and defend the borders of its national group, often through use of government institutions to enforce dominance.¹¹ Crucially for Medem, the borders between nationalities were permeable which implicitly rejected biological or blood-based ideas of the nation and allowed for the possibility of assimilation or hybridity and therefore the expansion or disappearance of national groups. Additionally, Medem strongly rejected the notion that nations had eternal natures and instead viewed them as constantly evolving and in flux. For this reason (and the fact that most nationalism had a distinctly bourgeois character), he advised socialists to support neither nationalism nor assimilationism and maintain their focus on class-based internationalism. This “neutralism” however, needed some active management beyond simply granting of equal rights and removal of discriminatory legislation. He acknowledged the reality of national oppression of minority groups as a serious concern and believed they needed special protections. Similar to Renner, he viewed nation-based territories as impractical since no territory was ethnically homogeneous and national-territorialism would inevitably lead to oppression of minority cultures. He instead suggested a form of Renner’s national personal autonomy, with a focus on cultural and linguistic autonomy in state institutions such as schools.

Although it is unclear if Otto Bauer was aware of Medem’s 1904 piece when he wrote his 1907 book, he was certainly influenced by Kautsky and fellow Austrian Social Democrat Renner and cited both. Like Renner, Bauer was an extremely influential figure in Austrian politics – he led the leftwing of the SDAP and served as Foreign Minister of Austria – and he too was deeply concerned about finding a socialist solution to the national question in multi-ethnic states such as Austro-Hungary. Bauer’s work, *The Question of Nationalities and Social Democracy*, is unique among socialist writings on nations and nationalism from this period in its size (a full, large book on the topic), scope, depth, and nuance. Bauer’s first chapter on “The Nation” alone is longer than Gellner’s entire book *Nations and Nationalism*. Given the fact that Bauer’s socio-historical analysis of the formation of nations and the phenomenon of nationalism and state interactions with the nation is so highly nuanced and avoids easily distilled theoretical generalizations, it is very challenging to provide an overview of his work and arguments. As Ephraim J. Nimni writes in his introduction to the English translation of the work “Refusing to accept any essentialist principle in his conceptualization of the national question, Bauer opened the way for a multidimensional understanding of the national community. This is perhaps another important reason why Bauer’s theory has been so consistently misinterpreted. A superficial reading of the theoretical chapter of his voluminous work is not enough to allow one to understand the intellectual aim of his analysis” (Bauer 2000, xlii). For this reason and the sheer volume of material covered in his work, only a few limited elements from the work will be examined here.

Bauer thoroughly rejected biological and romantic conceptions of the nation (what he called national materialism and national spiritualism respectively). Although he acknowledged the

budding field of evolutionary biology and its insights around heredity, admitted that some nations tended to have shared genetic descent, and accepted the possibility that some inherited traits may affect conditions of life behavior that shape culture and identity, he strongly rejected that shared descent was a necessary condition of the formation of a nation. He wrote “persons of common descent who are not united by a cultural community do not form a nation. A nation can exist only where fellow nationals exercise a mutual influence on one another, and this is made possible only by the tool of a common language and the transmission of the same cultural elements. A mere community of nature without a community of culture may as a race be of interest to anthropologists, but it does not form a nation. The conditions of the human struggle for existence can also produce the nation via the means of the community of nature, but they must always do so via the means of the community of culture” (ibid., 106). While Bauer at least recognized genetic descent as a real phenomenon, he entirely rejected romantic national spiritualism as a groundless post-hoc explanation for the existence of historically created national communities, summarizing that “the ‘spirit of the people’ is not an explanation of the national community of character, but a metaphysical reinterpretation of it that is based on the replacement of a causal relationship by a tautology” (ibid., 27).

Instead, Bauer saw modern nations as the culmination of historical processes of community interaction shaped by changing socio-economic conditions. Perhaps anticipating the approaches of the ethno-symbolist thinkers of the 1980s, Bauer provides *longue durée* analyses to understand nation formation. Using the Germans as an example he charts social history from tribal formations, through settled agriculture, and high feudalism, to early capitalism and industrialization; essentially adding analysis of ethnic and national social formation to Marx’s theory of stages of development. His historical analyses of these processes are too long, detailed and nuanced to begin to address here, but a few key points stand out for our understanding of nation formation. Bauer argues that during the age of feudalism, the Germans did not constitute a nation. A relative lack of mobility and interaction by the masses of peasants tied to the land meant that shared linguistic and cultural connections of tribes in pre-feudal times trended toward further differentiation during this time. Furthermore, hierarchies of power during this period dramatically separated peasant culture from that of the knights and lords. Indeed, Bauer argues that if a form of “nation” existed during this period, it resided in the cultural community of shared interaction found in the knighthood. Like other socialist theorists of the nation during this time, Bauer viewed the modern nation as emerging from the socio-economic changes resulting from the transition from feudalism to capitalism. Among many factors, his detailed account looks at the changing needs of the modern state and its need for standardized languages of administration to interface with subject populations, the need for more educated government officials and the resulting expansion of education and literacy, the role of communication and transportation innovations, and the expansion of democratic suffrage and military service. For Bauer, the German nation at his time still did not yet encompass all potential Germans since social and economic stratification still proved a barrier to cultural interaction, writing that “the nation is constituted by the knighthood in the Middle Ages and by the educated classes in the modern era... but the broad masses whose labor maintains the nation – peasants, artisans, workers – are nothing more than the tenants of the nation” (ibid., 107). He predicted that increased cultural interaction conducted through the medium of shared language would increase membership in the nation as capitalism progressed, and that under socialism, the nation would come to fully incorporate people into national communities. It is important to note here that although Bauer thought that modernization processes were leading to the formation of modern nations, this path was not the same for all groups, adding further complexity to his theory. For example, some groups that would become nations in the modern era did not have an ethnic ruling class during feudal times (such as Slovene peasants ruled by German lords) and would thus have a slightly different path to nation formation (he borrowed Engels’ term “non-historical nations” to describe these groups).

Seeing nations as historically constructed through processes of social interaction, Bauer arrived at a definition of the nation as “the totality of human beings bound together through a community of fate into a community of character” (ibid., 117). He contrasts this with peoples who have shared a “similarity of fate,” such as proletariats in different countries that have experienced similar socio-economic conditions but had not been bound together by a shared culture of interaction (ibid., 100-101). Bauer’s definition of the nation like Anderson’s description of the nation as an “imagined community” does not lend itself to identification of nations based on characteristic elements. Bauer argues that definitions of the nation that try to identify core constitutive elements that determine a nation (such as common area of habitation, common descent, common language, common mores and customs, common experiences, a common historical past, and common laws and common religion) quickly become problematic. Not only do not all nations possess the same types of shared characteristics, but these kinds of constitutive definitions also do not accurately predict which peoples become nations and which do not, and this is why a historically rooted multidimensional analysis is required. Furthermore, in what might be viewed as an anticipation and preemptive criticism of Anderson’s future arguments, Bauer acknowledges the power of shared national consciousness, but cautions against what he calls “psychological theories” of the nation that find the nation as solely the result of shared orientation. He writes that psychological theories alone are “unsatisfactory because, even supposing it were correct that the nation is formed by those conscious of their affinity with one another, the question would remain: why is it that I feel myself to be connected with these rather than with those people? What are the “indissoluble ties” by which I know myself to be linked to the other members of my nation? If I am conscious of my nationality, of what am I actually conscious?” (ibid., 120-121). For Bauer, it is still the community of character socially constructed through historical processes that forms the base on which this national consciousness is rooted.

Given Bauer’s understanding of the formation of the nation, he leaves open the possibility for permeability of national groups. Complete assimilation to a new nation or even hybridity of living as a member of multiple national groups is possible for Bauer. Although Bauer sees language as the crucial medium for interaction and socialization, he stresses that becoming a member of a nation is much more than simply learning another language. One must be socially and culturally incorporated into the nation, a process that is possible in later life, but much easier at a young age (ibid., 103). Although nations are socio-historically constructed entities that are in a constant state of change and development and humans have the capacity (though not easily) to change nations, Bauer took nations and their unique socio-cultural development seriously¹² and, similar to Renner and Medem, thought that national personal autonomy was the correct governance policy.

Within a year of the publication of Bauer’s book, Kautsky responded to these theories in his article “Nationality and Internationality.”¹³ Although he praised Bauer’s work as the “first detailed discussion of this question from a Marxist standpoint” and agreed that the nation is a “product of social development,” Kautsky disagreed not only with some key elements of Bauer’s analysis but also his core definition, writing that “Bauer’s specific definition of the nation is either so vague that it does not show how and why the nation is different to any other social formation, or it is wrong.” (Kautsky and Lewis 2009, 372-374) Resembling later critics of Anderson’s definition who would point out that nations were not the only kind of “imagined communities,” Kautsky points out that nations are not the only kind of “community of fate” that produce a “community of character.” Furthermore, Kautsky particularly objected to Bauer’s argument that marginalized segments of society are excluded from the nation and that (at the time of writing) the nation resided only among educated segments of society and he therefore proposed a key element of the nation that binds all segments together.¹⁴ Here Kautsky turns to the issue of language calling it “the most powerful of the threads uniting the nation” (ibid., 397).¹⁵ At this point Kautsky arrives at the main purpose of his article: to discuss language, its role in facilitating communities of interaction, and the future trajectory of national communities. Although he stands by his argument from 1898 that developing capitalist markets, expansion of democracy, and increased literacy contribute to the formation of

modern nationalism, he also contends that as people learn multiple languages and international commerce facilitates greater interaction, larger overlapping cultural communities will form. He (fairly accurately) predicts that as the commercial and cultural benefits of knowing common languages that link large numbers of people grow, many smaller languages would die out, that some languages will be newly elevated to languages of international communication (he suggests Russian) and that there might emerge a single main international language (he predicts English) (ibid., 386). While Bauer predicted a socialist future of distinct nations, Kautsky predicts consolidation, writing that “Once we have come so far that the mass of the population of our cultural states has mastered one or several other languages alongside their own, then the basis has been created for the gradual decline and the disappearance, initially of the languages of the smaller nations, and for the eventual fusion of the whole of the culture of humanity into one language and nationality” (ibid., 388). Although Kautsky’s brief article lacks Bauer’s detail and nuance, provokes many questions, and leaves itself open to potential charges of inconsistency, it importantly anticipates economic and cultural globalization and provides a theory for the interaction of localized nationalism with international forces.

Shortly after the publication of Kautsky’s article, the highly influential socialist philosopher and revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg published a series of key articles on nations and nationalism. In terms of modernization theory, very little in her work was novel, but rather reinforced the trend in high profile socialist writers of the period of the Second International to view modern nations and nationalisms as constructed by socio-economic forces tied to modernization. In arguing against using the nation as the basis on which to bestow political rights in her first article in the 1908-1909 series of works “The National Question”, Luxemburg strongly refutes the notion that nations and national rights are eternal and unchanging, writing that “Historical materialism has taught us that the real content of these ‘eternal’ truths, rights, and formulae is determined only by the material social conditions of the environment in a given historical epoch... Marxism regards and treats them only as expressions of certain definite historical conditions, as categories which, in terms of their material content and therefore their political value, are subject to constant change, which is the only ‘eternal’ truth” (Luxemburg 1976, 111). Luxemburg directly reiterates Kautsky’s basic formulation of three factors that “make up the ‘roots of the modern national idea,’ as found in the rise of the modern nation state in all of Europe. These factors are: the desire of the bourgeoisie to assure for itself an internal or domestic market for its own commodity production; second, the desire for political freedom – democracy; and finally, expansion of the national literature and culture to the populace” (ibid., 159). Luxemburg attempts to separate the modern national phenomenon from what we might now commonly describe as ethnicity. She writes “Naturally, we are not speaking here of a nationality as a specific ethnic or cultural group. Such nationality is, of course, separate and distinct from the bourgeois aspect; national peculiarities had already existed for centuries. But here we are concerned with national movements as an element of political life, with the aspirations of establishing a so-called nation-state; then the connection between those movements and the bourgeois era is unquestionable” (ibid., 160). But the main goal of her writing was not to theorize about the nature and process of formation of the nation. Luxemburg’s main contributions here were policy oriented. She argued against using the nation as the basis on which to bestow political rights, either through the national personal autonomy of Renner, Medem, and Bauer, or through the as yet still vague promises of national self-determination emanating from Lenin’s Bolsheviks.

Although Bolshevik leader Vladimir Lenin was a prolific writer in terms of the number of articles he wrote on the national question, his work is mostly focused on direct policies or general political agitation rather than theory.¹⁶ A much more detailed analysis of the formation of nations and nationalism is found in the writings of his future Commissar of Nationalities and eventual successor as leader of the Soviet Union, Joseph Stalin. Researching and writing from the Austrian capital of Vienna, Stalin defined a nation as “a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture” (Stalin 1954, 16). He specifically differentiated his definition from Bauer’s by

putting emphasis on the need for shared language and territory and downplaying the importance of the “community of character.” Additionally, he dismissed primordial blood descent-based criteria, noting that “a nation is not a racial or tribal, but a historically constituted community of people” and that some nations share descendants from a wide range of historically distinct peoples (*ibid.*, 11).

Stalin explicitly tied the formation of the nation to the modern period, specifically in the socio-economic transition of peoples from feudalism to capitalism. He wrote that “A nation is not merely a historical category but a historical category belonging to a definite epoch, the epoch of rising capitalism. The process of elimination of feudalism and development of capitalism is at the same time a process of the constitution of people into nations. Such, for instance, was the case in Western Europe. The British, French, Germans, Italians, and others were formed into nations at the time of the victorious advance of capitalism and its triumph over feudal disunity” (*ibid.*, 24). Stalin used the Georgians as a case study to illustrate this modernist process¹⁷ of nation formation:

“The Georgians before the Reform inhabited a common territory and spoke one language. Nevertheless, they did not, strictly speaking, constitute one nation, for, being split up into a number of disconnected principalities, they could not share a common economic life; for centuries they waged war against each other and pillaged each other, each inciting the Persians and Turks against the other. The ephemeral and casual union of the principalities which some successful king sometimes managed to bring about embraced at best a superficial administrative sphere, and rapidly disintegrated owing to the caprices of the princes and the indifference of the peasants. Nor could it be otherwise in economically disunited Georgia... Georgia came on the scene as a nation only in the latter half of the nineteenth century, when the fall of serfdom and the growth of the economic life of the country, the development of means of communication and the rise of capitalism, introduced division of labour between the various districts of Georgia, completely shattered the economic isolation of the principalities and bound them together into a single whole” (*ibid.*, 14).

Stalin’s analysis of the nation was not confined to its formation in the transition to capitalism. He looked to the path ahead for nations in the socialist era. Similar to Kautsky, Stalin differed from Bauer on the future trajectory of nations. He appeared to see the future era of socialism as one in which national identities become less salient, as opposed to Bauer’s vision of nations coming to full development under socialism. He claims that “Bauer’s prophecy regarding ‘the division of humanity into nationally delimited communities’ is refuted by the whole course of development of modern society. National barriers are being demolished and are falling, rather than becoming firmer” (*ibid.*, 59).

Stalin spent much of his work arguing against the implementation of national personal autonomy, whether that proposed by Bauer and Renner, by Medem and the Jewish Bund, or by certain Caucasian Social-Democrats, namely the prominent Menshevik and future leader of an independent Georgia during the Russian Civil War, Noe Zhordania. Stalin saw it as the responsibility of socialists “to put an end to the policy of national oppression, to render it impossible, and thereby to remove the grounds of strife between nations, to take the edge off that strife and reduce it to a minimum” (*ibid.*, 34) and he worried that national personal autonomy would reinforce rather than reduce divisions between peoples. He believed national personal autonomy “stimulates nationalism, because it leads to the viewpoint in favour of the ‘demarcation’ of people according to national curiae, the ‘organization’ of nations, the ‘preservation’ and cultivation of ‘national peculiarities’ – all of which are entirely incompatible with Social-Democracy” (*ibid.*, 100-101). He wrote that this would “prepare the ground not only for the segregation of nations, but also for breaking up the united labour movement. The idea of national autonomy creates the psychological conditions for the division of the united workers’ party into separate parties built on national lines. The breakup of the party is followed by the breakup of the trade unions, and complete segregation is the result. In this way the united class movement is broken up into separate national rivulets” (*ibid.*, 61).

Importantly, in his arguments against national personal autonomy, we find further details for his understanding of nations and peoples as changing or evolving social formations. Turning to the extremely diverse ethnic groups of the Caucasus, he argues that most had not reached levels of development to constitute nations due to their lack of literature and shared economic ties. Furthermore, many of these groups were unlikely to ever form independent nations, instead combining or assimilating with neighboring groups. In a slightly different vein of thinking, he also argued that Jews did not constitute a nation since they were extremely fragmented both linguistically and geographically (here we see the implications of Stalin's emphasis on language and territory in his definition of nation).

Somewhat ironically, given that he would be the only one of the writers here that would be given the power to implement his solution to the "national question," his work does not provide a clear picture of his policies.¹⁸ And indeed, many of the suggested policies appear completely at odds with those actually implemented in the USSR. He advocated for the elimination of minority discontent through the "complete democratization" of society, including guarantees on "liberty of conscience" and "liberty of movement" as well as the right to education in one's native language. This would be coupled with regional autonomy:

"The advantage of regional autonomy consists, first of all, in the fact that it does not deal with a fiction bereft of territory, but with a definite population inhabiting a definite territory. Next, it does not divide people according to nations, it does not strengthen national barriers; on the contrary, it breaks down these barriers and unites the population in such a manner as to open the way for division of a different kind, division according to classes. Finally, it makes it possible to utilize the natural wealth of the region and to develop its productive forces in the best possible way without awaiting the decisions of a common centre – functions which are not inherent features of cultural-national autonomy" (ibid., 101-102).

These policies would be combined with a commitment to the right of nations to self-determination (something strongly opposed by Luxemburg and Kautsky). The implication here is that nations (or at least the working classes of nations) would have the theoretical right to secede from a state but that the very fact that this freedom removed the element of compulsion to be part of the state, coupled with the beneficial policies mentioned above, would remove the desire to separate.

Conclusion

Rather than attempt to detail and contrast the exact content of their definitions and explanations as some later Marxist theorists have done (e.g. Lowy 1976) or to try to distill their thinking into short and often inaccurate or misleading summaries as others have done for some of the more famous of these writers¹⁹, it is instructive to examine what theoretical connections link these thinkers of the Second International. Although some minor definitional and theoretical differences such as the degree of importance of shared language for the existence of a nation can lead to different theoretical results, what is much more important is that these Marxists shared a larger theoretical lens. They all viewed the contemporary vertically integrated group identities and their associated political trends as distinctly modern phenomena. All saw group identity and political consciousness as tied to stages of socio-economic development. All explicitly linked nationalism to the transition to capitalism. All strongly rejected primordialist explanations of the nation. While some of the writers here use the term "nation" to describe earlier ethnic communities, they all make a sharp differentiation between the modern phenomenon of nations and earlier forms of social groupings. They were clearly what we would now call modernist theorists of nations and nationalism.

It is evident that contrary to the claims of Anderson and Gellner, many key Marxist theorists of the Second International engaged theoretically with nations and nationalism. And not only did they engage with these theoretical issues, but these Marxists were modernist theorists. Furthermore, in

the writings of these Marxists, which precede Anderson and Gellner's main works by about eight decades, we find that most of the key theoretical contributions for which Anderson and Gellner are usually credited were already made in part or in whole. The core elements of Gellner's main theory of nationalism – which saw nationalism as tied to political and economic modernization in the transition from agrarian to industrial society, including the expansion of literacy through education systems, standardization of languages, increased communication and transport technology that allowed for greater intra-group connections and homogenization of “national” cultures, and the atomization of individuals in society – can all be found in Bauer and echoed in other Second International thinkers.²⁰ Given Gellner's frequent criticism of Marxists, it is particularly ironic that his theory sounds the most like a summary of these older Marxist theories.²¹ Similarly, much of Anderson's theory seems to have been anticipated by these early writers. Although his work differentiates itself by its focus on what Bauer described (and criticized) as a “psychological theory,” of an imagined community, he too echoes the Marxists in writing that “What, in a positive sense, made the new communities imaginable was a half-fortuitous, but explosive, interaction between a system of production and productive relations (capitalism), a technology of communications (print) and the fatality of human linguistic diversity” and that “the element of fatality is essential” (Anderson 2006, 42-43). Furthermore, the ethno-symbolist analytical approach of Smith and Armstrong was clearly used in the first chapter of Bauer's book. To be certain, there are a myriad of differences in the writings of these different sets of thinkers, but on the whole, if we take the writings of the 1980's modernists in light of the late 19th and early 20th century Marxist writers, very little appears wholly novel.

This re-periodization of modernist theories of nationalism back to at least the dawn of the 20th century has two major points of significance. Firstly, it provides a useful counterpoint to narratives of the inexorable rise of nationalism during this period. The writings of these Second International Marxists show that many people were not unselfconsciously falling for nationalism or uncritically accepting the primacy of nations. These works show that at least some prominent thinkers were acutely aware that nations and nationalism were novel social formations that appeared to be gaining socio-political salience. They were aware that modernization was changing social organization and consciousness around them and (with the partial exceptions of Kautsky and Luxemburg) that governance systems and strategies might need to adapt to this. These works provide substantial evidence that some important figures during the era of nationalism's rapid rise did not find primordial and romantic notions of the nation to be convincing.

Secondly, and more importantly, it gives us a better understanding of the intellectual tradition that would shape the most powerful deliberate social engineers of the 20th century. Contrary to the extremely common narrative of the uncontested rise of the nation-state or hegemonic descriptions of the world as a “nation state system,” some of the largest and most important states of the 20th century – under the leadership of people deeply influenced by this early Marxist modernist understanding of nations and nationalism – explicitly rejected the nation-state model and instead became self-described multinational states which granted autonomous territories, linguistic and cultural protections, economic support, and social affirmative action programs for minorities. These states would include the most populous state in Europe and the largest by territory on the planet (the USSR), the most populous country in the world (China), the second largest state in Africa with around one-tenth of the continent's population (Ethiopia), as well as smaller, but geopolitically significant states like Yugoslavia.

In this light it is even more puzzling how the ideas of these early modernist theorists of nationalism have been neglected. It is true that from the very beginning, some Marxist thinkers clearly misrepresented the theories of their fellow writers, though whether this was from innocent misunderstanding or deliberate choice is unclear. The tendency of Soviets to write non-Bolshevik Marxist theorists out of their story and Cold War western fears of Soviet ideology and suspicion of its imperial policies could have further muddied understanding of these ideas. The fact that some of these works have only recently been translated into English (Bauer's book did not have an English

translation until 2000) and others had not been translated until I did research for this article (Medem's 1904 work and Kautsky's 1898 article) could not have helped the situation. Still, it seems like this was a history hiding in plain sight. Benedict Anderson never governed a multi-ethnic superpower and had the chance to translate his understanding of nations into policy for social engineering, but some of these early Marxist modernist theorists of nationalism such as Lenin and Stalin did precisely that. If nations were social constructs tied to processes of modernization, then these ambitious revolutionaries believed they could mold those nations and guide them into a harmonious future.

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Notes

- 1 Attention has been paid to how some domestic and foreign policy concerns shaped elements of nationality policies. These include the need for political concessions to certain ethnic minorities during to ensure Bolshevik victory in the Russian Civil War (Schafer 2001) or desire to project a positive influence on minority groups living beyond the Soviet frontier (Martin 2001). But larger questions surrounding the origins of theories driving Soviet social engineering through its nationality policies remain poorly answered.
- 2 For example, Benedict Anderson framed his book *Imagined Communities* as stemming from the desire to understand nationalist violence between socialist states in former Indo-China in the 1970s.
- 3 Some trace this school of thought further back to works such as Tom Nairn's 1977 *The Break-Up of Britian*, Elie Kedourie's 1961 book *Nationalism* or various writing of Miroslav Hroch in the late 1960s and early 1970s.
- 4 Some modernist theorists of nationalism writing slightly later, such as Eric Hobsbawm in his 1992 *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780*, would give more credit to Marxists of the Second International, though this was not framed in terms of their modernist theoretical contributions. Hobsbawm specifically singles out Bauer's work for praise but does not engage with Bauer's theories of nations and nationalism. It is also worth noting that another prominent scholar of nationalism, Walker Connor in his 1984 book *The National Question in Marxist Theory and Strategy* released a year after Anderson and Gellner's works, does engage with socialist policy responses to the national question, but its analysis of writers of the second international is very brief, tends toward over generalizations, misses key theorists, and does not substantially engage with their theories of nations and nationalism, but rather with their policy prescriptions.
- 5 Unfortunately, despite his frequent references to Marxists in general, Gellner entirely lacks citations for these broad claims, making it difficult to trace where he got these ideas or what thinkers he is referencing.
- 6 Some scholars such as Ephraim Nimni (1989) have argued that there are some limited coherent trends in Marx and Engels' writing on nations and nationalism, but other such as Lowy and Traverso (1990) have disagreed.
- 7 Indeed, a small number of academics, mostly Marxists, have in the post-WWI era comparatively examined some works of Second International thinkers on the nation question, but almost entirely in terms of their policy prescriptions to address nationalism and justification for these policies, rather than their theory of nations and nationalism. This notably includes Michael Löwy's 1976 article "Marxists and the National Question." Although much of the analysis in this article is impressive, he engages as a political Marxist, denouncing "errors" in the thinking of his subjects, reserving particular scorn for Stalin and praise for Lenin. Furthermore, although some

theoretical points can be seen to have wide room for interpretation, a few of his characterization of the works of thinkers such as Bauer and Stalin or his ordering of events are simply incorrect.

- 8 This includes “The Polish Question at the International Congress in London” (1896), “The Polish Question and the Socialist Movement” (1905), the five articles of “The National Question and Autonomy” (1908-1909), and “The Nationalities Question” from her larger work on the Russian Revolution (1918).
- 9 The Reichsrat or Imperial Council served as the legislature of the Cisleithanian half of the of the Austro-Hungarian Empire
- 10 He writes “the need of the bourgeoisie, of commodity producers in general, to secure the internal market and to expand the external market as much as possible... leads to isolation from the outside and to unification against the common external forces. The nation state can best meet this need. But where different nations live together within a state, the language borders replace the customs borders to some extent; Language is the most important means of communication. The merger and expansion of the language area and the exclusion of foreign language competition from it can become just as important for securing the internal market as the independence and size of the nation state elsewhere” (Kautsky 1898, 517).
- 11 According to Medem “The root of the national struggle in the form that is characteristic of the capitalist system lies in the desire of the bourgeoisie of the dominant nationality to monopolize the domestic market in its favor. To achieve this monopoly, it is not enough to eliminate “foreigners” from the market purely mechanically, through legal and administrative restrictions; it is also necessary to forcibly dissolve them into the dominant nationality, destroy everything that forms their national identity, and above all the differences in language, which are the same an obstacle to the free circulation of goods within a state, such as customs duties between states... The bourgeoisie fights for markets; the market is delimited (to a large extent) by national boundaries; the struggle for the market turns into a struggle for nationality. If a given nation belongs to the ranks of the ruling ones, then, wanting to ensure its sales among masses of consumers alien to its national composition, it wants to merge them with itself, repaint them from one national color to another, and uses the government apparatus for this. The bourgeoisie of an oppressed nation does not have at its disposal the organs of state power, these powerful means of coercion; not being able to attack, she is forced to confine herself to a policy of defense; not being able to count on a successful invasion of someone else’s market in order to tear off and appropriate part of it for itself, it is forced to limit itself to protecting and strengthening its own market. This means, translated into the language of national struggle, to engage in consolidating the national identity of a given nation. Both of them strive to increase the number of their clients and the number of members of their nationality to the maximum; one, stronger, by expanding its national contingent at the expense of the other; the other, weaker, by taking care to ensure that at least the previous contingent is not reduced” (Medem 1906, 9).
- 12 It is important to note that Bauer was not equal in his application of this principle and believed that some smaller dispersed groups, such as Jews (Bauer himself was Jewish) should simply assimilate.
- 13 Although he frames it as a response to the works of both Bauer and Renner, it is only Bauer that he consistently references through the work.
- 14 Here Kautsky makes a seemingly problematic argument. Contrary to Bauer he writes that “As with most other old/traditional things, the peasant remains staunchly attached to his nationality, whereas the townspeople, most notably the educated classes in the towns, prove far more adaptable” (Kautsky 1907, 395). It is possible that this comes from that fact that Kautsky uses the term nation in a broad sense (likely as both ethnicity and modern nation) a problem usually avoided by his use of the term “modern nation” to describe his main subject of examination. Ironically, the result appears like a classic romantic nationalist perspective that seemingly clashes with Kautsky’s own understanding of nations as a product of socio-economic modernization (from both his 1898 and his 1907/08 articles).

- 15 Here Kautsky also alleges that Bauer “only fleetingly touches on this,” which is not an accurate charge of Bauer’s work.
- 16 Another reason his writings are also not addressed here is due to the vagueness of many of his proclamations on issues such as “the right of nations to self-determination” and the fact that his later administration of the USSR would differ from many of his pre-revolutionary declarations on the national question.
- 17 At least one other scholar has identified Stalin’s analysis of Georgian nation formation as distinctly modernist. On page 529 of his biography of Stalin, Ronald Suny (2022) wrote that Stalin “what we would call today a modernist, rather than a primordialist, approach to explain the making of the Georgian nation.” His chapter “The Expert” provides remarkable background to Stalin’s writing on the national question. Although his focus differs significantly from this piece, he covers many of the authors mentioned here and his account represents one of the best overviews of early socialists and the national question, especially in terms of their suggested solutions. Unfortunately, some of his generalizations about socialist writers of this time are contradicted by a detailed analysis of the actual texts of these writers.
- 18 Bauer and Renner only came to prominent positions of power after Austro-Hungary had been dismantled into ethno-national states, rendering policy discussions over multi-ethnic governance a moot point.
- 19 For example, see the Chapter Two of Walker Connor 1984. Furthermore, even when limited analyses of Second International Marxists and the “national question” have been conducted, they have missed key thinkers such as Medem (who clearly influenced Stalin), key works such as those of Kautsky referenced here, and generally have not engaged deeply with the texts, instead relying on simple generalizations of ideas and policy.
- 20 Indeed, Gellner’s argument around the atomization of individuals in modern society even appears to use the same terms as Bauer’s centralist-atomist principle. This is so striking of a coincidence, that it raises the question of whether or not this and other concepts were borrowed by Gellner.
- 21 Gellner specifically criticized Marxists for their division of development into more than three stages of development (Gellner 1983, 114) when, in terms of the actual formation of nations, he and most Marxists examined here link nation formation to the transition between just two stages: feudal/agrarian and capitalist/industrial.

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